

## **The Eternal Punishment of the Wicked; the Destiny of the Damned**

Matt 25:46 (reading: .31-46)

Today I'll be talking about a very unpleasant topic. The Bible contains some topics that are rather distasteful yet true. If you or I were writing the Bible, we probably would not include this topic. We would probably rather not talk about this topic. Most people try to avoid this topic.

But this topic is biblical. We find this topic from the beginning to the end of the Bible. The prophets talked about it in the OT, and Jesus and the apostles talk about it in the NT. At the end of the book of Revelation, we find this topic. It may not be a pleasant topic, but it is thoroughly biblical.

The topic, of course, is the eternal punishment of the wicked; my subject is the destiny of the damned. The Bible teaches that the unsaved will experience the just punishment for their sins. They will be judged and held liable for their deeds. Since their sins are crimes against an eternal and infinite God, their sins deserve eternal punishment. God has a place specifically designed as the destiny of the damned.

This is a very sobering, somber subject. The damnation of hell is a grim prospect. The OT clearly affirms that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23, 32) and neither should we. God sent his Son into the world to save the world, not to condemn it. And yet we know that many—perhaps the majority of people—will be condemned because of their sin and unbelief.

We dare not take a flippant or casual attitude toward this topic. We should never gloat over the fact that the lost will suffer eternal torment. Nor should we compromise and hope that perhaps the unsaved will somehow escape eternal punishment.<sup>1</sup> We must take a biblical position on this topic.

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<sup>1</sup>The Master's Seminary, *Master's Seminary Journal Volume 9* (Master's Seminary, 1998; 2002), 9:131.

We should also recognize that belief in the eternal, conscious torment of the lost in hell has been the almost unbroken testimony of the church.<sup>2</sup> For nearly 2000 years of church history, mainstream Christianity has taught this doctrine.

Denial of this teaching is a hallmark of the cults and of unorthodoxy—JWs, Mormons and others deny the eternal punishment of the wicked. Denying this biblical doctrine puts you outside the borders of orthodox Christianity.

The generally accepted, historic position of the church has been that after the final resurrection and judgment, mankind will either live blessedly in the presence of God or live in conscious torment in the fires of hell separated from the presence of God forever.<sup>3</sup> This is what the Bible teaches, what the church has upheld historically, and what we must affirm, no matter how we feel about it. We cannot ignore the plain meaning of the biblical text.

Let's consider several truths about the eternal punishment of the wicked, the destiny of the damned:

I. The destiny of the damned is a biblical doctrine.

This idea comes straight from the Bible. These words are Bible words. We don't often use them in polite conversation, but they are biblical.

A. The English word "hell" is an Anglo-Saxon term that originally referred to the underworld in Norse mythology. English speakers started using that word to describe the destiny of the damned.

From my count, the word "hell" is used 54 times in the KJV, so it's thoroughly biblical.

B. To be "damned" refers to going to hell. The damned are on their way to hell. Damnation is the condition of eternal condemnation. The unsaved are damned; they will experience everlasting punishment.

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<sup>2</sup>The Master's Seminary, *Master's Seminary Journal Volume 9* (Master's Seminary, 1998; 2002), 9:131.

<sup>3</sup>The Master's Seminary, *Master's Seminary Journal Volume 9* (Master's Seminary, 1998; 2002), 9:135.

C. The Bible uses several terms in the original language to describe the eternal punishment of the wicked.

1. In the OT, the Hebrew word “sheol” is often rendered as “hell.”

a) The word can simply refer to death, the place of the dead, or the grave. In some cases, it’s a neutral term that does not refer to one’s eternal spiritual destiny.

b) The OT often uses “sheol” to describe a place of punishment for the wicked.

*Isaiah 14:11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, ... The maggot is spread under you, And worms cover you.’*

c) Sometimes it’s translated as “the pit” (Num 16:30). The OT uses the terms “lowest hell/sheol” to refer to hell.

*Ps 86:13 For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell.*

d) The OT prophets frequently speak of the judgment of the wicked.

*Dan 12:2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake ... to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Daniel does not use the word “sheol” there, but he speaks of the eternal shame and contempt of the wicked.

*Isa 66:4 And they shall go forth and look Upon the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, And their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.*

2. The KJV often uses the word “hell” to translate the Greek word “hades.”

Like “sheol,” “hades” can refer simply to death or the grave. But the word also seems to describe the eternal punishment of the wicked.

*Matthew 11:23 And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; ...*

3. The word most commonly used in the original language that refers to the destiny of the damned is “Gehenna.” This word is usually translated as “hell” and it refers to a place of eternal punishment.
  - a) Gehenna was a valley near Jerusalem where garbage was dumped and burned in Jesus’ day. Idolaters had formerly burned their children as sacrifices to the pagan gods in that valley. The name became the equivalent to hell.<sup>4</sup>
  - b) Jesus used the image of Gehenna eleven times to portray the misery of eternal punishment (Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5).
    - (1) In two instances, He refers to “Gehenna of fire.”

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<sup>4</sup>The Master's Seminary, *Master's Seminary Journal Volume 9* (Master's Seminary, 1998; 2002), 9:159.

- (2) Jesus speaks about hell fairly frequently. In the passage we read earlier, we find that those who reject Jesus will experience the fire prepared for the devil (Mt 25:41).

Mt 23:33 *Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the damnation (κρίσις) of hell (γεεννης)?*

- (3) In hell, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 13:50). So Gehenna is a place of torment for the wicked.

- c) Another word that seems to describe the destiny of the damned is “tartaros,” apparently a place in the underworld, a place even lower than “hades.” The verb form of the word is translated as “cast down to hell” in 2 Pet 2:4. Tartarus seems to be a place of eternal punishment.

- d) And there is another word—“abyss” (Luke 8:31—the legion of demons begged not to be thrown into the abyss).

4. The Bible contains words and concepts that lead us to believe that the destiny of the damned is eternal punishment. God will judge the wicked and cast them into the fires of hell.

II. The destiny of the damned is a place of punishment and torment.

- A. We’re talking about the eternal *punishment* of the wicked. That’s exactly what they will experience: punishment for their sins.

- B. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16), Jesus tells us that the rich man died and was buried, “And in hell (Ἅδης) he lift up his eyes, *being in torments,...*” (.23). He asked for Lazarus to bring him a drop of water “*for I am tormented in this flame*” (.24).
- C. Fire is the common theme or image that describes hell. Jesus mentioned the fires of hell at least 13 times in the Gospels.
- D. Paul mentions it as well.

Rom 2:8-9 ... *unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, 9 Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile;*

1 Thess 1:8-9 *In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power*

1. “vengeance” (ἐκδίκησις) refers to righteous retribution; a fair reward for what the wicked deserve.
  2. What is the just/fair retribution for the wicked? “everlasting destruction” – i.e., eternal ruin and corruption.
  3. This will occur “from the presence of the Lord...” The picture here is of rejection, being shut out from all that is good. The wicked are excluded from the glory of heaven and from the presence of God. The wicked are banished to utter ruin, barred from entrance into heaven.
- E. This is eternal punishment, not annihilation.

Some people who don't like the idea of eternal punishment suggest that the wicked will eventually be consumed; they will cease existing; they will be annihilated after they have served their time.

However, in the biblical descriptions we have, the fire is not quenched and the worm does not die (cf. Isa 66:24; Mt 25:46; Mk 9:48).

The Bible never says that the wicked are blotted out, extinguished, cease to exist, or are annihilated. There are no biblical statements showing the extinguishing/annihilation of the wicked. The punishment of the wicked extends forever, even after the creation of the new heavens and the new earth.

F. Why are the wicked being tormented and punished?

1. Because they are drinking the cup of God's wrath against their sin. They are enduring the just recompense for deeds done and decisions made during their earthly lives.
2. This is retributive justice. The wicked deserve what they get—their condemnation is just/righteous. They are paying the penalty or wages for their sins. Sin has consequences. Sin is by nature deserving of punishment/penalty.

*Ps 28:4 Give them according to their deeds, and according to the wickedness of their endeavours: give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert.*

*Eccl 12:14 For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether [it be] good, or whether [it be] evil.*

*Jer 17:10 I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.*

*Rom 2:6 [God] will render to every man according to his deeds:*

*Rev 20:12-13 ... the dead were judged... according to their works*

God is just; he will give unrepentant sinners what they deserve.

**Trans:** Hell is a place of punishment and torment where the wicked receive the just deserts for what they have done.

III. The destiny of the damned is eternal.

- A. The word “eternal” in the Bible generally means “forever,” an endless, unlimited time.

*Mt 25:46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

- B. Jesus uses the same word (αἰώνιον) to describe both “punishment” and “life.” The punishment for sin is just as long as the life that God gives the believer. Both are eternal.<sup>5</sup> Just as eternal life never ends, so the eternal punishment of the wicked never ends.

*Mark 9:43f Jesus repeatedly mentions hell as a place “Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.”*

*Jude 13 ... [some will experience] the blackness of darkness forever.*

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<sup>5</sup>Dallas Theological Seminary, *Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 129* (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1972; 2002).



Rev 14:11 *And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.*

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 forever and ever.*

Death and hell are cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14).

There is no indication in the Bible that those in hell ever emerge from it. The punishment of hell never stops; it's eternal.

C. Several questions naturally arise in this discussion:

1. What about purgatory? That idea is not biblical.
2. Will people get a second chance? Heb 9:27 "once to die..." The rich man was not offered a second chance.
3. Why must hell be eternal? Why can't it be temporary?
  - a) Because sin is a crime against an infinite, eternal God. Eternal punishment fits the crime.
  - b) There is no indication that the wicked actually cease from sinning, even in hell. The wicked do not repent; they keep on sinning and keep on deserving to be punished.
4. Will there be degrees of suffering in hell? Yes, people are not equally wicked, and the punishment they deserve varies from person to person.

Jesus affirms that some will “receive greater damnation” than others (Luke 20:46-47). He referred to those who would receive greater or fewer stripes, depending on how much they knew (Luke 12:47-48). The punishment will always fit the crime. No one will be unjustly punished. The wicked will get what they deserve, no more and no less.

**Trans:** The punishment of the wicked will be eternal.

IV. The destiny of the damned pertains to the unrepentant wicked.

A. Texts:

*Mt 7:23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

*1Co 6:9-10 ... the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor covetous, nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor abusive people, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.*

*Gal 5:19f The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

God is willing to forgive any of these sins if a person will repent and believe in Jesus. But without repentance, God will hold all these sins against the sinner.

B. What makes a person wicked?

1. Is it only the big sins (murder, idolatry, adultery) that cause a person to be wicked?
2. No, James tells us that if we violate one part of the law, we are law-breakers. Sin is the breaking of the law.

3. Rom 3:23 “All have sinned...”
  4. Everyone deserves the punishment of hell. We’re all wicked.
- C. Ultimately, only one sin will send you to hell—the sin of unrepentant unbelief; the sin of rejecting Jesus Christ. You can be perfect in every other respect, but if you reject Jesus your savior, you’ll go to hell.
- D. On the other hand, you could be guilty of all the sins we just listed, but if you repent and turn to Christ, you will be saved. “Such were some of you...” (1 Cor 6:11).

**Trans:** So hell is the destination of unrepentant unbelievers. The only way to escape that destiny is to trust in Christ.

- V. The final destiny of the damned is called the “second death” and the “lake of fire.

*Re 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

The very last part of the Bible affirms the destiny of the damned will be the fires of eternal hell.

Why do we have to talk about this unpleasant, rather offensive, grim topic?

**Quote Pink:** What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the alarming danger in which sinners are—the indescribably awful doom which awaits them, the fact that if they follow only a little further their present course they shall most certainly suffer the due reward of their iniquities. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the nature of that punishment which awaits the lost—the awfulness of it, the hopelessness of it, the unendurableness of it, the endlessness of it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Eternal Punishment*, 2.

Mt 23:33 *Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?*

I'll tell you how to escape—repent and believe the Gospel.

Quote Jesus: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luk 13:3, 5).

If you are saved, you should rejoice that you are not going to hell; you have no fear of eternal punishment. We have no fear of death, the grave, or the fires of hell. Once you are saved, you have no more worries about any of that.

If you are unsaved, you should have a healthy fear of eternal punishment. It's a reasonable motivation for salvation.

For those who are saved, the reality of hell should motivate us to tell others how to avoid going there. The rich man in hell wanted to warn his brothers so they would not go to hell. That's what we need to do as well—warn people to avoid the destiny of the damned.