



THE BIBLE STANDS

*The Bible stands though the hills may tumble,
It will firmly stand when the earth shall crumble;
I will plant my feet on its firm foundation,
For the Bible stands.*

Bible Facts About the Death of the Wicked

It is not true that sinners will burn forever in hellfire. The Bible teaches that, yes, the wicked will be punished, but only for a relatively short time--and then they will perish and no longer exist. No one sins enough in this life, to deserve eternal burnings on his body!

Our God is a good, merciful God, and will blot out, from existence, those who, in the final day of Judgment, have been shown to not want the purity and harmony of heaven.

"If eternal hell is real, love is eternally frustrated and heaven will be a place of mourning and concern for the lost. Such joy and such grief cannot go together."--Gerald Kennedy, Reader's Notebook, 1953, Harper & Row.

Thank God that He is perfectly just and fair in all His dealings with His creatures! "The wages of sin is death," said Paul (Romans 6:23). Death for the wicked will come quickly, and will mean the cessation of life--forever. This is the reward of the wicked.

What is the punishment of the wicked? Where will it take place? How long will it last? What will happen after it is ended? The Bible has answers. Here they are:

WHAT WILL BE THE END OF THE WICKED?

1. What will be the end of the wicked?

Romans 6:23--"For the wages of sin is death."

Ezekiel 18:4--"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

The original Greek and Hebrew words for "death" and "die" mean to cease to exist, to perish.

That answers the question of Peter: "What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).--They will be blotted out of existence.

2. How complete will this death be?

2 Thessalonians 1:9--"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction?"

The Greek word here is *olethros*, "destruction," and is the same as the English word, which means "to ruin, demolish, abolish, annihilate."

3. In what other ways is the death of wicked described?

Luke 13:3--"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

2 Peter 2:12--"But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption."

The word "perish" means "to be destroyed, pass away, come to an end, be lost, to die." The Greek word is *apollume*, "be destroyed."

Psalm 37:20--"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."

The word "consume" means "to destroy the substance of, especially by fire" or by decomposition.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF HELL?

4. What are the three meanings of "hell" in the Bible?

(1) "Hell" sometimes means "the grave."

Psalm 16:10--"Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell [sheol; Hebrew for the grave]; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption."

This verse is a prediction of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He did not go into hellfire, but into the grave. In Acts 2:27, this scripture is quoted by Peter. The Greek word used there is *hades*, which also means the grave. In 1 Corinthians 15:55, *hades* is translated "the grave."

(2) "Hell" can also mean a "place of burning." In the New Testament this word is *Gehenna*, or the "Valley of Hinnom," and was a deep valley just south of Jerusalem, where the garbage was burned up. *Gehenna* is the burning hell.

(3) "Hell" represents "darkness." In 2 Peter 2:4, the Greek word is *Tartarus*, not *Gehenna* or *hades*.

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."

This is the darkness that enshrouded Satan and his angels, when they were cast out of the presence of God. This is the darkness which has come to earth, because of the presence of the prince of darkness (Isaiah 60:2).

WHERE DO ALL MEN GO AT DEATH?

According to the Bible, all men go to the grave (*sheol*; *hades*) at death. Four questions will explain it:

5. What is the house that all go to at death?

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

6. What is this house of death?

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

7. At death, what happens?

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

This is the opposite of creation, when God breathed into the lifeless body of Adam, and he became alive.

Genesis 2:7--"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

8. Does everyone go to the grave at death?

Psalm 89:48--"What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave [*sheol*]"

Ecclesiastes 9:2--"There is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked."

Everyone goes to the grave at death; no one goes to hellfire. The best and the worst people die and go to the grave.

Yes, death is an "enemy" (1 Corinthians 15:26), and we sorrow when our loved ones go into the grave, but we can thank God that "blessed are the dead which die in the Lord" (Revelation 14:13). They have the hope of the resurrection. We may also be thankful that the wicked are slumbering in silence, and not screaming in continuous torture and agony.

WHEN WILL THE RIGHTEOUS DEAD COME OUT OF THE GRAVE?

9. At the Second Coming of Christ, God's faithful ones will have victory over what?

1 Corinthians 15:55--"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

The righteous dead come out of the grave, or hades, at the sound of the "last trump."

10. Is that when the righteous gain immortality?

1 Corinthians 15:51-55--"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 . . . So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

Jesus promised us that we would not go to heaven to be with Him, until His Second Coming (John 14:1-3).

Christ's promise will someday be fulfilled. At the sound of the "trump of God," His own, who have slept in silence, unconscious of the passing of time, will suddenly be awakened. Some have been in the graves for thousands of years, others for only a few years. But to all, it will be as a moment--and they will come forth to radiant, immortal life. Paul said that was when he--and all God's people--will be given eternal life.

2 Timothy 4:8--"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."

The promise of the resurrection is very definite, and very important.

1 Corinthians 15:16, 18--"For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised . . . Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

WHEN WILL THE WICKED DEAD COME OUT OF THE GRAVE?

11. When are the wicked raised from their graves?

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

That is what the Bible teaches. The wicked will be raised from their graves a thousand years later. It is not until that time that "hell" (hades, or the grave) gives up its dead (Revelation 20:13).

At the beginning of the millennium, Jesus raises His own from their graves and takes them to heaven. After a thousand years pass, they descend upon the earth with the Holy City, and then enter it. At that time, the wicked dead are raised, and Satan is thus able to again tempt and control the wicked (Revelation 20:1-7).

At the end of the millennium, untold millions of dead are raised from the grave, or sheol. Satan goes out to deceive them, and lead them in an attack on the City of God (Revelation 20:5-9). But then they receive their final sentence from God.

WHERE ARE THE WICKED AND THE GRAVE CAST?

12. After they have been raised at the close of the millennium, where are the wicked and "hell" (the grave) cast?

Revelation 20:14-15--"And death and hell [hades, the grave] 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."

The wicked are cast into a literal lake of fire. Nine times Christ warns us about this "hell" of fire, this burning hell. This is the "place of burning," the final Gehenna. It is mentioned 12 times in the New Testament.

IS EVERY PART OF MAN CAST INTO THIS FIRE?

13. Is the whole man--all of him--cast into this fire?

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."

It is sin and yielding to Satan which we need to fear. The wicked will be completely destroyed in hellfire. Nothing will remain undestroyed.

Matthew 5:30--"And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." (Also Matthew 18:8-9).

There is no fire in the grave. It is the place of quiet and unconsciousness. That is what the Bible teaches about what happens to man when he dies.

Psalms 146:4--"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."

Ecclesiastes 9:5-6--"The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything . . . Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished."

Psalms 6:5--"For in death there is no remembrance of Thee."

Psalms 115:17--"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence."

HOW LONG WILL THE WICKED BURN?

14. How long do the wicked burn in hellfire?

(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--and die 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."

(4) The wicked 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."

15. How long is "for ever"?

"For ever" may mean only as long as a man lives.

Exodus 21:2, 5-6--"If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing . . . And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children: I will not go out free: Then his master shall bring him unto the Judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.

"For ever" could also mean a shorter period of time. Jonah afterward said that, while he was in the great fish he was shut up "with the earth and her bars about me for ever" (Jonah 2:6). Jesus said about the wicked, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:46). He did not say, "punishing," but "punishment." The punishment was death, and it would have everlasting results.

16. What is the meaning of "everlasting" fire?

Everlasting or eternal fire--is fire which God uses to destroy everlastingly.

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

This fire is called "everlasting" (Greek: aionion, "age lasting") because of its lasting effects.

17. Is there in the Bible an example of this kind of fire?

The fire which burned Sodom and Gomorrah was everlasting fire.

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

Those cities were burned to ashes about 2000 B.C.

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

That is the kind of "everlasting punishment" the wicked receive. The death of those wicked will forever be a memorial to God's hatred of sin. It is death with eternal results.

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

This fire is 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, then 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."

18. Why is it called unquenchable fire?

This fire is called unquenchable (Greek: asbestos) because it cannot be put out and not because it will not go out. The word simply means that no power will be able to quench this fire until it has consumed everything in the fire.

19. Is there an example in the Bible of unquenchable 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 places of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched." [Fulfilled in Jeremiah 52:12-13; and for this reason: 2 Chronicles 36:14-21.]

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 every thing up and burned out. So shall the wicked be completely 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.

20. What is the "second death?"

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."

It is quite clear that the wicked are going to be completely destroyed. It is called "death," the "second death." It is death, not life. At the first death the wicked went into the grave. The second death marks the final end of the sinner, the end of death, and the end of the grave. At that moment in time, God will be completely finished with sin, sinners, death, and the grave.

21. When will the wicked burn in hellfire?

The wicked are not suffering now. Peter tells us they are "reserved" unto 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."

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."

They are not burning now, but are "reserved" till a later time. But when that time comes, the fire will do its work thoroughly and completely; they will be "devoured."

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

The wicked are reserved unto the day of destruction (2 Peter 3:7 with Job 21:30), and "They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath" (Job 21:30).

Jesus Himself said, "The tares are the children of the wicked one." And "as therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world" (Matthew 13:38, 40).

There is not a single, solitary sinner burning in hell today. Thank God for that! He is totally fair and Just. When the punishment is finally meted out, it will be relatively brief.

And it will be thorough. So complete will be the destruction, that the wicked will be as though they had not been. (More on this later in this study.)

22. Where will hellfire burn?

The Bible is quite clear that it will burn on the surface of the earth.

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

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.

The present heavens and earth and sinners await the fires of the last day. The Greek for "perdition" is apoleia, "destruction."

While hellfire is burning, the earth will temporarily become a fiery hell. Yet the repeated promise is that God's people will inherit the earth.

Psalms 37:11--"The meek shall inherit the earth" (also Matthew 5:5; Isaiah 11:4).

God's children could not inherit the earth, if hellfire were forever burning on it.

Instead, when the fire goes out, God will remake the world more beautiful than before.

Revelation 21:1--"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away."

23. Will this death be so complete that sin and sinners will never again exist?

It will be so complete that as soon as the fire is ended, there will not be another sinner anywhere. Sin and sinners will be no more--forever. In Matthew 13:41-42, it is called a "furnace of fire." What can be more destructive than a fiery furnace?

Psalms 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." If the wicked were forever alive in hellfire, they would be continually sinning, hating, cursing. But sin and sinners will be no more. After a relatively short time, the lake of fire will stop burning, and there will be no more fire, because the sinners will all be forever perished.

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."

Nahum 1:9--"Affliction shall not rise up the second time."

Proverbs 10:25--"As the whirl wind passeth, so is the wicked no more.

As soon as the fire is out, God will make a new earth,--and only God's faithful ones will dwell in it. The wicked will be gone forever.

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

24. Why will sin finally be ended?

It is a great mercy of God to finally bring to an end this misery. But when it finally occurs, all will see that God was just and right at each step in the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

God does not want to hurt or slay anyone, but it is His responsibility, as the Creator, to finally eliminate the hateful, rebellious, and wicked. That is why the destruction of the wicked is called "His strange act."

Isaiah 28:21--"For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, He shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that He may do His work, His strange work; and bring to pass His act, His strange act."

Through sin the wicked have forfeited the right to life and an immortal existence with God and holy angels. Their destruction will be an act of love and mercy on the part of God. To perpetuate their lives would only be to perpetuate sin, sorrow, suffering, and misery.

Even death itself will then be at an end--cast into the lake of fire and destroyed (Revelation 20:14).

The experience of sin will be over, and God's original plan of peopling the earth with a race of holy, happy beings will be carried out (2 Peter 3:13).

HOW CAN WE AVOID HELLFIRE AND THE SECOND DEATH?

The unquenched flames of hell, Gehenna, which do not preserve, but consume whatever they feed on, aptly pictures what other Bible texts describe as the utter destruction of the wicked at the time of the final Judgment.

25. How can we escape that final "everlasting destruction,"--and, instead, have eternal life with Christ?

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."

It is now that we must prepare for heaven, it is now that we must return to God, repent of our sins, and surrender our lives to Him. It is now that we must resist sin through the enabling grace of Jesus Christ, and, through that grace, obey the Ten Commandments.

No one found written in the Book of Life will be destroyed in the lake of fire. (Revelation 21:8; 21:27; 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 human being suffer in hellfire. For Christ tells us it was "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). Christ died that we might have a home with Him forever. It is by His mercies that we can have this. In the strength of Christ, let us take it--and tell every one we meet about it.