

TOPIC XV

STUDY – “HELL” AND FINAL CONDEMNATION

By: Bob Stewart

Introduction

“Hell”! When one envisions this place, those images are likely not consistent with anything actually taught in the Bible. Here is an English word needing much definition and clarification. The idea of “Hell” as a place of torment comes from modern literature combined with a distortion of Biblical teachings and illustrations. For example, we often think of "hell" as a place where Satan rules over the demons and the souls of those who have been cast there. It is often thought of as a place of immense fiery heat where living demonic creatures reside tormenting the souls of the wicked and unbelieving. None of this is Biblical. Where do these ideas come from? For one, we have an oft quoted passage from Milton's "Paradise Lost" where Satan states, "Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven"¹ is one of many fictional sources adopted by the church and taught as truth. The context of this proclamation in Milton's poem is revealing.² Satan, of course, is never seen as "ruler" of "hell" in the Bible. He is in fact, "ruler of this world."³

But some will ask about the story of the rich man and Lazarus. This will be examined later, but does not fit any of these images if we look closely at the terms used. Our source for information about this subject is the Holy Bible comprised of the Old Testament in both Hebrew and Greek (LXX) and the New Testament in Koine (common) Greek. Much is made of the importance of properly understanding and interpreting the Greek New Testament.

But even more important, Jesus and the apostles did not speak Greek in their conversations or teachings. How do we know? There is ample evidence for this in both history and the New Testament. Let's consider a few things in this regard.

First, the Jews have a history of hating the Greeks and all things Greek. The same held true of the Romans in Jesus' day. Just a century and a half before Jesus was born, the Jews were at war with the Greeks and were victorious. Those of the resistance to the Greek demand that they all convert to styles, language and

¹ Book 1, paragraphs 14-15.

² Book 1, paragraphs 13-14

³ John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11; Ephesians 2:2; I John 5:19

worship of all things Greek revolted and they were victorious. Hanukkah is the celebration of this victory in 164 BCE. The hatred of the foreign Gentile rulers continued long after Jesus' day.

We can better understand the feelings of the Jews by recognizing that hard feelings over the outcome of the civil war in our own country over the same period of time still exist in many places in the south. But in Jesus' day, we are talking about the Jew's feelings about a foreign nation invading their country and committing atrocities. The strength of their resentment cannot be underestimated.

Second, it is well established that Jesus and His disciples spoke an ancient form of Aramaic conversationally, as well as Hebrew when needful. This is reflected in two places in the New Testament. First is the placard Pilate put on the cross of Jesus reading, "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS." John 19:20 says, "Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin *and* in Greek."

However, more significantly are the words spoken by Jesus on the cross recorded in the original tongue by both Matthew and Mark, "'ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" that is, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?" These words are also an ancient form of Aramaic and the word, "Eli" is both Hebrew and Aramaic. This would have been the common language used by most of the people.

Here is the point. All of Jesus teachings were translated from His native tongue into the Greek manuscripts we have of the New Testament. Therefore, it is incumbent for us to know the Hebrew/Aramaic words Jesus used and their meaning before they were translated into Greek, wouldn't you agree?

Next, we must remember that we are working with Jewish documents here as we examine the scriptures. The Hebrew Scriptures themselves were scarce and in the hands of the religious teachers and scholars, not the people. If one wished to hear the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, one had to attend the synagogue services on the Sabbath.

Otherwise, the Old Testament was in Greek, known as the "Septuagint" and was quoted by the writers of the New Testament. How this came about was that the Hebrew scrolls were unfortunately translated and written into Greek around in the second century before Christ. The first century Jews, as well as those of the 3rd

century BCE and following were required to use the Koine Greek for written correspondence because of the impact of Alexander the Great and the decree that his empire must adopt all things Greek. So in c. 132 BCE, the Septuagint⁴ was completed. This became the Bible of the Jews and was used exclusively by the apostles when quoting from the Old Testament.

The difficulty arises when Old Testament and Hebrew images and phrases, not to mention Hebrew theology and thought are written in Greek as is the entire New Testament. Then, western minds interpret the text according to Greek thinking and western definitions adding to them their own interpretation from their own grasp of western ideas. But the Bible throughout is an eastern book, Jewish in nature and with a concrete language, not a western book with an abstract language as we have today. Add to that Jerome's translation of all of it into Latin and later the added images of many poets and writers, and it begs the question, "Is anything we have been taught in the church about this and so many other topics actually accurate or true?"

End of Introduction

The attempt to restore the Jewish flavor to the New Testament is a daunting one and one most colleges, teachers, preachers and schools choose to ignore. However, in this study, we will try to grasp as much of the ancient understanding and flavor as possible.

In Old England, in the translations of the time including the KJV, the word "Hell" was a translation of all the New Testament Greek terms including, Hades, Gehenna, and Tartaros. We will look closer at these words in a moment. But the root of the English word "hell" actually meant something different to early 8th through the 17th century Englishmen than it does to 21st century Americans. The words hell, heel, heal, hill, hole, hull and more are from the same ancient root meaning "something covered over or buried". The phrase, "Planting potatoes in hell" was common even into the early twentieth century. I even heard it expressed myself when I was a child.

"The modern English word *hell* is derived from Old English *hel*, *helle* (about 725 AD) to refer to a nether world of the dead reaching into the Anglo-Saxon pagan period, and ultimately from Proto-Germanic *halja*, meaning "one who covers up or

⁴ The Old Testament translated into Koine (common) Greek.

hides something."⁵

"Something covered over or buried" would have been a fair translation of "Hades" but not really a picture of what the ancient Hebrews had in mind, or the Greeks for that matter. But "hades" is the only Greek word approximating the intent of the Hebrew. The Jews would have made the mental transition to "Sheol" which we will look at in a moment. Westerners would see it as something different, especially when translated "hell."

Again Jerome, (Mid -4th century), decided to translate the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts he possessed into Latin and used the Latin word "infernus" for all three of the Greek forms in the New Testament. "Infernus" meant "belonging to the lower regions" at that time. However, later we find that the word "inferno" stems from this word and by the 13th century we have "Dante's Inferno" with a whole new conceptualization. In other words, in the original sense of "hell" used in the English of the King James Bible, the term "Hades" would be the designation as this indicates the "underworld" or simply the "grave". "Hades" is used in the New Testament to represent the Hebrew "Sheol" but we have lost the sense of the original idea by using the English word "hell", and substituted a totally different sense to it. That is why modern translations do not use the word "hell" to translate "hades" any longer, but use the term "grave." Although this is better, it still falls short of the original intent.

But "Hades" is something altogether different in Greek thought. From the website, "Greek Mythology/The Olympians" we have a good summary,

"Hades was the brother of Zeus and Poseidon. After the overthrow of their father, Cronus, he drew lots with them to share the universe. He drew poorly, which resulted in becoming lord of the underworld and ruler of the dead. Nevertheless, he was not considered to be death itself, as this was a different god, called Thanatos. Greedy like his brother Poseidon, he was mainly interested in increasing his subjects, and anyone whose deeds resulted in people dying was favored by him. The Erinnyes (the Furies) were welcomed guests in his kingdom."

"The Greeks were not keen on uttering his name, afraid of causing some kind of reaction that would end up with them dead sooner. Instead, they decided to give him another name, Plouton, deriving from the Greek word

⁵ Wikipedia on line under article entitled "Hell."

for wealth, due to the precious metals mined from the earth. Thus, Hades also became the god of wealth."

"Although an Olympian, Hades preferred the Underworld and rarely left his kingdom. His weapon was a pitchfork, which he used to create earthquakes, similar to the way Poseidon used his trident. He also had a helmet of invisibility, which he had received as a gift from the Cyclopes, in order to use it during the clash of the Titans. He was married to Persephone, daughter of Demeter, whom Hades abducted and carried down to the Underworld. Hades is also called Pluto, Dis Pater, Orcus, Plouton."

We can see that much of our images of Satan come from non-Biblical sources. The word "Hades" became synonymous with the thought of some underworld kingdom and portrayals of the god "Hades" are often similar to portraits of Satan. Are we beginning to see the problem? The confusion took root when the New Testament used the Greek "hades" to represent "Sheol" but westerners took it to mean something else altogether as translators, poets, writers and theologians in the Roman Church added their ideas to the image.

However, the ancient Jewish belief and the teachings of the Bible do not coincide with the mythology above. Briefly, "Sheol" indicated the place or realm of departed souls, and was thought of as being under the earth (or the ocean depths) likely due to the simple act of burial. When the earthly life was ended, the Hebrew thought was that in some form life had not ended per-se, but was preserved. From here, much of the thinking about Sheol is muddled. There are ideas that, 1. This abode of the dead is an unending gloom, or; 2. That God has preserved the souls of the faithful for some future purpose while the unfaithful remain in Sheol, or; 3. That there might be the hope of joining the Lord in His realm, although this concept is not well supported in the Biblical narrative.

There is simply no clear addressing of this issue in the Old Testament. Later in this essay, the Talmudic idea of "Abraham's bosom" as it relates to this issue will be discussed. But there is evidence that the dead can be called upon though the practice is forbidden: (Deuteronomy 18:11; I Samuel 28:11-14; I Chronicles 10:13).

Going back to the New Testament, the word "hell" may be a translation of one of three words:

(1) "ταρταρω" (tar-ta-raoh -used one time), From, "Ταρταρος", (Tartaros),

found in II Peter 2:4 This is the abode of the angels and spirits who have sinned and are placed in this pit of darkness reserved for judgment. The passage later speaks of God knowing how to, "...keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment" and that the destruction of the ungodly will also take place with these disobedient spirits (verse 12). In a similar passage in Jude 5-6, the destruction of the wicked will take place along with these angels of evil in the great judgment day.⁶ However, it is important that the word used for this place of gloomy captivity is called Tartaros and is only used this one time.

(2) "αδηζ" ("Hades") is used ten times in the New Testament: Matthew 11:23, 16:18; Luke 10:15, 16:23; Acts 2:27, 2:31; Revelation 1:18, 6:8, 20:13, 20:14. From the roots "not able to be seen", properly *unseen*, that is, "Hades" or the place (state) of departed souls: - the grave, corresponding to the Hebrew Sheol (שְׁאוֹל) translated "grave" in the NASB.

(3) "γεεννα"(*geh-hen-nah* - is used twelve times); Matthew 5:22, 5:29, 5:30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 23:33; Mark 9:43, 9:45, 9:47; Luke 12:5, James 3:6

It is of Hebrew origin: גֵּי בֶן־הִינּוֹם - "gey-ben-hinnom" - *valley of* (the son of) *Hinnom*; *gehenna* (or *Geh-Hinnom*), is a valley south of the temple mount and south of the City of David. It connects to the Kidron Valley on the East side of Jerusalem and once connected to the Tyropian Valley on the West side of Jerusalem. It is used (figuratively) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment or destruction: - "Hell" in traditional theology. But is traditional theology accurate?

Frankly, our traditional concepts of "hell" come mostly from western literature such as Goethe's "Faust" where Faust sells his soul to Mephistopheles for wealth and wisdom. We also read of "Dante's inferno" in "The Divine Comedy", where a vivid depiction of the damned is portrayed. Milton's "Paradise Lost" adds to the mix. From these came many of the images and tales of Satan and Hell, and thus Biblical teachings have been supplanted by these images derived from modern stories and pictures. Add to this a sprinkling of Greek mythology, sermons by the Puritan fathers like Jonathan Edwards, the Catholic Church, traditional Bible eisegesis of seemingly obvious Biblical texts on the matter, fire and brimstone preachers and traditional theological doctrines taught by seminaries, Bible Schools and churches over the centuries and the impact is that pretty much everyone holds that the unrepentant, unredeemed sinner will suffer the torment of everlasting

flames forever. Some hold that this final judgment upon the "wicked" redounds to the "Glory of God" and is the ultimate statement of that glory.⁷

The link between these images and "hades" had come full circle. But "hades" (translated "hell" in the early English Bibles) did not connect with the common images at all. "Hades" would be seen by the Jews as "Sheol", the world or abode of the dead (as if a subterranean *retreat*). This word is used 67 times in the Old Testament. It is envisioned as a place somewhere deep in the earth, in darkness, frightening and the place of the dead. It is mysterious and the situation of those therein is unknown. Early on, it was understood as simply the grave. In Numbers 16:30-33, those of Korah's rebellion were swallowed up in an opening in the earth and fell into "Sheol." Here is the account. Moses is speaking:

"But if the LORD brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the LORD." As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with *their* possessions. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly."

By the time of the Judges, the concept of "Sheol" developed into a place where the spirits of the dead resided and God could raise them up to life as could mediums as we see in I Samuel 28.

Whether there is some sort of living existence or not in Sheol was considered and debated. But as to the "who", "what", "where", "when", "how", and "why" there was no clear determination. It was left as a place where the fate of the dead was undetermined. In the days of Jesus for example, the Sadducees had doubts about the resurrection of the dead while the Pharisees believed in it.

Again, the word "hell" is not used to translate either "sheol" in the Old Testament or "hades" in New Testament in the NASB. Only in the KJV and other older English versions will you find this translation. In Old English, "hell" was simply a word to define burial in dirt or "depths". But there is no western sense of "hell" as we have envisioned it the Bible.

⁷ See Daniel Fuller's essay at the end of this study.

In the Biblical texts,⁸ the word is “gehenna”, from the Hebrew, indicating “Valley of (the sons of) Hinnom”. This mention of this deep ravine, located outside the walls on the south side of the city of Jerusalem, brought terrible images to those who knew its history. This is not the place of the dead or "Sheol" at all but an image used by Jesus as the result of a fatal judgment by God.

Early in the Israeli settlement of Canaan, the valley was the border between Benjamin and Judah (Joshua 15:8, 18:16). But in the time of the monarchy, from Solomon onward as the Judean kings followed the evil practices of paganism, this valley was used for the worship of Molech, (also called Milcom and Baal) and included child sacrifice by burning. [See I Kings 11:4-8, 33; II Kings 16:2-4 (II Chronicles 28:1-4); II Kings 23:4-20 (Josiah’s reform); II Chronicles 33:1-9; Jeremiah 7:27-34; 19:1-15; etc.]. This practice and worship was in force when Canaan was invaded and occupied. (Note: Judges 2:11-13) It also involved cult prostitution, worship of both male and female idols and was, in essence, a fertility cult. Mass burials and burning of bodies and debris led to this place as the picture of where the wicked would be cast in the judgment. The place of Topheth is near the junction of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys.

On the south side of the valley is the “Potter’s field” where Judas’ thirty pieces of silver was used to buy a burial place for paupers and where the tombs of early Christians (Jewish) are buried. After the restoration to Jerusalem following the Babylonian exile, it is theorized that the valley became used as a sort of perpetually burning city dump. The occasional floodwaters would wash the ashes into the adjacent Kidron Valley and on down into the desert. This practice has not been verified through either literature or archaeological evidence. However, some New Testament quotations may refer to this ancient practice.⁹

"In Jer 31:40, without any change of construction, the southern border is described. 'The whole valley of the corpses and of the ashes...shall be holy to Jahveh,' i.e., be included within the space occupied by the new city. By 'the valley of the corpses and of the ashes' expositors generally and rightly understand the valley of Ben-hinnom (בְּנֵי־הִנּוֹם) are the carcasses of animals that have been killed, and of men who have been slain through some judgment of God and been left unburied). Jeremiah applies this name to the valley, because, in consequence of the pollution by Josiah of the place where the

⁸ Matthew 5:22, 5:29, 5:30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15, 23:33; Mark 9:43, 9:45, 9:47; Luke 12:5, James 3:6

⁹ See Jeremiah 31:40. The commentary on this verse by Keil and Delitzsch is helpful.

abominations had been offered to Moloch (2Ki 23:10), it had become a sort of slaughtering-place or tan-yard for the city."¹⁰

The Valley of Hinnom was a place where all that was burned was ultimately burned to ash and then washed away down the valley by rain storms.

For example, the quotation Jesus uses in Mark 9:48¹¹ (where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched") is from Isaiah 66:22-24 that reads,

"For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me," declares the LORD, So your offspring and your name will endure. And it shall be from new moon to new moon And from Sabbath to Sabbath, All mankind will come to bow down before Me, says the LORD. Then they will go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind."

This Old Testament quotation gives us an idea of the thoughts Jesus had about this place and judgment of the wicked. He had to be thinking of the ancient Hebrew concepts, not the modern western ones. Note that the passage refers to corpses, not to living spirits or persons.

Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on Isaiah 66:24 ff.

"They who go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem every new moon and Sabbath, see there with their own eyes the terrible punishment of the rebellious. *“And they go out and look at the corpses of the men that have rebelled against me, for their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched, and they become an abomination to all flesh.”* They perfects are *perf. cons.* regulated by the foregoing יִצְאוּ יְרוּשָׁלַיִם (accented with *pashta* in our editions, but more correctly with *munach*) refers to their going out of the holy city. The prophet had predicted in Isaiah 66:18, that in the last times the whole multitude of the enemies of Jerusalem would be crowded together against it, in the hope of getting possession of it. This accounts for the fact that the neighborhood of Jerusalem becomes such a scene of divine judgment. רָאָה בַּ always denotes a fixed, lingering look directed to any object; here it is connected with the grateful feeling of satisfaction at the righteous acts of God and their own gracious

¹⁰ Keil and Delitzsch "Commentary on The Old Testamernt," E-Sword.

¹¹ Mark 9:44 and 46 where this is quoted are not in the earliest manuscripts and therefore questionable as to their authenticity.

deliverance. תּוֹעֵב, which only occurs again in Daniel 12:2, is the strongest word for “abomination.”

"It is very difficult to imagine the picture which floated before the prophet's mind. How is it possible that all flesh, i.e., all men of all nations, should find room in Jerusalem and the temple? Even if the city and temple should be enlarged, as Ezekiel and Zechariah predict, the thing itself still remains inconceivable. And again, how can corpses be eaten by worms at the same time as they are being burned, or how can they be the endless prey of worms and fire without disappearing altogether from the sight of man? It is perfectly obvious, that the thing itself, as here described, must appear monstrous and inconceivable, however we may suppose it to be realized. The prophet, by the very mode of description adopted by him, precludes the possibility of our conceiving of the thing here set forth as realized in any material form in this present state." (End of commentary)

It is the Valley of Hinnom ("Gehenna") Jesus refers to in Mark 9:42-49, and as He quotes this passage, the images of the worship of heathen gods including human burnings in the history of Israel, brought forth a grisly image to those who heard Jesus expresses God's judgment on those who caused others to stumble in their faith in God. If bodies were indeed cast into some sort of burning place in this valley, then we can understand that "worms" would always be present in the rubbish dump and the fire was kept constantly burning as the need to dispose of trash and carcasses became constant as the city grew. Further, if the bodies of dead criminals were also disposed of here and left unburied, this act of failing to bury the body and its subsequent “burning” brought ultimate disgrace to the person and, in the Jewish mind, was such an abomination that the soul was prevented from entering Sheol and, with the burning, all hope of an afterlife was lost.

This valley is also referred to in the NASB by Jesus as the "fiery hell" in Matthew 5:22,

"But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty *enough to go* into the fiery hell."

The translation of "fiery hell" is actually, "fiery Valley of Hinnom." Does this And other images mean, however, that the judgment of the wicked is defined as an eternal torment, or does it mean that the fire of torment is eternal but those thus cast into it are destroyed without hope of life again, in contrast to the righteous

who live in bliss eternally? This is the main controversy.

Let's look at some key passages carefully, reading their contexts. Do they cross interpret or relate? If so how? If not, then what do we conclude? Can we be definitive about our traditional view? Let's take the time to read these verses and passages.

First, New Testament passages relating to the result of judgment of the unbelieving and wicked. Some notes will follow some of the verses.

Gehenna - (The Valley of Hinnom - normally translated "hell." Jesus' use of this vivid image would bring to mind the burning sacrifices held there for centuries. These heathen practices, also practiced by idolatrous kings saw smoldering bodies burn until they were ash.) Matthew 5:22. This practice was no longer practiced in Jesus day, so He adds the word "fiery" to recall the times when this did occur.) Matthew 5:29, 30; 10:28. Notice the word "destroy" we will examine more thoroughly later. It is the Greek ἀπόλλυμι (ah-pol-u-mee) and means to perish, be destroyed or die. Matthew 18:9; 23:15, 33. We do not see any indication that a long suffering is connected with any of this. Now, Mark 9:43. The phrase "unquenchable fire" simply means that it cannot be extinguished. There is no hope of escape. It does not carry with it the idea that those cast therein continue to suffer. Mark 9: 45, 47. (For verse 48, see the commentary on pages 273 and 274. The same for verses 44 and 46) Luke 12:4-5.

Eternal fire or fire of destruction - Matthew 3:10-12, (Luke 3:17); Though some would interpret these phrases as an eternal torment for those cast therein, the parallelism makes it clear that as the chaff is burned to ashes, so is anything cast into a fire that cannot be extinguished. It is the fire that is the subject, not those cast into it. Matthew 13:49-50. This image is important to understand. (See the commentary on page 282.) The "weeping and gnashing of teeth" suggests to some an eternal torment. However, this phrase (also in Matthew 8:12 and associated there with "outer darkness") describes those realizing that their assumption that they were the heirs of the promise God made to Abraham because 1. They were of the physical line of Abraham and, 2. They were circumcised was not true and now they faced the reality that they were cut off and excluded from all they had assumed due to centuries of teachings assuring them of this. Now they faced the sentence that presented them with the worst possible doom - being cut off and excluded from the entire Abrahamic covenant. Jesus made a strong comment about this in verses 11 where He said speaking of the faith of a Gentile roman

Centurion, " "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

It is quite probable that the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is the reaction to the realization mentioned above as they were now being ushered to this doom.¹²

In Matthew 25:46 eternal "punishment" is "kolasis" and means to be cut off, pruned, curtailed shortened as the result of a sentence. This word is only used twice in the New Testament, here and in I John 4:18. In Jude 1:7 the word "punishment" is from the Greek "di-kay" meaning a just or righteous sentence.

John 15:6; II Thessalonians 1:6-10; Hebrews 6:7-8; Hebrews 10:26-27 and II Peter 3:7 all point to the total destruction of the wicked, unbelieving and evil.

Fire of Torment - Revelation 14:9-11. Those destined for an eternal torment, only found in Revelation are: 1. Those having worshipped the beast and having received his mark on the forehead or hand; 2. Satan; 3. The beast; and 4. The false prophet. See Revelation 19:20 and 20:10. Otherwise, all other wicked and unbelieving are destroyed in the Lake of Fire.

Lake of Fire - Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; 21:7-8. The "Lake of Fire" appears to have dual purposes. In 20:10 it is a place of eternal; torment for Satan, the Beast, The False Prophet and for those having worshipped the beast and having received his mark on the forehead or hand (14:9-11). In 20:14-15 and 21:8 it is the place of "the second death" also mentioned in 2:11 and 20:6.

Second Death - Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8. This coincides with the concept of eternal destruction seen in II Thessalonians 1:9; Philippians 3:19; Romans 9:22; Matthew 10:28 etc. Also, both death and the grave or "Sheol" are destroyed, no longer existing as a place because the saints will live forever and there will be no one to experience either of these realities.

Eternal fire - Matthew 18:8-9; 25:40- 41. In Matthew 18:8-9, a parallelism exists with "eternal fire" and "fiery hell"(Gehenna). This corresponds with the "unquenchable fire" noted above. In 25:40-41, we can presume that this "eternal"

¹² Greg Schmidt of our study group presented the idea that the anticipation of a soon separation from God and the impending destruction of their existence would cause this terrible agony. I agree.

and "unquenchable" fire corresponds with the vision of the "Lake of Fire" in Revelation 14:9-11 and 19:20 and 20:10.

Furnace of Fire - Matthew 13:36-43, 47-51. This "furnace of fire" in verses 42 and 50 refer to the use of a furnace as a kiln, an oven to bake bread or a smelter to melt ore. This indeed indicates total destruction as the parallelism because of the fact that the "tares" in the corresponding earlier statement are burned to ashes. Again, the weeping and gnashing of teeth as the anticipation of this destruction is supported here.

Outer Darkness - Matthew 8:10-12, 22:1-13; 25:24-30; II Peter 2:17; Jude 1:13. These outer darkness references make it clear that the real issue is not necessarily a literal burning or eternal separation from God, but a total and complete cutting off from the inheritance of Israel and the promises of Abraham. This would be the most horrifying thing a Jew could ever imagine regardless of the form it takes.

For example, in Matthew 8:11-12, Jesus, after marveling at the faith of the Roman Centurion says, "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

And in Luke 13:27-28, Jesus speaks of the judges pronouncement, "...and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS.' In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrown out."

The Jews, who trusted in their circumcision, their physical lineage from Abraham and their works and traditions (and still do) would find these pronouncements most disturbing. This surely added to the momentum to have Jesus killed.

To Perish - Used 95 times in the N.T. (ἀπόλλυμι) Various translations; "destroy," "to lose," "to die," "to be utterly destroyed." Some key verses to illustrate the use of the word and those germane to our subject are: Matthew 10:28; Luke 9:25; Luke 13:3-5; Luke 17:19; John 3:16; John 10:28; Romans 2:12; James 4:12; Jude 1:5;

Second, New Testament passages relating to other aspects of the general topic.

Hades - (Equivalent of Sheol): Matthew 11:23 (Luke 10:15), Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:27 (24-28), 2:29-32; Revelation 1:17-18, 6:8, 20:13-14.

Hades, translated "hell" in many older translations and versions of the New Testament have influenced many unbiblical ideas about the entire topic.¹³

Tartaros - II Peter 2:4

Bottomless Pit (Pit of the Abyss) - Luke 8:31; Romans 10:7; Revelation 9:1; 9:2, 9:11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3

Fire used in a variety of images - Matthew 3:10, 11, 12; 7:19; 13:40-50; 17:15; 22:7; 25:41. Mark 9:22, 14:54; Luke 13:9, 16-17; 9:54; 12:49; John 15:6, 18:18. I Corinthians 13:3, 15 (Divine fire?); Hebrews 10:27; I Peter 1:7

Divine or heavenly fire - not of judgment- Hebrews 1:7; 12:18, 29; Revelation 1:14; 2:18; 3:18; 4:5; 8:5; 7:8; 9:17-18; 10:1; 11:5; 14:18; 15:2; 16:8; 17:16; 18:8; 19:12; 20:9

Darkness (Metaphorical) - Luke 1:76-79; 22:52-53; John 3:19; Acts 26:18; Romans 2:19, 13:12; I Corinthians 4:5; II Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:8-11, 6:12; Colossians 1:13; I Thessalonians 5:4-5; I Peter 2:9.

One could conclude, after examining the texts and lessons, that the ultimate fate of the wicked is simply extermination or annihilation. At face value the illustrations of chaff thrown into the fire etc. leave little else to be thought.

However, there seems to be a sense of something happening to the wicked prior to this fate, (including judgment) but it is short term, not long. Even the Lake of Fire, reserved for the Devil and his angels as well as the beast, the False Prophet and those having worshiped the beast and his image, receiving a mark on his forehead or on his hand,¹⁴ suffer eternal torment in their case but no such statement is made regarding those cast in whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The passages speaking of outer darkness are not specific enough to conclude that

¹³ See the introduction, pages 265-269

¹⁴ Revelation 14:9-11

this is the final step, but the corresponding parallel passages do point to this conclusion. We must remember that the Jews who were taught these things did not think theologically (as we tend to do), but viscerally. They were presented, as we saw, with different images illustrating the same consequence of being an adversary of God or an unbelieving skeptic. The most frightening and abhorrent images are presented to them that amount to the worst possibility a Jew could imagine ... exclusion from the promises and presence of the people of Israel and of God.

The preponderance of evidence leads one to the conclusion that the stated ultimate fate of the wicked is destruction.

However, there are three particular passages to be considered that some consider could lead to a different conclusion. The first is:

LUKE 16:19-31, THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

This story is one of three instances where the idea of the ultimate fate of the condemned (annihilation) is brought into question. If it is a teaching on the fate of the dead in the afterlife and a specific teaching on the nature of Hades (Sheol), then it is to be considered as a serious definition of the nature of the afterlife. If it a parable or portrait for other purposes, then it does not have to be considered as theologically definitive. The church, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, has done a lot to convince history that the afterlife (particularly purgatory) is portrayed in terms of this story. But the church in general has also done damage to the scriptures through a strict literalism that is not acceptable. I choose to consider this story a parable for the following reasons, many being the very reasons others question its legitimacy as a parable.

1. The tale appears in the midst of a series of parables Luke records and, interestingly enough, it is followed by Jesus' teaching on stumbling blocks. Although the style is unusual, there is no reason to: A. Assume it is a strict teaching on the immediate afterlife and, B. Therefore conclude it is not a parable. But the way Jesus tells it and the point He ultimately makes is certainly an attention grabber.
2. It appears that this story in similar form had been told for centuries among the Jews regarding the benefits of generosity as opposed to selfishness, especially as it effects one's standing in the afterlife. Even in Egypt, a story strikingly similar to

this had been told.² Many Jews may have been familiar with it. In any case, the theme of this story is common, even today, “The evil done in this life will be reflected in the afterlife as will the good”. This theme is basic to many tales in much of near-eastern literature as well as in Greek mythology. But Jesus takes this common theme and pulls the rug out from under the preconceived conclusion. His masterful use of this theme grabs the attention of his hearers and holds them to His key point – which centers on faith, not works or rewards.

3. In addition, The Talmud lends elements to this story as it describes the “Bosom of Abraham” as the destination of the truly righteous in the afterlife. This means that Abraham, accounted righteous by faith, was in God’s favor. All in his bosom would be similarly blessed. The use of Abraham’s name lends effect to His story rather than removing it from the realm of imagery or parable. Jesus’ painting of this portrait is interesting in that His purpose is to address the unbelief of His hearers, not their selfishness. And the theme has some familiar elements in it such as - riches do not necessarily indicate good standing before God any more than poverty indicates a negative standing before God. This great debate exists today. Does wealth, health, or high social standing indicate God’s favor? Not at all, but this is still not the point of Jesus story even though His hearers may have thought so as He was in the midst of telling it.

4. The point is surprising, and typical of Jesus. First, He grabs their attention with the familiar theme that once one enters Hades, (signifying the end of this mortal existence – the "grave" or better, Sheol - the place of the spirits of the dead) what transpires thereafter rests upon what was done in one’s lifetime (verse 25). This is the common theme his hearers had heard before. Second, there is no crossing over to Abraham’s bosom nor can one cross over to Hades from Abraham’s bosom (verse 26). This precludes objections and questions about the possible “whys” and keeps his hearers from being mentally distracted. Third, and most importantly, opportunity is given now for people to listen to Moses, the prophets, and as a final

² An Egyptian story goes like this, according to Hugo Grossman in 1918, repeated in TIB, volume 8, page 289. It was apparently still extant in a Demotic Egyptian papyrus in the first century A.D. “The body of a wealthy man, clad in his finest attire, was carried to his grave by a large company of mourners. At the same time the body of a poor man was removed for burial, unaccompanied by attendants and covered only by a mat. An observer, impressed by the disparity in the honors bestowed on the two, commented on the advantages enjoyed by the rich man but changed his views when he was permitted to visit the underworld. There he saw the poor man clothed in the linen garments of the rich and given a place of honor, while the rich man suffered torments for his evil deeds. The story concludes with the moral: 'He who is good on earth fares well in the realm of the dead, and he who is evil on earth fares well.'”

divine statement, one who rises from the dead. Then Jesus turns the story on its head. Failure to listen will result in the most unpleasant of fates. God offers, through Jesus, opportunity for mankind to be given the truth in an undeniable fashion. However, there will always be those who deny what is before their very eyes due to close mindedness or hardness of heart (verses 27-31). This is an unexpected conclusion and his hearers are no doubt stunned. There are no questions, and Jesus once again dashes their preconceived ideas to the ground.

When Jesus spoke this parable, He likely spoke in Aramaic, or possibly Hebrew. Thus, He would have used the word Sheol, not Hades. Hades is used by Luke as he writes in Greek. It is interesting that the other gospel writers omit this story. Perhaps Luke thought it would have a significant impact on Theophilus, his Gentile (likely, but possibly a Jew as well) friend to whom he writes his histories.

The use of Sheol lends itself to more creativity than does "Hades" because it is basically undefined as simply the place of the dead, the grave, - a mysterious realm the condition of which was unknown to the Jews. Thus Jesus could use this in His story without objection. It is important to note that He did not use the term "Gehenna." Hades on the other hand, comes with Greek mythology and baggage we include in the story from our background.¹⁵ Jesus' use of Sheol allows Him to paint a portrait which the hearers knew to be a creation for effect. This is common to Jesus' style. There is no precedent for any of the elements in the story in Hebrew literature. But Hebrew literature is loaded with stories using imagery for effect.

Although the scripture abounds with statements about Sheol (Hades) with basic teachings regarding the nature of this place, which is simply the mysterious underworld place of the dead, and adding to that the fact that all who die go there, whether believers or not, (even Jesus was there-Acts 2:27, 31), we have the introduction of "Abraham's bosom" where Lazarus (not the brother of Mary and Martha) rested. Lazarus is the Greek rendering of Eleazar, meaning "one whom God has helped." Abraham's bosom was seen in the Talmud as the hope of those who died. The preponderance of information about Sheol and the grave lends credence to this unique story as a parable. Otherwise, the elements of this story would be commonly known. But it is not. It is unique, as were many of Jesus' stories. One can legitimately ask the question noting the style of verses one and two, "Did Jesus hearers actually have personal knowledge or acquaintance with either or both of these individuals?" In asking this question, I have received a

¹⁵ See discussion earlier in the essay.

preponderance of “no’s” and a few who didn’t know. Only rarely do I get a definite yes, and these are from people who don’t accept that the Bible has any teaching that is not to be taken literally.

If Jesus were to state a position on or teaching about the nature of Hades, He would be more inclined to begin His description with, “Truly, truly I say to you that Hades (Sheol) is a place of torment where all who go there will suffer agony in the flame and cry out for help!” Etc. But He doesn’t. He uses names of individuals to indicate that the message that has a significant point. Rather than question whether the story is a parable because names are used, (and this is the only parable so doing), we can understand the parable better because names are used, especially considering the impact the imagery of Abraham’s name brings to the table.

There is a main point to the story that would be unnecessary if the story was intended to be a description and warning about those who would go there. The point has nothing to do with Hades itself, but of the unbelieving generation. The point begins at verse 27, "And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house--for I have five brothers--in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' "But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'" The point is clear! Those whose hearts are not open to Moses and the Prophets will not be open to any revelation from God, even the resurrection of one from the dead.

Some other elements of the story bear comment. In verses 19 and 20, the rich man is seen to be “gaily living” due to his wealth, while the poor Lazarus is carried by someone to the gates of the rich man’s residence. This, of course would be unlikely. With his disease (verse 16) the poor man would have been likely excluded as unclean and placed in a colony of the unclean where others would care for him and feed him. Jesus contrives this scene for effect and to grab His hearers. The question arises, “What will the rich man do?” The words describing the condition of Lazarus are only found here. They indicate a condition of ulcerated sores. Luke, a physician, would be familiar with the proper term as he translates the Aramaic to Greek.

In verse 21, it appears that the poor man can see the table of the rich man and we note later on that the rich man was able to see the condition of the poor man and did nothing about it. He may have used the excuse that the poor man was

“unclean” and so avoided him using this rationality. The story has some similarities to the parable of the Good Samaritan. It seems the dogs have more compassion on Lazarus than does the rich man. The poor soul couldn’t even clean himself. In verses 23 and 24, the rich man still sees Lazarus as subservient to himself. Verses 25 and 26 assure the hearers of the conclusion in their own mind. They will listen closely to see if they are right. They are shocked to find out they were totally caught off guard. In a message very typical of the style of the prophets, Jesus illustrates that that hardness of heart toward the poor is symptomatic of hardness of heart toward God.

In verse 27, Jesus takes the story in a new, unexpected direction. Verse 28 places the story in the hands of the rich man in torment. It appears that the rich man finally expresses a concern for others. The motive for his request is extreme. This extreme means to motivate one to care for the needs of others must be avoided and hearts need to be softened prior to this point. Further, the rich man has humbled himself to even asking the Abraham send Lazarus to his own family to warn them. But in fact, the hardness of heart resulting in faithlessness, selfishness and carelessness will not only fail to listen to Moses and the prophets, but not even to the words of one miraculous rising from the dead. In this image, not only is Lazarus included as one that would have to rise from the dead to warn the brothers, but there is the allusion to Jesus' own rising from the dead and the reception He will receive from those hardened of heart.

The second and third passages that are brought into question have already been discussed. This regards the furnace of fire in which there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” These are found in Matthew 13:36-43 and Matthew 13:47-50 regarding the destruction of the tares from the field and the bad fish from the net.¹⁶

This account in Matthew 13 of Jesus’ teaching is unique to the gospels. In fact, other than Daniel 3:1-30, and Isaiah 31:9, this is the only other reference to such an image. In Daniel, the account is of the three heroes, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were cast into Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace for failing to worship his image. They survived without even a hint of the aroma of smoke and Nebuchadnezzar was moved to honor them and their God. If Jesus is using this image, perhaps He is noting that those who do commit idolatry can anticipate the same treatment but without survival.

¹⁶ See the discussion about these passages on pages 275- 277 entitled "Eternal fire or fire of destruction" and "Furnace of Fire."

The length of time the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” takes place is not determined, so it could be of any chosen time period.¹⁷ In Isaiah, the theme is again idolatry by the citizens of Judea and the leaders of Jerusalem who are seeking help from Egypt rather than repentance and trust in God in the face of an Assyrian threat. The following phrases are used:

Isaiah 30:31-33,

“For at the voice of the LORD Assyria will be terrified, *When* He strikes with the rod. And every blow of the rod of punishment, Which the LORD will lay on him, Will be with *the music of* tambourines and lyres; And in battles, brandishing weapons, He will fight them. For Topheth has long been ready, Indeed, it has been prepared for the king. He has made it deep and large, A pyre of fire with plenty of wood; The breath of the LORD, like a torrent of brimstone, sets it afire.”

Topheth--literally, "A place of abomination" (discussed earlier); the valley of the sons of Hinnom, southeast of Jerusalem, where Israel offered human sacrifices to Moloch by fire; hence a place of burning (2Ki 23:10; Jer 7:31). Latterly Gehinnom or Gehenna, that is, Valley of Hinnom, may have been the receptacle of the refuse of the city, to consume which fires were constantly burning. In the former sense it was a fit place to symbolize the funeral pyre of the Assyrian army (not that it actually perished there); the Hebrews did not burn, but buried their dead, but the heathen Assyrians are to be burnt as a mark of ignominy. (From Keil and Delitzsch)

Isaiah 31:8-9, “And the Assyrian will fall by a sword not of man, And a sword not of man will devour him. So he will not escape the sword, And his young men will become forced laborers. "His rock will pass away because of panic, And his princes will be terrified at the standard," Declares the LORD, whose fire is in Zion and whose furnace is in Jerusalem.”

The “furnace” here appears to indicate that while the Lord’s fire (glory) resides in Zion, His judgment upon the wicked stems from Jerusalem, where His presence is represented by the temple. (See 10:16-17; Amos 1:2-4)

In Jesus' teachings, there are some elements we must consider. He is teaching in parables and His subject is again the kingdom of God. In the first parable

¹⁷ Again, see the commentary on this above in bold, "Eternal Fire or Fire of Destruction" (page 275)

(Matthew 13:36-43) illustrating the separation of the righteous from the wicked, a field of grain is used. The harvest is the end of the age and God's angels are the reapers who separate the grain from the weeds (tares). The "tares" are identified as "sons of the Evil One" and are "stumbling blocks, and "lawless". They are "gathered up by His angels at the end of the age and "burned with fire" and/or "thrown into the (not 'a') furnace of fire (and) in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The idea of "The" Furnace rather than "a" furnace indicates that His hearers had an idea of what He was referring to.

In His second parable (Matthew 13:47-50) a fishing dragnet is the illustration and God's angels are the fishermen who separate the catch. The wicked are fish that the angels thrown away. Then Jesus states, "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Again, "The" Furnace of fire presents a fire within a structure designed for a specific purpose as opposed to a general fire. In furnaces, not only did chaff get burned up, but also as a kiln, pottery was cured, or as a smelter, metals purified, for the blacksmith, metals softened. In other words, within the furnace, we find a superheated situation such as we see in Daniel 3.

A reference to the use of a furnace of fire to punish evildoers (in the mind of Babylonian/Persian rulers) is found in Jeremiah 29:21-23,

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying to you falsely in My name, 'Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will slay them before your eyes. 'Because of them a curse will be used by all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon, saying, "May the LORD make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire, because they have acted foolishly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and have spoken words in My name falsely, which I did not command them; and I am He who knows and am a witness," declares the LORD."

Whether those hearing Jesus parables thought of any of these images or simply understood the intense heat generated by a furnace in which, rather than total destruction occurring, one suffers torment, we cannot say for sure. In any case, the images are used to motivate those in this life to consider their standing before God and His angels, and thus be given opportunity to repent before there is no more time to do so. The weeping and gnashing of teeth points to one's recognition that

it is too late, and the incredible realization that there is no more opportunity to change one's mind. Personal disintegration, not on just a temporal scale, but on a final, eternal scale is devastating and fear, remorse, terror, and rage pour forth from the forever lost.

Conclusion

It is difficult to say with absolute certainty that the ultimate fate of the wicked is defined as extermination even though the preponderance of scripture seems to indicate this. There are enough illustrations, teaching and information that can be interpreted by some to cast this conclusion into question.

But, other factors can be brought to bear on this as well. The nature of God and His mercy for one. Is it in the nature of God to torture unbelievers for eternity? Is it, on the one hand as some have taught, the destiny of the saved to look upon the torments of the lost with glee and revel in their judgment? On the other hand, as John writes in Revelation 21:1-5,

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He *said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. "He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.”

Then how does this leave room for an arena of eternal torment and pain to exist? If the “Lake of Fire” is a part of this worldly continuum, would it not also be vanquished?

Another issue is the dissolution of the created universe and the creation of a new one after The Day of The Lord as II Peter 3:7, 10-13 describes:

“But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.” “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.” (See also Isaiah 66:14-17;

In Jude 5-10 we have a vivid picture of the destruction of the wicked:

“Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe. And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day, just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire. Yet in the same way these men, also by dreaming, defile the flesh, and reject authority, and revile angelic majesties. But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" But these men revile the things which they do not understand; and the things which they know by instinct, like unreasoning animals, by these things they are destroyed."

In II Thessalonians 1:3-10 Paul writes,

“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever* greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. *This is* a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels

in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed--for our testimony to you was believed."

Even in the beloved verse of John 3:16, Jesus states, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Here, the word "perish" is "ἀπόλλυμι" (ah-pol-leu-mi) meaning to totally destroy, suffer destruction or ruin.

In every instance where God brought judgment upon His enemies or instructed others to do so in His name, not one single time was there the command or action resulting in torture of the enemies. On the contrary, they were to be "utterly destroyed" (See Deuteronomy 7:2, 20:17; Joshua 11:20; I Samuel 15:3; etc. for examples of this). Further, we have patterns that indicate the way in which the Lord deals with the ungodly. At the flood, none were saved at all except those in the Ark, all was lost at Sodom and Gomorrah, and in Korah's rebellion, (Numbers 16), there was no question regarding the totality of the judgment. Finally, in no place is there ever a command to torture or torment the enemies of Israel or God.

In nearly every instance where the image of fire is used, the result is destruction, either in judgment or in purification where the impure is destroyed. This is the rule rather than the exception. Exceptions to this image occur in parables designed to use this image to achieve a point beyond the nature of the "afterlife" or the "beyond". The student will have to decide for himself what seems to be the final outcome of the wicked.

END OF EXCURSUS

ANOTHER VIEW

(Preface) This article was written in the late sixties by Dr. Daniel P. Fuller, the son of the founder of Fuller Theological Seminary. I was fortunate to have him as an instructor when I attended there. The paper is one way to look at the reason for the wrath of God on the unbeliever. However, it must be noted that Fuller is an avowed Calvinist and that this is reflected in his essay. (Bob Stewart)

HELL AND GOD'S LOVE

Daniel P. Fuller

The chief contact that many today have with the Biblical teaching of an eternal hell is during an American literature course, when they read Jonathan Edwards' sermon, "Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God". Our contemporary mood regards such preaching as revealing more about the purported psychotic qualities of Edwards than about what unrepentant men should expect from a holy God. John Hicks, in his book, "Evil and the God of Love" (Macmillan, 1966) darkly reports the suggestion that "...the theology implied by the title of Edwards' famous sermon...reflects God in the hands of angry sinners!" (pg. 99 note).

Teaching regarding hell was more common in Puritan days, but it was no more popular. Richard Baxter, an English Puritan living a century before Edwards, devoted two of his sixteen chapters of his famous devotional work, "The Saints' Best" (1650) to the subject of hell. Here Baxter warned men of its awfulness in terms as loving, sober and forthright as did Edwards. But at the close of these two chapters Baxter confessed, "This kind of preaching or writing is the ready way to be hated; and the desire of applause is so natural that few delight in such a displeasing way."

Preaching on hell is rare today not only because of its continued unpopularity but also because of a widespread line of thought which argues that the love of God precludes such an idea. Nels Ferre expresses this when he says, "If one creature is to be eternally tormented, Christ's compassion declares that it were far better that there had been no creation." "Evil and The Christian Faith", Harper and Row, 1947, page 110

To be sure, as long as our attention is focused only on the Biblical themes of an eternal hell and the love of God, a clash seems inescapable. But when both of these themes are seen in their organic relation to that ultimate emphasis in Scripture on the glory of God, then we can see how compatible the love of God is with an eternal hell.

THE GLORY OF GOD

Scripture never tires of asserting that God does only what redounds to His glory. He created men for His glory (Isaiah 43:7). He redeems men and forgives their sin not primarily that he might benefit them, but "for His own name's sake" (I John 2:12). "For my name's sake will I defer mine anger, and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off...For mine own sake, *even* for mine own sake, will I do *it*: for how should *my name* be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another." (Isaiah 48:9, 11)

It is altogether fitting that God should be jealous for His own glory. He is the most perfect of all beings, and He Himself is the source of all that He is. Credit should be given where credit is due, and therefore it is right for God to render appropriate honor to His infinite glory. God would be unrighteous were He not to summon all His might in delighting in His glory.

THE LOVE OF GOD

The most loving thing God can do is reveal His glory to men, for knowledge of His majesty and greatness produces in their hearts the very joy which God has within Himself. How could God be more loving to men than to allow them to share the very delight into which He enters with His whole being. It is of little wonder, therefore, that the men of the Bible testify that the glory of God is worth everything to them. Paul counted the knowledge of Christ to be so exceedingly excellent that all his former delights were garbage by comparison. (Phil. 3:8)

The Psalmist likewise declared that he wanted but one thing, namely, to be able to enjoy the beauty of God all of his life (Ps. 27:4). He confessed, "Oh Lord, I love the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwells." (Ps. 26:8)

But were God to cease to be glorious, either by doing something un-praiseworthy or by not rendering proper honor to his glory, it would be impossible thereafter to be loving. He loves men by revealing to them the glorious God that He is, but if he were no longer glorious, there would no longer be anything God could do for men that would be of ultimate worth. Therefore, God is love only as He continues to act gloriously in all that he does, and as He summons all His might to delight in His glory.

So loving is God that when men join Him in delighting in His glory, the very power whereby He delights in Himself becomes directed toward men for their benefit. When men look to Christ as the only one to save them from the penalty of sin because of His death on the cross, and submit to Him as Lord, then they render great glory to God, for they have acknowledged the worth of Christ, God's "unspeakable gift" (II Cor. 9:15). In believing in Christ and in living a life of praise and thanksgiving to God, such men become the very embodiment of the glory of God. They do not, of course, become glorious in themselves; rather, by delighting in God's glory they signify how glorious He is. Since God ever delights in His glory, He cannot but delight in His glory, He cannot but delight in these men, and the very omnipotence by which God delights in Himself likewise works to maintain their well being. Jeremiah 32:40-41 tells how God follows hard after those who fear Him to do them good, and how He works to bless them with His "whole heart and soul."

THE WRATH OF GOD

But just as God's hand is for good upon all that seek Him, so, "...the power of His wrath is against all those who forsake Him," Ezra 8:22. If all of God's energy is summoned to express delight in His glory and to bless those who redound to His glory, it can only be that those whose lives have gone the opposite direction must find themselves opposed by the very omnipotence of God. And to be sure, the Bible declares that such are opposed by "the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." (Rev. 19:15) It also declares that this opposition will last throughout eternity (Matthew 25:46).

For God not to punish the contempt of His glory with such an infinite punishment would be tantamount to His not delighting in His glory. Only to the extent that He

fully opposes those that oppose His glory does God act consistently with His full delight in His glory. To the objection, therefore, that the Biblical picture of God's wrath against the unrepentant is so terrible that the God of Love cannot be thought of as having any part of it, Jonathan Edwards replied,

"If the obligation to love, honor and obey God be infinite, then sin, which is a violation of the obligation and so is an infinite evil, and therefore hell, consisting of an infinite punishment, is entirely just.... There is no evading the force of this reasoning, but that by denying that God, the sovereign of the universe is infinitely glorious; which I presume none of my hearers will venture to do." (Works, 1858 ed., IV, 267)

God has ordained the infinite punishment of hell in order that the infinite worth of His glory might be maintained despite the injury done to it by the unrepentant. Only in so doing does God remain glorious and therefore loving to men. Were God thus not to oppose the unrepentant, He would cease to be glorious and therefore would no longer be able to love men by allowing them to share in His glory. In short, God would not be loving were he not to invoke against unrepentant men the infinite punishment of an eternal hell.

Dr. Ferre implies that the love of God will never rest until hell be emptied of its last occupant. But is not the truth rather, that the love of God would be emptied if he did not require the infinite punishment of an eternal hell for the unrepentant contempt of His glory? And is it not rather true that God's love rests only as He sees that the honor of His glory is maintained by means of an eternal hell?