

# Present Truth

2 Peter 1:12

August, 1998

Dear Readers,

*“Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.”* (2 Thessalonians 1:2, 3) Last month we addressed an interesting subject concerning the condition of the dead. This month we will look a little more in depth at that subject and examine what the Bible says about the final reward of the wicked and the righteous. Each of us will one day give an account of ourselves in the judgment. *“For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. ... Every one of us shall give account of himself to God.”* (Romans 14:10, 12) I pray that each of us will be ready to meet our Lord on that day. *“Prepare to meet thy God.”* (Amos 4:12)

**Arizona Campmeeting Notice:** “The Church at Wilhoit” is having a campmeeting September 9-13 in Wilhoit, Arizona (about 1½ hours Northwest of Phoenix). Campmeetings are one the most enjoyable times of the year so we hope you will plan on being there. We are certain you will gain a rich blessing by attending with your family. The first meeting will be September 9<sup>th</sup> at 7 p.m. with the remaining meetings to begin at 10 a.m. on the 10<sup>th</sup>, and will continue until noon Sunday, on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September. Doug Goslin and Lynnford Beachy will be among the speakers at this campmeeting. Call (520) 442- 9868 and ask for Kim for more detailed information. I’ll see you at campmeeting!

## The Reward of the Wicked

There are many ideas present within the numerous churches concerning the state, or the condition, of the dead. There are also many ideas regarding the final reward of the wicked. This study will examine what the Bible says on this subject so we will have a more exalted view of our loving God who created us. Let’s first examine where man came from.

*“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”* (Genesis 1:26) The Father said to His Son, *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”* Adam was created in God’s image and His likeness.

This does not mean that Adam was exactly like God in every respect. We can be sure that in at least one way Adam was different from God, for God said, *“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat*

*of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”* (Genesis 2:17)

Adam was subject to the possibility of dying. God could not die under any circumstance. *“Which in His times He [Christ] shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate [the Father], the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality [cannot die], dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.”* (1 Timothy 6:15, 16)

God, the Father, is the only being in the universe who could never have died under any circumstance. Adam could die for he was not immortal. This fact, however, was the point on which Satan first attacked when he tempted Eve in the garden. *“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die.”* (Genesis 3:4) This statement was in direct contradiction to the word of God, for He said, *“in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”* The day that Adam and Eve ate of the fruit, the sentence was there, *“thou shalt surely die.”* It was now inevitable, they must die.

As we look at the story of Adam and Eve a little deeper, we can see that Satan had an underlying motive

in contradicting the word of God. Let's first look at a little history regarding Satan. We will go back to the time when his name was Lucifer.

## *The history of Satan*

Lucifer was created perfect. *"Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee."* (Ezekiel 28:15) Lucifer means "Light Bearer," and was the name of Satan before he fell. *"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!"* (Isaiah 14:12) Lucifer was perfect when God created him. He loved God with all his heart, all his soul and all his mind. However, there came a time when "iniquity was found" in him. What was this iniquity?

Concerning Lucifer, God said, *"Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness."* (Ezekiel 28:17) Lucifer became proud, because of how beautiful and good he thought he was. This pride corrupted his wisdom. What wisdom was corrupted? *"We love him, because he first loved us."* (1 John 4:19) Lucifer began to doubt God's love, he began to think that God was being unfair to him by not exalting him to a higher position than he had. Lucifer wanted to be like the Most High. *"I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."* (Isaiah 14:14) It was this abnormal ambition that led him to spread seeds of doubt among the faithful angels. Lucifer succeeded in getting one third of the angelic host to accompany him in his rebellion. *"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: ... And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."* (Revelation 12:4, 7-9)

It was Lucifer's lie from the beginning that God was not as loving and caring as He made himself out to be. Lucifer thought that he could do a better job than God. At one time Lucifer believed that God was loving, kind, unselfish and just. While in this condition, Lucifer was perfect. But something happened. Lucifer began to doubt God's love. Lucifer believed his own lie. It was this belief that began the terrible road to destruction. This caused him to sin against God and the heavenly host.

Sin began with a disbelief in God's love, and Satan knew that if he could get others to disbelieve God's love, they would join him in his rebellion.

## *Eve in the garden of Eden*

This is where we pick up the story in Genesis 3. *"Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."* (Genesis 3:1-5)

Satan planted a seed of doubt in Eve's mind. She began to wonder why God had withheld the fruit of that tree from her. She had understood that it was for her own benefit that God had withheld the fruit from her, but now she began to be unsure. Gazing at the fruit, Eve thought something like this, "Could it be that God is withholding this fruit from me because He does not want me to become wise, and be elevated to a higher level."

*"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat."* (Genesis 3:6) Satan succeeded in getting Eve to join him in his rebellion against God. What was it that caused Eve's fall? How could Satan convince a perfect, sinless being to openly rebel against God?

Up until that time, Eve was convinced that God loved her very much. God had done many wonderful things for her. He always provided her needs, and everything was wonderful in that beautiful garden. At Satan's instigation, Eve began to wonder if God really did love her. She wondered if there was something good that God was withholding from her. Soon she believed Satan's lie, and doubted God's love. She ate of the fruit, and we all know the rest of the story.

It was a disbelief in God's love that started Satan on his downward path. It was a disbelief in God's love that convinced Eve to sin. It is a disbelief in God's love that keeps us in sin. It is only through a revelation of God's infinite love that we can be brought back to God in a loving relationship surpassing any we have yet had.

The world lay darkness as to the immense love that God has for them for many years. It was to make clear God's love, and redeem His children, that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world. Jesus came to declare the wonderful character of love that God has for each one of us.

It has been Satan's goal to deceive men as to the true character of God. Satan would have us believe that God

is not as loving as He claims to be. Satan knows that if he can convince us on this issue, we will never completely surrender our lives to Him enough to have a hatred for sin so great as to cause us to stop sinning. It is only through a true picture of God's love that we can ever love Him enough to fulfill the commandment that Jesus called "the first and great commandment." "*Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.*" (Matthew 22:37, 38)

### **Satan's promise of eternal life**

Satan persuaded Eve to believe that she could disobey God's commands and still live forever. Were Satan's words true?

Let's let the Bible answer this question. "*And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.*" (Genesis 3:22-24)

God loved Adam and Eve very much, and realized that it was for their own good that they be prohibited from eating of the tree of life and living forever in a sinful condition.

Did Adam or Eve ever eat of the tree of life after they had disobeyed God? No! Will Adam, or any transgressor live on and on forever and ever? Not unless they are forgiven, turn from their wicked ways and live.

Man is not immortal in any way. Man's life is dependent upon whether he eats of the tree of life or not. No man has ever eaten of the tree of life since Adam's fall (possibly with the exception of those whom the Bible reveals have been raised from the dead, like Moses, or those who have been taken to heaven without seeing death, like Enoch and Elijah). Therefore man, in his fallen condition, does not have eternal life. Our eternal life depends upon whether or not we eat of the tree of life.

"*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.*" (Revelation 2:7) "***Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.***" (Revelation 22:14)

Surely these verses do not include the unrepentant, wicked ones who have rejected God's free gift of salva-

tion. Only those who do His commandments and overcome will eat of the tree of life. Only those will live forever, for we have seen that eternal life depends upon whether or not a man eats of the tree of life. Certainly the wicked will not ever get a chance to eat of the tree of life, therefore they will not live forever.

### **What is the reward of the wicked?**

"*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" (John 3:16) God loves us so much that He willingly gave up something for us. What did He give up? If He had merely given up an ox or a goat as a sacrifice for us, we would not think God is very loving or kind. Our perception of God's love for us depends upon the value of the gift which He gave up for us.

John 3:16 is very specific as to what God gave up. God gave up His Son. Not just any son, but His only-begotten Son. Not a son by creation as were the angels, nor a son by adoption, as are redeemed mankind, but a Son begotten in the express image of His Father's person. God loves us so much that He was willing to give up everything for us, and this was proven by the fact that He gave up that which was most dear to Him, His only-begotten Son. "*He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*" (Romans 8:32)

This gift was given to redeem mankind, yet there are many who will not accept this free gift as their own. This is very sad, since this verse makes it clear that those who do not "*believe in Him*" will lose out on everlasting life. Those who do not have everlasting life will perish. The opposite of everlasting life is everlasting death.

"***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.***" (Psalm 37:20) The Bible tells us that the wicked shall consume away into smoke. God does not have any pleasure in seeing those whom He loves perish. "*Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?*" (Ezekiel 33:11) My friend, if you have not yet given your life to the Lord, please, before it is too late, ask Jesus to come into your heart.

"*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. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of*

*the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts.*" (Malachi 4:1-3)

There will be a day when the wicked shall be burnt up, and they will become ashes. "**For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be:** yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be." (Psalm 37:10)

*"That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; Yet he shall perish for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he? He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night. The eye also which saw him shall see him no more; neither shall his place any more behold him."* (Job 20:5-9) The wicked shall perish forever, but the righteous will live forever.

*"Let the sinners be consumed out of the earth, and let the wicked be no more. Bless thou the LORD, O my soul. Praise ye the LORD."* (Psalm 104:35) There will be a time when the wicked will not be—anywhere. They will all be destroyed, and they will be as though they had not been. "*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.*" (Obadiah 16) This is the most merciful thing a loving God could do for those who rebel against Him and His government.

The very words of Christ speak this same truth. "*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 10:28) Christ says that hell (Greek: Gehenna) will destroy both soul and body. There will not be soul or body that remains burning forever and ever.

*"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die."* (Ezekiel 18:4) This is not talking about the first death that you and I are most acquainted with, but of the second death, spoken of in Revelation 20.

### *How complete will the destruction of the wicked be?*

We need only to look at the example the Bible has given us. "*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.*" (Jude 7)

If we want to know what the vengeance of eternal fire is, then all we must do is look at Sodom and Gomorrha. These cities were destroyed with fire out of heaven. Are they still burning? No! Sodom and Gomorrha are examples given us for the vengeance of eternal fire.

*"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."* (2 Peter 2:6) Sodom and Gomorrha were turned into ashes. This, as we have already seen, is what the Bible says will become of the wicked.

Satan, the leader of the wicked, will also be turned into ashes. We read about this in Ezekiel 28.

*"Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth [Lucifer]; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee.*

*"By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.*

*"Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee. All they that know thee among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more."* (Ezekiel 28:13-19)

Surely if hell were to last forever and ever, Satan would be there as well, but here we see that Satan will be destroyed. God says He will burn Satan up and turn him into ashes; never shall he be anymore. Satan will be destroyed along with all those who have rejected God's salvation. Never shall they be anymore. They shall be as though they had not been.

*"And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in*

*their mouth.*” (Zechariah 14:12) Here is the sad reward of the wicked: the Lord will rain fire upon them, and they shall be burned up.

“Behold, they shall be as stubble; **the fire shall burn them**; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: **there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.**” (Isaiah 47:14) The fire shall burn the wicked; they shall not be able to deliver themselves from the power of the flame. And when it is all over, there shall not even be a coal to warm at or a fire to sit by, because they will be turned into ashes and burned up completely.

“And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and **they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed**<sup>3615</sup> [to come to an end, vanish, perish, be destroyed].” (Isaiah 1:28) They that forsake the LORD shall come to an end. They shall vanish; they shall be utterly destroyed.

“And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall **pine away**<sup>4743</sup> [rot away, melt, vanish, dissolve] for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another.” (Ezekiel 24:23) The wicked will melt or dissolve away for their iniquities.

“In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, **and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake**, saith the LORD.” (Jeremiah 51:39) The wicked will sleep a perpetual sleep and shall not awake. Those who die the second death will never awake again for they shall be as though they had not been.

“The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, **and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.**” (2 Peter 2:9) The Lord is reserving the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. When are the wicked going to be punished? Are they burning in hell right now? The Bible says that they are reserved for the day that they will be punished.

“That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath.” (Job 21:30) The wicked will be raised from the dead for the day of their punishment. They are not being punished right now.

“**There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.**” (Acts 24:15) If the dead are really alive somewhere, what reason would there be for a resurrection? William Tyndale raised the same question.

William Tyndale, the great English Reformer, who first translated and published the Bible in the English language, had a written controversy, in 1530, with Thomas More, called his *Answer to Thomas More's Dialogue*. In this dialogue Tyndale answered Thomas More in this way, “Ye in putting departed souls in

heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection. ... If the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good a case as the angels be? and then what cause is there of a resurrection.” (*Works of William Tyndale*, Volume 2, pages 188, 189)

“Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner.” (Proverbs 11:31) Both the righteous and the wicked will be recompensed, or rewarded, in the earth. The righteous shall inherit the new earth, but the wicked will be burned up in this earth first.

## When do the wicked receive their punishment?

“**But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished** [the wicked are not raised from the dead until the thousand years are finished]. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: **on such the second death hath no power**, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:5, 6) Those who have part in the first resurrection, the resurrection of the just, shall not suffer the second death.

## When will the righteous be resurrected?

We have already seen, in Revelation 20, that it will happen before the thousand years (millennium). “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: **and the dead in Christ shall rise first** [this is the first resurrection]: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17)

The resurrection of the righteous takes place when the Lord returns from heaven, which will be very soon. This marks the beginning of the thousand years. Revelation 20:5 says that the rest of the dead, or the wicked, “lived not again until the thousand years were finished.”

The second resurrection, the resurrection of the wicked, will take place just after the thousand years. Now let's read on to see what happens. “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.**” (Revelation 20:9) This is the second death that was talked about in verse six. From this death there is no coming back, for they shall be as though they had not been.

This is when the earth shall melt with fervent heat and be destroyed. *“Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished.”* (Isaiah 51:6)

*“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

*“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”* (2 Peter 3:10-13)

After the wicked are destroyed, along with Satan, never to come back to life again, God will make a new heaven and a new earth. This new heaven and new earth will be all that the garden of Eden was and more. God has prepared many wonderful things for His people to enjoy throughout eternity. *“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”* (1 Corinthians 2:9)

*“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.”* (Revelation 21:1) *“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”* (Revelation 21:4) There will not be, anywhere in God’s universe, the slightest hint of pain or sorrow. There will not be a continual burning hell where people are tormented without end, for the former things are passed away.

The idea that God takes pleasure in watching the wicked burn continually is a false teaching that has caused many people to look upon God as an unkind tyrant, even worse than Hitler. This false doctrine has its origin with Satan, who first said, “Ye shall not surely die.” Man does not have an immortal soul for he never ate of the tree of life after sinning, which would have allowed him to have eternal life.

We are becoming like the God whom we behold. If we are beholding a God who is pleased to see the creatures whom He has made suffer without end, then we will acquire the same type of character. But this is far from the true character of God, for the Bible clearly

states, *“As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”* (Ezekiel 33:11) God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

### Answering some objections

Let us now look at some of the verses that are commonly brought out to seemingly prove that the wicked will burn forever with no end.

*“And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever 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 14:11) This is almost a direct quote from Isaiah. *“It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.”* (Isaiah 34:10)

These people who are tormented day and night, and their fire shall not be quenched, are the same people talked about in Isaiah 47:14. *“Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.”* (Isaiah 47:14) When a fire is quenched, it is put out, either by water or by some other method. This fire will not be quenched. It will not be deliberately put out, and if those suffering from it would try to put it out, they could not. The fire will consume them. But as you can see, *“there shall not be a coal to warm at”* when it is all over.

The term “for ever” is used quite often in the Bible, and I would like to share just a couple of places where it means, “until it is finished.” *“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 aul; and he shall serve him for ever.”* (Exodus 21:6)

This verse is talking about a servant who decides to serve his master for the rest of his life. The way the term “for ever” is used here, certainly does not mean that there will be no end to it, but it does mean that the servant will serve his earthly master for the rest of the days of his life on this earth.

Here is another example of this usage of the term “for ever:” *“But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the LORD, and there abide for ever.”* (1 Samuel 1:22) *“Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.”* (1 Samuel 1:28) The term “for ever” is used to mean *“as long as he liveth.”*

So when the smoke of their torment goes up forever, it goes up for as long as they live, for they shall be consumed. This is how the term “for ever” is used in the Bible; it does not always mean “without end.” The Bible never contradicts itself. Many times it may seem to contradict itself, but the Scriptures can be harmonized if they are searched diligently with the guidance of God’s Spirit.

*“Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire.”* (Matthew 18:8)

We have already seen that Sodom and Gomorrha suffered the vengeance of eternal fire, or everlasting fire. What happened to them? They were burned up with fire and brimstone. This then is what everlasting fire is, it is being burned up, and the results are everlasting, for never shall they be alive again.

The same goes for the other verses that use “everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46), “everlasting destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9), “everlasting burnings” (Isaiah 33:14), “eternal damnation” (Mark 3:29), and “eternal judgment” (Hebrews 6:2).

*“So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: **there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.**”* (Matthew 13:49, 50) In hell fire there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

*“The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; **he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.**”* (Psalm 112:10) The wicked will gnash with his teeth and melt away, he will be destroyed.

### *Their worm dieth not*

Another verse that is used to try to prove that the wicked will burn forever without end, is Isaiah 66:24. *“And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: **for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.**”* (Isaiah 66:24)

Many people falsely interpret this to mean that their soul will not die. This could not be what it is referring to because the word of God says, *“The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”* (Ezekiel 18:20) Certainly the soul of the wicked will die. Therefore the words, “their worm dieth not” could not possibly be referring to the soul.

*“Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave those which have sinned. The womb shall forget him; **the worm shall feed sweetly on him; he shall be no more remembered; and wickedness shall be bro-***

*ken as a tree.”* (Job 24:19, 20) The worm is a creeping thing that feeds upon dead bodies. The worm that dieth not is referring to worms feeding upon the wicked, not the soul of the wicked.

*“Behold, the whirlwind of the LORD goeth forth with fury, a continuing whirlwind: it shall fall with pain upon the head of the wicked. **The fierce anger of the LORD shall not return, until He have done it, and until He have performed the intents of His heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it.**”* (Jeremiah 30:23, 24)

The fierce anger of the LORD shall not return until He has done what He has planned. His anger will go out and fall with great pain upon the head of the wicked, but His anger will return after the wicked are destroyed. This is known as a strange act of God. *“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.”* (Isaiah 28:21)

The most important aspect of our knowing what the Bible says about the destruction of the wicked in contrast to the widely accepted theory, is that our perception of God’s character is affected by how we perceive His actions. Whatever view we have of God’s character is what our own characters will be “changed into.” *“But we all, with open face **beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.**”* (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Suppose a fifteen-year-old boy gets drunk one night and steals his father’s car and wrecks it. If the father of that boy would torment him with fire for one week, we would say that man is cruel. Suppose the father tormented him for one year. Surely we would say that this punishment is far too severe for the acts that were committed. Now suppose the same young boy, did the same thing, but instead of living through it, he died in the accident. Do you suppose God will take that young boy and torment him for billions and billions of years? This would be downright cruel. More cruel than the worst criminal who has ever lived.

We will be changed into our perception of God’s character. Think about it! If a young boy at the age of fifteen, after taking his father’s car for a joy ride while intoxicated, runs into a tree and dies, would it be merciful and just to burn him forever and ever with no end? Then another man who has become a hardened criminal, after murdering many people, and committing many other crimes, finally gets shot to death. Should this man receive the same punishment as the fifteen-year-old boy? It would be quite unfair to the young boy if the other would receive the same punishment.

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Not only that, is it fair to torture someone for millions of years for sins that may have taken only fifteen years to commit? This surely sounds unfair to me. With this perception of God, we see Him as unfair, and accordingly we feel justified in being unfair as well. The Scripture tells us that God is just and merciful and He treats us better than we deserve.

*“And that He would shew thee the secrets of wisdom, that they are double to that which is! **Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth.**”* (Job 11:6) God gives us less than our iniquities deserve. This surely would not be the case if God would torture the wicked for millions of years.

*“And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our **God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this.**”* (Ezra 9:13) *“He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”* (Psalm 103:10)

Our God is a merciful and loving God. He does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked; but is great in mercy. God does the best thing He can do for the wicked who have determined to reject His free gift of salvation. He allows them to be as though they had not been. True, some will suffer more than others, and some will suffer

longer than others, but they will all have an end. God *“will render to every man according to his deeds.”* (Romans 2:6)

I encourage each one of you to study everything out in the Bible, so you can know for sure what God says about any subject. *“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”* (1 Thessalonians 5:21) Let us be like the noble Bereans who *“received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”* (Acts 17:11) Do not accept my words, or any other man’s words as the final authority for what the Bible teaches on a subject, but go directly to the source of all truth. *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* (John 17:17)

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