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THE ORIGIN, NATURE, AND DESTINY OF THE SOUL [PART V]

Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

BIBLE TEACHING ON HELL

As one examines the various means through which men have attempted to circumvent the idea of the existence of hell, it is evident that there is no shortage of such theories. From universalism on the one hand to annihilationism on the other, men have done their best to disgorge the concept of eternal punishment from their minds. Some even have suggested that the only “hell” men experience is that of their own making here on Earth. Such a notion is standard fare in the vernacular of our day. For example, people speak of the fact that “war is hell.” They complain that, as they endure the vicissitudes of life, they are “going through hell.” John Benton noted:

When people’s personal lives go wrong, when they get caught up in bitterness and anger, when perhaps there is vicious language and even violence in the family home, we sometimes speak of people creating “hell on earth....” The psychological agony of guilt or the deep pain of bereavement are spoken of colloquially as being “like hell” (Benton, 1985, p. 42).

In his book, *Hell and Salvation*, Leslie Woodson observed: “The reference to man’s hard lot in life as ‘going through hell’ has become so commonplace that the modern mind has satisfied itself with the assumption that hell is nothing more” (1973, p. 30).

Believe whatever we will, say whatever we please: the simple fact is that none of these descriptions fits the biblical description of

hell. And certainly, Jesus never spoke of hell in such a fashion. When He warned us to “fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28) and spoke of those who “shall go away into eternal punishment” (Matthew 25:46), He was not referring to some sort of temporary, earthly misery resulting from war, bereavement, or the like. Furthermore, the idea that “hell” is represented by whatever “pangs of guilt” we may experience from time to time during this life is a foolish assertion indeed. As one writer summarized the matter:

[I]t is a well-known fact that the more one sins the more callous he may become until he has “seared his conscience as with a hot iron” (II Tim. 4:2). **If this theory is true then it follows that the righteous suffer greater punishment than the wicked.** A wicked person can destroy his “hell” by searing his conscience. However, a righteous man will be sensitive to sin and will feel the pangs of guilt when he sins. And, the more devout he is the more sensitive he is about sin. Again, **if this theory is true the worse a man is the less he will suffer.** To escape hell one simply would plunge himself into unrestrained sin and harden his heart. Obviously this doctrine is false (Ealey, 1984, p. 22, emp. added).

The book of Job makes clear that, on occasion, the righteous do suffer terribly—while the wicked appear to prosper. At times, the psalmist even grew envious of the prosperity of the wicked, and wondered if it really was

to his benefit to strive to be righteous (Psalm 73:2-5, 12-14). Absolute justice is a rarity in the here and now, but is guaranteed at the Judgment yet to come (Matthew 25:31-46). We would do well to remember that the “Judge of all the Earth” will “do that which is right” (Genesis 18:25). We also should remember:

It is significant that the most solemn utterances on this subject fall from the lips of Christ himself. In the New Testament as a whole there is a deep reserve on the nature of the punishment of the lost, though of course the act of final judgment is prominent. But with Christ himself the statements are much more explicit (Carson, 1978, p. 14).

The urgent question then becomes: What did Christ and His inspired writers teach regarding hell? What does the Bible say on this extremely important topic?

The word “hell” (which occurs 23 times in the King James Version of the Bible) translates three different terms from the Greek New Testament—*hades*, *tartaros*, and *gēenna*. While each has a different meaning, on occasion the KJV translators chose to translate each as “hell.” Was this an error on their part? Considering the way the word was used in 1611, no, it was not. Robert Taylor addressed this point when he wrote:

Hell in 1611 referred to the place of the unseen, the place that was beyond human eyesight, the place that was covered. In that day men who covered roofs were called hellers—they put coverings on buildings or covered them (1985, p. 160).

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According to Brown, “this was a correct rendering in 1611 because the word ‘Hell’ in Elizabethan English also meant an unseen place (e.g., Matthew 16:18; Luke 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; et al.)” [1999, p. 171].

The actual origin of the Greek *hades* (transliterated as *hades* in the English) is not well known. Some scholars have suggested that it derives from two roots: *a* (a negative prefix depicting “not”) and *idein* (a word meaning “to see”). Thus, according to *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon*, *hades* would evoke the idea of “not to be seen” (1958, p. 11). W.E. Vine advocated the view that *hades* meant “all receiving” (1991, p. 368). The exact meaning of the term, however, must be determined via an examination of the context in which it is used. *Hades* occurs eleven times in the Greek New Testament. On ten occasions (Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27,31; Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13-14) the KJV translates it as “hell.” [In such occurrences, most recent versions (e.g., the ASV, NKJV, et al.) transliterate the Greek as “hades.”] Once (1 Corinthians 15:55), *hades* is translated as “grave.”

The Greek *tartaros* is the noun (translated into English via the Latin *tartarus*, cf. ASV footnote on 2 Peter 2:4) from which the verb *tartarosas* (aorist participle of *tartaroo*) derives. Ralph Earle observed that the term signified “the dark abode of the wicked dead” (1986, p. 447). Originally, it seems to have carried the idea of a “deep place”—a connotation that it retains in both Job 40:15 and 41:23 in the Septuagint. The Greek poet, Homer, wrote in his *Iliad* of “dark Tartarus...the deepest pit” (8.13). The word *tartaros* occurs only once in the Greek New Testament (2 Peter 2:4), where it is translated “hell” (“God spared not angels...but cast them down to hell”). In writing of this singular occurrence, R.C.H. Lenski remarked: “The verb does not occur elsewhere in the Bible; it is seldom found in other writings. The noun ‘Tartarus’ occurs three times in the LXX [Septuagint—BT], but there is no corresponding Hebrew term. The word is of pagan origin...” (1966, p. 310).

The Greek *gēenna* is the predominant term used in the New Testament to depict hell. The word “represents the Aramaic expression *ge hinnom*, meaning ‘Valley of Hinnom’ (Neh. 11:30; cf. Josh. 15:8), and for this reason the word is commonly transliterated into English as *Gebenna*” (Workman, 1993, p. 496). Several sites have been suggested for the “valley of

Hinnom” (or Valley of the Son of Hinnom, Vos, 1956, 2:1183; Earle, 1986, p. 447), but most authorities now believe that it was located on the south side of Jerusalem. In the Bible, the valley is mentioned first in Joshua 15:8. Centuries later, the apostates of Judah used it as a place to offer child sacrifices to the pagan god Molech (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6). When good king Josiah ascended the throne and overthrew the practice of idolatry, he “defiled” the place called Topheth (a name signifying something to be abhorred and spit upon) in the Valley of Hinnom (2 Kings 23:10). The valley came to be reviled for the evil that had occurred there, and eventually turned into a smoldering garbage dump that served the entire city of Jerusalem. Years later, it even was used as a potter’s field (as is evident from the many rock tombs that are known to rest at its lower end). A perpetual fire burned, to prevent the spread of contagion, and worms and maggots performed their unseen, unsavory tasks amidst the debris and decay (see Morey, 1984, p. 87; cf. Foster, 1971, pp. 764-765). J. Arthur Hoyles graphically described the grisly goings-on:

Here the fires burned day and night, destroying the garbage and putrefying the atmosphere from the smell of rotten flesh or decaying vegetation. In time of war the carcasses of vanquished enemies might mingle with the refuse, thus furnishing patriotic writers with a clue as to the destiny of their own persecutors. They were destined to be destroyed in the fires that were never quenched (1957, p. 118).

By the second century B.C., the term *gēenna* began to appear in Jewish literature as a symbolic designation for the place of unending, eternal punishment of the wicked dead. As Gary Workman noted:

It is natural, therefore, that when the New Testament opens *Gebenna* would be the primary term for hell. It is so recorded eleven times from the lips of Jesus and is also used once by James. It was not to the literal Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem that they referred, nor anything similar to it, but rather to “the *Gebenna* of fire” in a realm beyond the grave. Both Jewish and Christian historians confirm that the prevailing view of Jews at the time of Christ (except the Sadducees who denied even the resurrection) was that of eternal punishment for the wicked. And since Je-

sus never attempted to correct Pharisaic thinking on the duration of *Gehenna*, as he did with eschatological errors of the Sadducees (Matt. 22:29), this is weighty evidence for the meaning he intended to convey by his use of the term (1993, pp. 496-497).

The word *géenna* occurs twelve times in the Greek New Testament. In nine of these (Matthew 5:29-30; 10:28; 23:15,33; Mark 9:43,45; Luke 12:5; James 3:6—KJV), it is translated as “hell.” Three times (Matthew 5:22; 18:9; Mark 9:47—KJV) it is translated as “hell fire.” David Stevens has pointed out: “It is also significant that eleven of the twelve times that the word *gehenna* is used, it is used by the Lord himself! Thus, it is evident that what we know about *gehenna*, we learn from the Lord himself” (1991, 7[3]:21).

There exists a diversity of views regarding the usage of these terms in Scripture. For example, some scholars have suggested that *hades* (or the Old Testament *sheol*) is a generic term for **the abode of the dead, whether good or evil**, while they await the final Judgment—a view with which I concur. Thus, *hades* is composed of two compartments: (1) the abode of the spirits of the righteous (known either as paradise—Luke 23:43, or Abraham’s bosom—Luke 16:22); and (2) the abode of the spirits of the wicked (Tartarus—2 Peter 2:4, or “torment”—Luke 16:23) [Davidson, 1970, p. 694; Denham, 1998, p. 609; Harris, et al., 1980, 2:892; Jackson, 1998, 33[9]:34-35; Stevens, 1991, 7[3]:21; Thayer, 1958, p. 11; Zerr, 1952, p. 17].

On the other hand, some scholars suggest that *hades* should not be used as an umbrella term to refer to the general abode of the dead. Rather, they suggest that after death, there exists: (1) the grave for the physical body (*sheol*, physical abyss, physical *hades*); (2) the abode of the spirits of the righteous (paradise, Abraham’s bosom, the “third heaven”); and (3) the abode of the spirits of the wicked (Tartarus, spiritual abyss, spiritual *hades*) [see McCord, 1979, 96[4]:6]. Still others have advocated the belief that *gehenna*, *tartarus*, and *hades* are synonyms representing exactly the same thing—“the place of all the damned” (Lenski, 1966, p. 310).

There is one thing, however, on which advocates of each position agree wholeheartedly, and on which the biblical text is crystal clear: after death and the Judgment, *gehenna* (hell) will be the ultimate, final abode of the spirits of the wicked. But what, exactly, will hell be like?

Hell is a Place of Punishment for Bodies and Souls of the Disobedient Wicked

The Scriptures speak with clarity and precision on the topic of hell as a place of punishment appointed for the disobedient wicked. The psalmist wrote by inspiration: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God” (9:17). Jesus taught that at Judgment, the wicked will “depart” into punishment “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41; cf. Matthew 25:46 where Jesus employed the Greek term *kolasis*, which means punishment, torment, suffering, and chastisement [see Brown, 1999, p. 173]). When John described those who would join the devil in hell’s horrible abyss, he referred to “the fearful, and unbelieving, and

*As sinners realize,
“I’ve been shut out
of God’s presence!,”
they will be overcome
with a sense of
eternal loss that
leads to a depth of
anger, and sense of
loss, which they find
utterly impossible to
express in words.*

abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and liars” (Revelation 21:8). Paul said that those who inhabit hell with Satan will be those who “know not God” and who “obey not the gospel of Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

In discussing *gehenna* in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Geerhardus Vos addressed the verses that deal with hell, and then stated: “In all of these it designates the place of eternal punishment of the wicked, generally in connection with the final judgment.... Both body and soul are cast into it” (1956, 2:1183). E.M. Zerr commented: “*Gehenna* is the lake of unquenchable fire into which the whole being of the wicked (body, soul and spirit) will be cast after the judgment”

(1952, p. 17). Hell is a place of contempt and shame (Daniel 12:2), as well as torment and anguish (Luke 16:23-24). It is a place of “outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12; 25:30) where punishment and suffering occur (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 14:11) that will involve both body and soul (Matthew 10:28).

Hell is a Place of Conscious Sorrow, Torment, Pain, and Suffering

From such vivid descriptions, it is quite evident that the wicked will be in a state of **consciousness**. In fact, John wrote that Satan and his human cohorts would be “cast **alive** into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20). That is to say, the Bible definitely teaches “**the persistence of personality after physical death**” (Warren, 1992, p. 32, emp. added). When Christ described hell as a place of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:13), He overtly emphasized the fact that its inhabitants will endure **conscious** sorrow. Hell is a place of such terrible suffering (2 Thessalonians 1:9) that the apostle John referred to it as the “second death” (Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8). Benton summarized this well:

Hell...is to be shut out of God’s presence, cut off from all that is good and wholesome. It is to be cut off from all love, all peace, all joy for ever. Jesus explains that once people realize this, once they realize what they have missed, the effect upon them will be devastating. “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” It is an unspeakably sombre picture. Men seldom weep, but in hell men weep uncontrollably. Jesus speaks of the place being totally characterized by tears.... In hell people do not just weep; they gnash their teeth. Having been shut out of the presence of God into the eternal blackness, permanently deprived of all that is wholesome and good, in bitter anger men and women grind their teeth in speechless rage. As they realize that once and for all, “I’ve been shut out!” they are overcome with a sense of eternal loss which leads to a depth of anger and fury that they find impossible to express in words (1985, pp. 47-48).

In addressing the consciousness of those in hell, Wayne Jackson wrote:

Punishment implies **consciousness**. It would be absurd to describe those who no longer exist as being “punished.” The wicked will be “tormented” with the fire of *Gehenna* (cf. Rev. 14:10-11). Torment certainly implies awareness (cf. Rev. 9:5; 11:10) [1998, 33[9]:35, emp. in orig.].

And torment there will be! When, in Revelation 20:10, John wrote of this torment, he employed the Greek word *basanisthesontai*, the root of which (*basanizo*) literally means “to torment, to be harassed, to torture, to vex with grievous pains” (Thayer, 1958, p. 96; cf. Matthew 8:6 regarding the one “tormented” [*basanizomenos*] with palsy).

Previously, John spoke of those who inhabit hell as experiencing the “wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger” (Revelation 14:10). Imagine—experiencing the undiluted wrath of God! In the next verse, John lamented: “The smoke of their torment [notice: **not** the smoke of their annihilation!—BT] goeth up for ever and ever.” Little wonder, then, that the writer of Hebrews referred to the second death as “a sorer punishment” than any mere physical death (10:29).

Hell is Eternal in Nature

Surely, one of the most horrific aspects of hell is its eternal nature. Throughout the Bible, words like “eternal,” “forever and forever,” “unquenchable,” and “everlasting” are used repeatedly to describe the duration of the punishment that God will inflict upon the wicked. As the “Judge of all the earth,” God alone has the right to determine the nature and duration of whatever punishment is due to the wicked. And He has decreed that such punishment will be eternal in nature (Matthew 25:46; Revelation 14:10-11). That may not agree with our mind-set, or appeal to our sensitivities, but it is God’s word on the matter nevertheless.

I once heard of a newspaper in Detroit, Michigan that ran a story about a man who (ironically) had been transferred from Hell, Michigan to a city by the name of Paradise. The news headline read: “Man Leaves Hell for Paradise!” Such an event might occur in **this** lifetime, but you may rest assured that it will not happen in the **next** (Luke 16:19-31). When Dante, in his *Inferno*, depicted the sign hanging over hell’s door as reading, “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here,” he did not overstate the case.

Some, of course, have objected to the concept of **eternal** punishment because of such passages as Mark 12:9 (where Jesus foretold in a parable that God would “destroy” those who killed His beloved Son) and Matthew 10:28 (where Jesus told His disciples to fear

Him who was able to “destroy” both soul and body in hell). But the belief that the soul will be annihilated is based, not on an understanding, but a **misunderstanding**, of the passages in question. In addition to referring to destruction, the Greek term *apollumi* employed in these two portions of Scripture (and approximately 90 more times elsewhere in the New Testament), also can mean “lose,” “perish,” or “lost.” As Vine pointed out: “The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of well-being” (1991, p. 211). Thayer defined *apollumi* as it appears in Matthew 10:28 as “to devote or give over to eternal misery” (1958, p. 64).

Granted, it would be more comforting for the wicked to believe that at the end of this life they simply will be punished “for a little

Believe whatever we will, say whatever we please—the simple fact is that God’s Word depicts hell as a place of eternal contempt, shame, sorrow, anguish, torment, pain, punishment, and suffering.

while” and then “drop out of existence,” rather than to have to face the stark realization of an eternal punishment in the fires of hell. But comforting or not, the question must be asked: Is such a belief in compliance with biblical teaching on this subject?

While it is true that, on rare occasions in Scripture, words such as “everlasting” and “forever” may be used in a non-literal sense (i.e., the thing being discussed is not strictly eternal—e.g. Exodus 12:14 and Numbers 25:13), they **never** are used in such a sense when describing hell. The word *aiomios* occurs some seventy times in the Greek New Testament where it is translated by such English terms as “eternal” or “everlasting” (e.g., “eternal fire,” Matthew 18:8, 25:41, Jude 7; “eternal punish-

ment,” Matthew 25:46; “eternal destruction,” 2 Thessalonians 1:9; and “eternal judgment,” Hebrews 6:2). In his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Vine wrote of *aiomios*:

Moreover, it is used of persons and things which are in their nature, endless, as, e.g., of God (Rom 16:26); of His power (I Tim. 6:16), and of Him (I Peter 5:10); of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 9:14); of the redemption effected by Christ (Heb. 9:12), and of the consequent salvation of men (5:9);...and of the resurrection body (II Cor. 5:1), elsewhere said to be “immortal” (I Cor. 15:53), in which that life will be finally realized (Matt. 25:46; Titus 1:2) [1966, p. 43].

Thayer stated that *aiomios* means “without end, never to cease, everlasting” (1958, p. 112).

In his inspired discussion about the coming fate of false teachers, Jude assured the first-century Christians that those who perverted the truth **would** be punished. To illustrate his point, he reached back to Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24-25) as an example of those “suffering the punishment of eternal fire” (v. 7). G.L. Lawlor commented on Jude’s illustration as follows:

Jude says these cities, their sin, and their terrible destruction lie before us as an example, *deigma*. Better, perhaps, the word might be rendered “sign,” that is, to show us the meaning and significance of something, i.e., this awful sin and God’s catastrophic judgment. The cities were destroyed by fire and brimstone, but the ungodly inhabitants are even now undergoing the awful torment of everlasting punishment. These cities are an example, they lie before us as a sign, to show the certainty of divine punishment upon an apostasy of life dreadful almost beyond description (1972, p. 70).

But what did Lawlor mean when he said that the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah “are even now undergoing the awful torment of everlasting punishment”? His point is this. The Greek *hupochousai* (rendered “suffering”) is a present participle and “shows that they were enduring ‘eternal fire’ even as Jude wrote! The primary force of the present tense in the Greek, especially as connected with a participial construction as here, is that of **continuous** action” (Denham, 1998, p. 607, emp. added). Greek scholar M.R. Vincent wrote regarding this point: “The participle is present, indicating that they are suffering

to this day the punishment which came upon them in Lot's time" (1946, 1:340). Brown remarked: "This grammatical construction simply means that Jude is saying that the inhabitants of the two cities not only suffered, but they continue to suffer. What a warning to those in rebellion to God!" (1999, p. 176).

The Jews (and Jewish Christians) of Jude's day would have understood that point because they knew and understood the significance attached to gehenna. Alfred Edersheim, who stood without equal as a Hebrew/inter-testamental period scholar, devoted an entire chapter of his monumental work, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, to the rabbinical and New Testament evidence on the subject of eternal punishment. His conclusion was that the Jews in the time of Christ understood gehenna as referring to a place of eternal, conscious torment for the wicked (1971, pp. 791-796). Eminent religious historian Philip Schaff (1970, 2:136) reported that, except for the Sadducees (who believed in neither a resurrection for the righteous nor the wicked), the Jews of Christ's day consistently held to a view of personal, eternal, conscious punishment—a truly important point for the following reason.

During His ministry, Jesus was quite outspoken against those things that were wrong or misleading. In Matthew 22:23-33 He chastised the Sadducees severely regarding their erroneous views about the lack of a future existence. Yet, as noted earlier, He **never opposed** the Jewish concept of eternal punishment of the soul. Had the Jews been in error regarding the afterlife, surely the Son of God would have corrected them in a pub-

lic manner as He did on so many other points of Scripture. Instead, He **repeatedly reaffirmed** such a concept. His silence speaks volumes!

No Hell...No Heaven

When Christ spoke to the people of His day about the ultimate fate of humanity in eternity, He stated that the wicked would "go away into everlasting (*aionios*) punishment, but the righteous into eternal (*aionios*) life." As Denham has pointed out: "The word rendered 'eternal' is the same Greek word *aionios*, rendered earlier as 'everlasting'" (1998, p. 615). The Lord's double use of the term *aionios* is critically important in this discussion. J.W. McGarvey addressed this fact when he wrote:

Whatever this Greek word means in the last clause of this sentence it means in the first; for it is an invariable rule of exegesis, that a word when thus repeated in the same sentence must be understood in the same sense, unless the context or the nature of the subject shows that there is a play on the word. There is certainly nothing in the context to indicate the slightest difference in meaning, nor can we know by the nature of the subject that the punishment spoken of is less durable than the life. It is admitted on all hands that in the expression "everlasting life" the term has its full force, and therefore it is idle and preposterous to deny that it has the same force in the expression "everlasting punishment." The everlasting punishment is the same as the everlasting fire of verse 41. The punishment is by fire, and its duration is eternal (1875, pp. 221-222).

There can be absolutely no doubt that the Lord intended to teach two specific states of conscious future existence. In fact, as James Orr observed in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: "The whole doctrine of the future judgment in the NT presupposes survival after death" (1956, 4:2502). Writing in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Joachim Guhrt stated that since "God's life never ends, i.e., that everything belonging to him can also never come to an end,...even perdition must be called *aionios*, eternal" (1978, pp. 830,833). In this same vein, Guy N. Woods commented: "Our heavenly Father is described as 'the everlasting God.' (Romans 16:26.) Hell will be the inhabitation of the wicked so long as God himself exists" (1985, 127[9]:278). George Ladd thus noted:

The adjective *aionios* does not of itself carry a qualitative significance, designating a life that is different in kind from human life. The primary meaning of the word is temporal. It is used of fire, punishment, sin, and places of abode; and these uses designate **unending duration** (1974, p. 255, emp. added).

But that is only half of the Lord's message. Orr went on to say: "Here precisely the same word is applied to the punishment of the wicked **as to the blessedness of the righteous...** Whatever else the term includes, it connotes duration" (1956, 4:2502, emp. added). When he discussed the definition and meaning of the word *aionios* in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Herman Sasse noted that when the word is used "as a term for eschatological expectation," if it conveys "eternity" for the rewards of the righteous it also must convey "the sense of 'unceasing' or 'endless'" (1964, 1:209). Therefore, "however long then the righteous will experience the blessedness of **eternal** life is just how long the wicked will suffer **everlasting** punishment..." (Denham, 1998, p. 615, emp. in orig.).

In his intriguing book, *Hell on Trial—The Case for Eternal Punishment*—Robert Peterson wrote the following under the chapter titled "The Case for Eternal Punishment": "Jesus places the fates of the wicked and the righteous side by side.... The parallelism makes the meaning unmistakable: the punishment of the ungodly and the bliss of the godly both last forever" (1995, p. 196). Gary Workman spoke to this very point when he observed:

New Testament writers used *aion* and *aionios* 141 times when speaking of eter-



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nity to convey the idea of unceasing, endless, and perpetual. If the word means “without end” when applied to the future blessedness of the saved, it must also mean “without end” when describing the future punishment of the lost (1992, 23[3]:33).

Benton elaborated:

The same word *aionios*, “eternal,” is used to describe both heaven and hell. If we take the position that hell is capable of termination then, to be consistent, we must believe that the same is true of heaven. But, from the rest of the Bible, that is plainly not the case. Heaven is **for ever**. We must stay with the plain meaning of the word “eternal.” Both heaven and hell are without end (1985, p. 55, emp. in orig.).

These writers are correct. The fact that Christ made a special point of repeating *aionios* in the same sentence requires that we “stay with the plain meaning of the word.” Hoekema therefore concluded:

The word *aionios* means without end when applied to the future blessedness of believers. It must follow, unless clear evidence is given to the contrary, that this word also means without end when used to describe the future punishment of the lost.... It follows, then, that the punishment which the lost will suffer after this life will be as endless as the future happiness of the people of God (1982, p. 270).

Those who are willing to accept Christ’s teaching on heaven should have no trouble accepting His teaching on hell. Yet some do. Their refusal to accept biblical teaching on the eternal nature of the wicked, however, is not without consequences. John Benton accurately summarized the situation.

Disregarding the doctrine of eternal damnation tends to make us doubt eternal salvation.... Though Revelation 21:22 proclaims the final fate of the wicked—existence in the lake of fire (21:8) and exclusion from the city of God (22:15)—these chapters trumpet more loudly the final destiny of the redeemed (1995, p. 217).

But does it **really** matter **what** a person believes in this regard? Wayne Jackson answered that question when he wrote: “Those who contend that the wicked will be annihilated are in error. But is the issue one of importance? Yes. **Any theory of divine retribution which undermines the full conse-**

quences of rebelling against God has to be most dangerous” (1998, 33[9]:35, emp. added).

Since both heaven and hell are described via the same, exact terminology in Scripture, once the instruction of the Lord and His inspired writers on the subject of an eternal hell has been abandoned, how long will it be before the Bible’s instruction on the eternal nature of heaven likewise is abandoned? Have we not witnessed the effects of this type of thinking before? Those who started out to compromise the first chapter of Genesis eventually compromised other important facets of biblical doctrine as well (e.g., biblical miracles, Christ’s virgin birth, the Lord’s bodily resurrection, etc.). For many, rejecting the

The good news is that no one has to go to hell. God’s promise is that the person who believes in and obeys Christ will inherit heaven, and “I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

biblical concept of the eternity of hell may well represent the first steps on the slippery slope that eventually will lead to compromise in other areas of Scripture. Surely it would be better by far to echo the heartfelt sentiments of Joshua when he told the Israelites that while they were free to believe whatever they wished, or to act in any manner they chose, “as for me and my house, we will serve Jehovah” (Joshua 24:15).

CONCLUSION

The latter part of this series has dealt at length with the concept of the souls of the wicked inhabiting an eternal hell, but has had relatively little to say about the con-

cept of the souls of the righteous inhabiting an eternal heaven. Actually, this should not be all that surprising. The very idea of hell has met with violent opposition—for good reason. No one **wants** to go to hell. Thus, the Good Book’s teaching on heaven is accepted far more readily than its teaching on hell.

The simple fact of the matter, however, is that God created man as a dichotomous being who consists of both a body and a soul. When eventually each of us has “shuffled off this **mortal** coil” (to quote Shakespeare), our **immortal** soul will return to God Who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Infidelity, of course, always has objected strenuously to the concept of “life after death.” The very idea seems preposterous to unbelievers—just as it did to King Agrippa in the first century when Paul asked the pagan monarch: “Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?” (Acts 26:28).

Indeed, why should it be difficult to believe that an omnipotent God could raise the dead? For the God Who created the Universe and everything within it in six days, and Who upholds “all things by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3), how difficult could it be to raise the dead? As Blaise Pascal, the famed French philosopher once remarked: “I see no greater difficulty in believing the resurrection of the dead than the creation of the world. Is it less easy to reproduce a human body than it was to produce it at first?” (as quoted in Otten, 1988, p. 40).

Writing in the book of Revelation, the apostle John described in unforgettable language the destiny of the righteous when this world finally comes to an end: “Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them” (21:3, RSV). Thousands of years earlier, God’s pledge to Abraham had foreshadowed just such a covenant relationship. Moses recorded: “And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you” (Genesis 17:7, NKJV). Paul spoke of the fact that “if ye are Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:29), and referred to those who serve Christ faithfully as “heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7). James rejoiced in the fact that those who were “rich

in faith” would be “heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him” (James 2:5). The writer of the book of Hebrews spoke of Christ as having become “unto all them that obey him, the author of eternal salvation” (5:9).

No doubt that is exactly what John had in mind when he went on to say in Revelation 21: “He that overcometh shall inherit these things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (vs. 7). God will be Father to the man or woman who demonstrates faith in Him, perseveres to the end, and lives in humble obedience to His divine will. Such is the promise of sonship to believers. God will welcome those who believe in and obey His Son as “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17), and will—according to His promise—bestow upon them all the riches and blessings of heaven.

In the next verse, however, John went on to paint a picture of stark contrast when he described the ultimate end of the impenitent wicked:

But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death (Revelation 21:8).

What diametric alternatives—enjoying eternal happiness as a son or daughter of God, or enduring eternal pain in “the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone”!

The good news, of course, is that no one **has** to go to hell. When Christ was ransomed on our behalf (1 Timothy 2:4), He paid a debt He did not owe, and a debt we could not pay, so that we could live forever in the presence of our Creator (Matthew 25:46). God takes no joy at the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11). Nor should we. As one writer eloquently stated it: “No one who has been snatched from the burning himself can feel anything but compassion and concern for the lost” (Woodson, 1973, p. 32).

As we begin to comprehend both the hideous nature of our sin, and the alienation from God resulting from it, we not only should exhibit a fervent desire to save ourselves “from this crooked generation” (Acts 2:40), but we also should feel just as passionate about warning the wicked of their impending doom (Ezekiel 3:17-19).

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EDITOR’S NOTE: I want to thank each of our readers for your patience in enduring this lengthy, 5-part series—the first ever of its kind to run in *R&R*. We have received more compliments regarding these particular articles than anything else we have ever published, and I am extremely grateful. Look for our new book on this subject soon!!

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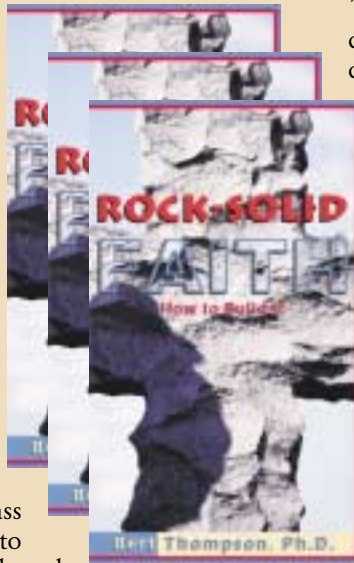
NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

ANNOUNCING: THE NEW “ROCK-SOLID FAITH: HOW TO BUILD IT” VIDEO SERIES

In my April “Note from the Editor,” I announced the availability of our new book, *Rock-Solid Faith: How to Build It*, which replaces our 1992 volume, *A Study Course in Christian Evidences*. Several years ago (not long after the *Study Course* was released), I prepared a 13-lesson video lecture series to accompany the book chapter by chapter. The book/video combination quickly became our most popular product.

In my “Note from the Editor” this month, I am happy to announce the availability of our brand new 13-lesson video lecture series, *Rock-Solid Faith: How to Build It*, which follows chapter by chapter our book by that same title (exactly as our earlier videos did with the *Study Course* book). In early June, I spent a week at the studios of World Video Bible School (WVBS) near Austin, Texas, filming the 13-lesson video lecture series. It now is available for purchase from our offices.

Each lecture in the series is approximately 38 minutes long, so that the presentations may be used in Bible school classroom settings (which, from reports we have received through the years regarding the *Study Course* video series, is one of the most popular venues for viewing the lectures). Since each video lecture uses almost a complete 45-minute class session, many Bible class teachers choose to show the video lesson to the students one week, and then follow that lesson the next week with a study of the written material from the book. This works quite well, especially in light of the fact that there simply is no way to cover in the 38-minute videos every single aspect examined in each chapter of the book. The video lectures are in-depth presentations (as opposed to being just a cursory treatment), but, admittedly, the material in the book is much more extensive (and contains additional reference material and documentation that was inappropriate for inclusion in oral presentations).



I think you will be **very** pleased with both the content and the quality of the new video series. While you, as the viewer, will have to judge the content, I certainly can attest to the quality. Each tape in the series is top-notch, due the fact that the good folks at WVBS not only have the latest in high-tech video equipment (including state-of-the-art character generation computers), but also are consummate professionals as well (with a touch of perfectionism thrown in for good measure).

There are five tapes in the lecture series. They come in sturdy, protective plastic cases with full-color covers that match the front cover of the *Rock-Solid Faith* book they are intended to accompany. The tapes are sold only in sets, which sell for \$85 (\$5 s/h). The books are \$10 each (\$1.50 s/h for first copy; 50¢ s/h for each additional copy, with a 15% discount offered only on the book when you order 10 or more copies). Volume two of the new *Rock-Solid Faith* trilogy (*How to Sustain It*) is being typeset now, and is due to be released later this year. Each book in the trilogy will have its own companion video series. If you would like to order the videos or the book by credit card (or via invoicing to a church), call us toll free at 800/234-8558. Your satisfaction—as with each of our products and services—always is 100% guaranteed.

— Bert Thompson

[PS: While I am on the subject, I would like to recommend to you the non-profit work of World Video Bible School. WVBS produces professionally prepared videos on every book of the Bible, and a host of related subjects (counseling, etc.). The instructors are sound, well-qualified Christians. Call WVBS for their new catalog (512/398-5211), or write them at: 130 Lantana Lane, Maxwell, Texas, 78656-9797. You’ll be glad you did!]