

HELL

A great many professing Christians in the contemporary church do not believe in the absolute reality of hell as a literal place of eternal punishment for the ungodly. Many believe that hell simply refers to the grave. Others believe that hell is merely symbolic because all men will ultimately be saved; that Christ died to save all men. This in essence is true – Christ’s death was sufficient for all men, but efficient only for those who believe on Him (CP 1Jn 2:2 with Jn 3:16-18, 36). Still others believe that the fire of hell causes extinction of being; that there is no more consciousness. This is called the doctrine of complete annihilation, or conditional immortality. Some who espouse this view claim that hell, as a place of punishment, will be this earth turned into a lake of fire on judgement day, and that the fire will go out after it has accomplished its work of destruction. They use Psa 11:6, Isa 34:8-9, 47:13-14, Jer 17:27 and Mal 4:1-3 from the Old Testament, and 2Pe 3:7 from the New Testament to support their claim. Let us see what these scriptures really teach (CP Psa 11:6; Mal 4:1-3). These are two end-time prophecies concerning the destruction of the ungodly at Armageddon. “*The day cometh*” in Mal 4:1, and “*The day that I shall do this*” in V3, refers to Armageddon and Christ’s second coming. “... and ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet” refers to the wicked being trodden under the feet of the righteous at Armageddon (CP Eze 38:18-23; 39:1-16) these prophecies will all be fulfilled when the wicked are cast into the lake of fire, which is the ultimate destiny of all the ungodly throughout history (CP Rev 20:11-15).

Now let us look at Isa 34:8-9 and 2Pe 3:7 which are also used to support each other in that teaching (CP Isa 34:8-9; 2 Pe3:7). Isa 34:8-9 is a prophecy against the nations that will be mobilized against Christ at Armageddon. They will be destroyed by Christ and their lands made desolate, never to be inhabited again by humans (CP V1-17). 2Pe 3:7 underlines the absolute certainty of a future judgement on heaven and earth. This judgement will be contemporaneous with the great white throne judgement of Rev 20: 11-15, “...against the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men” (CP 2Pe 3:10-12). Heaven will pass away, the elements will melt with fervent heat, and earth and the works it contains will be burned up – dissolved (KJV). *Dissolve* means loose, loosen, unbind that which is bound, to dissolve something coherent into parts, to destroy. In the context of 2Pe 3:7, 10-12, it means that heaven and earth will be loosed from their present corrupt state and made new as to character (CP Isa 65:17; 66:22; He 1:10-12, 12:27-28; 2Pe 3:13 with Rev 20:11; 21:1). *New* in Isa 65:17, 66:22; 2Pe 3:13 and Rev 21:1, used to describe heaven and earth, means new in freshness and character, not in existence (CP 2 Cor 5:17; Rev 21:5). Heaven and earth as we know them will be renewed by fire, not destroyed.

Now let us see what Isa 47:13-14 and Jer 17:27 teach (CP Isa 47:13-14). This is a prophecy concerning the destruction that would soon come

upon the Babylonians because they no longer trusted in God to guide them, but in astrologers and stargazers, and prognosticators – those who predict the future by astrology. The fire of hell is not the subject here, but the impending destruction of Babylon (CP V1-15). Jer 17:27 is a prophecy over Jerusalem (CP Jer 17:27). Here God threatens to destroy Jerusalem if the people keep disobeying him. The fire of hell is not in view here either, but the destruction of Jerusalem (CP 2Ki 25:8-9).

Clearly, there is no suggestion whatever in any of the foregoing scriptures which validates their use to teach that hell, as a place of punishment, will be this earth turned into a lake of fire, which will go out after it has accomplished its work of destruction. Throughout scripture hell is defined as a literal place of everlasting punishment for all who die in sin (CP De 32:22; Psa 9:17; 55:15; Pr 15:11, 24; 23:13-14; Isa 5:14; 14:12-15; 33:14; 66:22-24; Dan 7:9-11; 12:2; Mt 13:24-30, 36-42, 47-50; 25:41-46; Mk 9:43-48; Lu 16:19-31; Rev 14:9-11; 21:8). There can be no confusion as to what the plain teaching is in those scriptures: punishment in hell is unceasing throughout eternity. The word *everlasting* in those scriptures describes something that never ceases; that continues forever; that is perpetual, without end. While some of the terms used may be symbolic and descriptive, they clearly attest to the absolute reality of hell as a place of ongoing punishment for the wicked when they die. Isa 66:22-24 is irrefutable proof of the absolute reality of hell as a place of eternal punishment for the ungodly. The corpses of those being tormented will be a vivid reminder throughout eternity to all the saved of the consequences of dying in sin. Jesus also teaches this when He warns in Mk 9:43-48 that it is better to enter into eternal life with one hand, one foot, one eye than to be cast into the “*fire that shall never be quenched. Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched*”. This signifies that the punishment of the ungodly in hell is eternal. “... where their worm dieth not” refers to the real consciousness of those being punished. *Worm* is used in scripture for men (CP Job 25:6); Messiah (CP Psa 22:6); Israel called Jacob (CP Isa 41:14), and sinners in hell (CP Isa 66:22-24). *Worm* is the living, conscious, never dying part of the human being that will feel the torments of hell throughout eternity (CP Mt 8:11-12; 13:41-42, 47-50; 22:11-13; 24:48-51; 25:28-30; 41-46; Rev 14:9-11; 20:10-15). The living, conscious, never dying part of man is the soul – his spiritual and immortal nature (CP Mt 10:28; 16:26; Mk 8:36-37; Lu 12:4-5; 12:16-21; He 10:39; Jas 1:21; 5:20; 1Pe 1:9; 2:11; 4:19).

Jesus also teaches in the Parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Lu 16:19-31, that heaven and hell are absolute realities, and that personality – feeling, knowing, seeing, reasoning and remembering – continues throughout eternity, whether it is in heaven or hell. This plainly also refutes the teaching that hell merely causes extinction of being; that there is no more consciousness (CP Psa 116:3). It is not known who wrote this Psalm, but it has been recorded in scripture by the Holy Spirit for believers to use to teach others that hell is a literal place of everlasting punishment for the ungodly, and that those being tormented are fully

conscious of what is happening to them. Jonah knew what was happening to him when he died in the belly of the great fish, and his soul went to hell (CP Jon 1:17-2:10). In 2:1 Jonah prayed from hell – Sheol – where his soul went between the time he died, and when he was vomited up (CP 2:2-5). That Jonah died and his soul went to hell is proved by V6-7 (CP 2:6-7). *The earth with her bars about me forever* (KJV) refers to Sheol, where Jonah’s soul was. Jonah’s soul was saved from hell, and his body from corruption through being vomited up on the shore (Jonah’s experience here was an Old Testament type of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus (CP Mt 12:38-40). Jonah had to die as the Old Testament type of Jesus, the New Testament antitype, died). As well as being fire, hell is also alluded to in the New Testament as exclusion from the kingdom of heaven (CP Mt 7:21-23); *outer darkness* (CP Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30), *everlasting punishment* (CP Mt 25:46); *eternal damnation* (CP Mk 3:29); *the wrath of God* (CP Ro 2:4-5); *destruction* (CP Php 3:18-19; 2Th 1:7-9); *chains of darkness* (CP 2Pe 2:4; Jude 6); *mist of darkness* (CP 2Pe 2:17); *blackness of darkness* (CP Jude 13); *second death* (CP Rev 2:11; 21:8). We also see in scriptures that hell is both a Judgement of punishment upon sinners and a place in which the punishment occurs (CP De 32:22; Psa 9:17; 55:15; Pr 15:11, 24; 23:13-14; Isa 5:14; 14:12-15; 66:24; Dan 7:9-11; Mt 5:22, 29-30; 7:19; 8:12; 10:28; 13:36-42, 47-50; 18:8-9; 23:33; 25:28-30, 41-46; Mk 3:29; 9:43-48; Lu 10:15; 12:4-5; 16:19-31; Jn 15:5-6; Ro 2:4-5; Php 3:18-19; 2Th 1:7-9; He 10:39; Jas 3:6; 2Pe 2:4, 17; Jude 6:13, 21-23; Rev 2:11; 14:9-11; 21:8).

In the Old Testament (KJV), *hell* is translated from the Hebrew word **Sheol**, which means the world of the dead, the unseen world of departed spirits. It represents the place of future punishment for the wicked (CP De 32:22; Psa 9:17; 30:3; 89:48; Pr 9:13-18; 23:13-14; Isa 38:18; Eze 32:24-27). The corresponding New Testament word for Sheol is **Hades**, which means the region of the departed spirits of the lost (CP Lu 10:15; 16:19-31). Hell is also derived from the Greek word **Geenna** – transliterated as **Gehenna**, which means a place or state of the lost and condemned; the final destiny of the wicked (CP Mt 25:41-46). Clearly, throughout scripture hell is defined as a literal place of never ending torment for the wicked, although neither hell nor Hades, nor Sheol, constitute the eternal state of sinners. Their final destiny is the lake of fire at the great white throne judgement, signifying the end of Christ’s thousand years reign. The great white throne judgement is when all the ungodly, from the beginning of time to the last ones killed by fire from

God at the end of the thousand years in the last great rebellion led by Satan, are cast into the lake of fire. Satan, together with all his angels, Antichrist, and the false prophet, and all whose names are not in the book of life, will be cast into the lake of fire to be tormented day and night forever (CP Rev 14:9-11; 19:20; 20:7-15; 21:7-8).

Although hell, as the present abode of the wicked, may not be eternal, its torment is. The lake of fire, as a place of punishment for the wicked is absolute, fixed, eternal, exactly as Isaiah prophesied in the Old Testament. Let us look at that prophecy again (CP Isa 66:22-24). It is plainly evident here that there is conscious survival after death, whether it be in heaven or hell. The soul lives forever. As we noted earlier, it is man’s spiritual and immortal nature, and is indestructible. It cannot be made extinct. This is also explicit in Jesus’ parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Lu 16:19-31. Let us read the parable again (CP Lu 16:19-31). This clearly teaches conscious survival after death. V22 teaches that the rich man died, and was buried. His body was in the grave, but his soul went to hell – here, Hades – where he suffered great torment “... *and being in torments in Hades ... for I am tormented in these flames*” (CP V22-24). It does not matter if it is Sheol, Hades, Hell or the lake of fire, it is a place of conscious suffering for sinners.

Conscious survival after death is also taught many times in scripture from a heavenly perspective (CP Lu 20:38; 23:42-43; Jn 11:25-26; Ac 7:59-60; 2Cor 5:1-9; Eph 3:15; Php 1:21-24; He 12:22-23; Rev 6:9-11). Scriptures also teach that just as there are rewards in heaven for the righteous (CP 1Cor 3:13-15), so too, there are degrees of punishment in hell for the wicked (CP Lu 12:41-48). This is called the parable of the unfaithful servant. Its teaching is explicit: those who profess to love God but are indifferent and careless about the things of God, will forfeit their place in his eternal kingdom. They will be eternally damned along with unbelievers, but their torment in hell will be worse than those who never professed to love God (CP Lu 12:47-48 with Mt 10:14-15; 23:14; Lu 10:10-16; He 10:28-29; Jas 3:1).

In light of what this study teaches, it needs to be said in closing here, that Christians who truly believe that those who die in sin will suffer eternal torment in hell, should never cease to solemnly warn them of the wrath to come. It is incumbent upon us to do so, and it will be to our peril if we do not (CP Mt 28:18-20 with Eze 3:17-21).