



# My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

## Lesson #22: "Eternal Life in Christ"

SCRIPTURE READING: REVELATION 20:14-15; 21 MALACHI 4:1, 3

**Memory Verse: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:" John 11:25.**

The doctrine of an eternally burning hell in which lost sinners suffer endlessly in the awful pain of "hellfire" is still held by millions of serious-minded Christians. This belief is an outgrowth of the "natural immortality" idea. That is, if the sinner, as well as the saint, were immortal, neither would ever really die, but would live on forever in a place of ghastly torment or of unrivaled bliss.

In the light of our last lesson, you yourself must decide whether this doctrine is Scriptural. Using sanctified reason, you must decide, too, whether a just God would permit the wicked to suffer throughout eternity for the sins they committed in a few brief years. One writer has said:

"If eternal hell is real, love is eternally frustrated and heaven is a place of mourning and concern for the lost. Such joy and such grief cannot go together. There can be no split personality for the real lovers of God and surely not for God Himself. God cannot be faithless to Himself no matter how faithless we are" (A Reader's Notebook by Gerald Kennedy. Copyright 1953, Harper & Brothers).

However, the fact that a just God will not punish sinners throughout eternity in hellfire does not remove the prospect that a just God will punish sinners with fire and destroy them. "The wages of sin is death," said Paul. Fire is the best means of destruction. And death is destruction, simply the cessation of life. This is the reward of the wicked. So the Bible teaches, as we shall now see.

### 1: WHAT IS THE BIBLE MEANING OF THE WORD, "HELL"?

There are three meanings. Let us look at them, one at a time:

#### **1. Hell sometimes means the "grave."**

The Hebrew word widely used for "grave" is sheol. In Psalm 16:10, we have it rendered "hell," referring to the grave. "Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." In Acts 2:27, this Scripture is quoted by Peter. In this verse, the Greek word for "hell" is hades. Its meaning is "grave," the same as sheol in the Hebrew. As you know, the New Testament was originally written in Greek. In Acts 2:31, Peter definitely says that Psalm 16: 10, the verse we speak of, refers to Christ's resurrection. Christ was not left in "hell," that is, not in the grave, but was raised from the dead. The word, hades, is used eleven times in the New Testament. In I Corinthians 15:55, it is translated "grave." Otherwise it is translated "hell" signifying the grave or "state in the grave."

#### **2. Hell also signifies a "place of burning."**

In the New Testament the word is Gehenna, or the "Valley of Hinnom," described as "a deep, narrow glen, south of Jerusalem, where, after the introduction of the fire gods of Ahaz, the idolatrous Jews

offered their children to Moloch." In this Valley of Hinnom, the bodies of dead animals and the refuse of the city were cast. Fires burned continuously, and worms infested the carcasses of animals. What the fire did not destroy, the worms consumed. It thus was a type of complete annihilation. Gehenna, the place of burning, is used twelve times, being translated "hell."

### **3. Hell sometimes represents darkness.**

The third meaning of the word, "hell," is found in 2 Peter 2:4. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment."

The Greek word here is Tartarus, not Gehenna or hades. In this text, hell represents the darkness that enshrouded Satan and his angels, when they were separated from God, and heaven and the darkness that has come to earth because of the presence of the prince of darkness (Isaiah 60:2).

#### **2: WHERE DO ALL MEN GO AT DEATH?**

Surprisingly, the Scriptures declare that all men go to hell (or the grave) when they die. Here are five facts about death:

#### **1. The dead go into the house of death, appointed to all living.**

***Job 30:23: "For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all living."***

#### **2. This house is the grave (*sheol*).**

***Job 17:13: "If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness."***

#### **3. This grave is *hades* in the Greek New Testament.**

***1 Corinthians 15:55: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (See margin,)***

#### **4. *Hades* is translated "hell" in Acts 2:27, 31, meaning the "grave."**

***Acts 2:27, 31: "Because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." "He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption."***

*Hades* is translated as "hell" ten times in the New Testament.

#### **5. The spirit (breath of life) of all men goes to God at death.**

***Ecclesiastes 12:7: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."***

Hell, or the grave, is an impartial place. "There is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked" (Ecclesiastes 9:2). "What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave [*sheol*]" (Psalm 89:48)? The rich and poor, the high and low, the righteous and the wicked; all meet in that abode. Into the grave have gone the vilest characters that have ever lived, and its portals have opened to receive the loveliest and sweetest mortals whose gentle footsteps ever graced the earth.

Yes, death is an "enemy" (1 Corinthians 15:26) and the grave is not a comforting consolation, but we thank God that "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13). They have the hope of the resurrection. And we may also rejoice that the wicked are now slumbering in silence rather than screaming in torture and agony.

### 3 - WHEN WILL THE DEAD COME OUT OF THE GRAVE?

The righteous come out of the grave, or hades, at the sound of the "last trump" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, 55). This trump sounds at Christ's second coming (1 Thessalonians 4: 16). And this is at the beginning of the millennium (Revelation 20:6). Christ's promise of His glorious return, to gather His chosen ones unto Himself (John 14:1-3), will someday be fulfilled. At the sound of the "trump of God," the saints who have slept in silence, unconscious of the passing of time, will suddenly be awakened. Some have slumbered for thousands of years; others have had only a brief period in the grave. To all, the time will seem the same-as just a moment. They will come forth with their faces glowing with joy, health, and immortality.

The living righteous will be caught up with these resurrected saints, and they will go to be with Christ and reign with Him a thousand years. What a glad and glorious reunion this will be.

But when will the wicked dead come out of the grave? They will be raised from their graves a thousand years later (Revelation 20:5). "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." This is the Bible teaching.

Hell (hades, or the grave) gives up its dead (Revelation 20:13). This occurs at the end of the millennium, when the saints and the New Jerusalem descend from heaven to earth. The untold millions of the wicked dead are raised from the grave, or hades. Satan goes out to deceive them. He then leads them in assault against the city of God, the home of the saints (Revelation 20:5-9). Notice carefully what happens next.

### 4: WHERE WILL THE WICKED AND HELL (THE GRAVE) BE CAST?

They will be cast into the lake of fire.

***Revelation 20:14-15: "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."***

Yes, they will be cast into a literal lake of fire. Nine times does Jesus give warning concerning this "hell" of fire. This is the "place of burning," the final Gehenna of Scripture. This Gehenna is mentioned twelve times in the New Testament.

### 5: WILL THE WHOLE MAN BE CAST INTO THIS FIRE?

The answer is clear: all of him: "both soul and body in hell" (*Gehenna*).

***Matthew 10:28: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 5:30; 18:8-9).***

Since there is no fire in the grave, this consignment to a place of burning could not take place at death. The burning hell Jesus is speaking of is not one into which some ghostlike spirit or soul is cast, but one into which men are cast bodily. Since at death the body goes into the grave, where there is no burning, this hell that Jesus here speaks of has no connection with ordinary death. It refers to the second and final death by fire, when the wicked are destroyed at the close of the millennium.

6: HOW LONG WILL THE WICKED BURN?

**1. Until body and soul are destroyed.**

***Matthew 10:28: "But rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."***

**2. Until neither root nor branch is left.**

***Malachi 4:1: "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."***

**3. Until they are devoured—the "second death."**

***Revelation 20:9, 14: "And 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. . And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."***

The wicked will burn forever, as long as life lasts.

***Revelation 20:10: "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."***

If you will read Exodus 21:6, you will find that "for ever" may mean only as long as a man lives. Jonah said that he was shut up in the great fish and "the earth with her bars was about me for ever" (Jonah 2:6).

Yet he was in this strange abode only three short days.

It is perfectly plain that the wicked are going to be completely destroyed.

This will be the second death. At the first death, the wicked went into the grave. The second death marks the end of the sinner, the end of death, and the end of the grave. God is forever through with sin, sinners, death, and the grave. Those who suffer the second death will be destroyed by eternal fire. Jesus declared, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:46). Notice it does not say "punishing," but "punishment" and has reference to the result rather than to the method.

**7 - WHAT IS THE MEANING OF "EVERLASTING" FIRE?**

Everlasting, or eternal, fire is fire that God uses to destroy everlastingly the enemies of His truth.

***Matthew 25:41: "Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand. Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."***

Sodom and Gomorrah are given in the Scriptures as an example of this fire.

***Jude 7: "Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire."***

Don't forget that these cities were burned to ashes.

**2 Peter 2:6: "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly."**

This is the kind of "everlasting punishment" the wicked receive.

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

This fire is also called "unquenchable fire."

**Mark 9:43-44: "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."**

Jerusalem was destroyed by such a fire.

**Jeremiah 17:27: "But if ye will not hearken unto Me to hallow the Sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jeremiah 52:12-13).**

This fire is called unquenchable. This word simply indicates that no power will quench the fire until it has consumed everything. Jerusalem is not burning today. Yet God said it would be destroyed by a fire, "and it shall not be quenched." It was not quenched, but burned everything up and burned out. So shall the wicked be destroyed.

The "worm" is a symbol of complete and final destruction. In the Valley of Hinnom, the worms consumed what the fire did not destroy.

#### 8: WHEN AND WHERE WILL THE WICKED BURN IN HELL?

Peter tells us the wicked are reserved to the Day of Judgment to be punished.

**2 Peter 2:9: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations. and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (Proverbs 11:31).**

The earth will become, temporarily, a fiery hell.

**2 Peter 3:7: "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."**

Keep in mind that this happens at the end of the millennium, after the wicked dead are raised.

**Revelation 20:5: "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished."**

**Revelation 20:9: "Fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them."**

So complete will be the destruction, that the wicked will be as though they had not been.

**Obadiah 16: "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."**

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

Then God will make a glorious new earth.

***2 Peter 3:13: "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."***

#### 9 - HOW CAN WE ESCAPE DESTRUCTION AND HAVE ETERNAL LIFE?

Let us fully accept Christ and be diligent to be without spot of sin.

***2 Peter 3:14: "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless."***

God will write our names in His book. And no one whose name is retained there after the judgment will be destroyed by fire (Revelation 21:8; 22:15).

***Revelation 20:15: "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."***

God never intended that any man should ever suffer in hell. It is "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). God wishes us to have a home with Him forever and ever. Christ died that we might inherit a home with Him. It is by His mercies that we receive this rich reward. His second coming will soon open the literal gates of heaven to receive the redeemed. Is it not all wonderful? Let us praise God for the glorious plan of salvation!

### SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 6:23). While life is the inheritance of the righteous, death is the portion of the wicked. Moses declared to Israel: 'I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil' (Deuteronomy 30: 15). The death referred to in these Scriptures is not that pronounced upon Adam, for all mankind suffer the penalty of his transgression. It is 'the second death' that is placed in contrast with everlasting life.

"In consequence of Adam's sin, death passed upon the whole human race. All alike go down into the grave. And through the provisions of the plan of salvation, all are to be brought forth from their graves. 'There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust'; 'for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive' (Acts 24: 15; 1 Corinthians 15:22). But a distinction is made between the two classes that are brought forth. 'All that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation' (John 5:28, 29). They who have been 'accounted worthy' of the resurrection of life are 'blessed and holy.' 'On such the second death hath no power' Revelation 20:6). But those who have not, through repentance and faith, secured pardon, must receive the penalty of transgression-'the wages of sin.' They suffer punishment varying in duration and intensity, 'according to their works: but finally ending in the second death. Since it is impossible for God, consistently with His justice and mercy, to save the sinner in his sins, He deprives him of the existence which his transgressions have forfeited and of which he has proved himself unworthy. Says an inspired writer: 'Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.' And another declares: 'They shall be as though they had not been' (Psalm 37: 10; Obadiah 16). Covered with infamy, they sink into hopeless, eternal oblivion.

## Lesson 22: Eternal Life in Christ

"Thus will be made an end of sin, with all the woe and ruin which have resulted from it. Says the psalmist: 'Thou hast destroyed the wicked, Thou hast put out their name forever and ever. O thou enemy, destructions are come to a perpetual end' (Psalm 9:5, 6). John, in the Revelation, looking forward to the eternal state, hears a universal anthem of praise undisturbed by one note of discord. Every creature in heaven and earth was heard ascribing glory to God (Revelation 5: 13). There will then be no lost souls to blaspheme God as they writhe in never-ending torment; no wretched beings in hell will mingle their shrieks with the songs of the saved.

"Upon the fundamental error of natural immortality rests the doctrine of consciousness in death—a doctrine, like eternal torment, opposed to the teachings of the Scriptures, to the dictates of reason, and to our feelings of humanity." *Great Controversy*, 544-545