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EVERLASTING

PUNISHMET

BY JOHN C. RIBBENS

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FOREWORD

By David Hettema

The subjects dealt with in this booklet are important to anyone who claims a relationship to God through Jesus Christ. These matters concerning your future have to do with your death and your life as an individual. The promise of everlasting life is the portion of those who believe in Him, but the truths regarding as to the how and the when and also as to where the believer will experience that promised life are buried under many centuries of fables, lies and unscriptural teachings. Many who claim to be leaders and teachers of the Word of God are parroting what their predecessors have taught, setting forth Satan's big lie, "You shall not surely die," perpetuating the "never dying soul" teachings of the Greek philosopher Plato, teachings that are absolutely foreign to God's Word.

A vacuum of honest Scriptural searching and teaching on the subject of the nature and destiny of man exists. Because of this great void the popular traditional belief that all the good "go to heaven" is embraced by the vast majority of mankind. Sadly, if this is the truth, resurrection is not of value, putting down the work of the Savior who declared, "I am the resurrection and the life, he that believes on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). The vast majority of the living generation think they are already immortal, not knowing that their deaths would be their final state, except that Jesus Christ in His resurrection has bought resurrection and new lives for all men, not in heaven, but on this earth under the righteous order of God's government. All men today need to have a new look at these ideas, then search, find and hold the truth of God's Word regarding the nature and destiny of man.

PREFACE

The Bible reveals the fact that in the distant future a company of nations will be alive and consigned to everlasting punishment. This doctrine concerning everlasting punishment has, for centuries, been extrapolated to mean that the next act of God for the overwhelming number of sinners will be a time of never-ending punishment in which this vast company of men will experience the most cruel forms of punishment this world has ever known. If this doctrine of endless punishment as affirmed by its believers is necessary to satisfy the righteous demands of a just and holy God, then it constitutes one of the strongest reasons for being revealed to man at the earliest period of our world's history. However, if the long period of about 2,500 years from the creation to the giving of the law on Mount Sinai be examined, it would be impossible to conclude that this is the primary doctrine of divine revelation. Furthermore, if the primary subject of the first 2,000 years of human history concerns the church's fictitious subject of everlasting punishment, then it would be a blatant denial of the incontrovertible fact that the primary subject of the word of God concerns the Kingdom of God. It would also mitigate against the fact that God is foremost and primarily a God of compassion and love, not One seeking to show vengeance on mankind. For centuries men have languished for want of a

clearer concept of what the future holds out for mankind. One thing we can be absolutely sure of is that the "judge of all the earth will do right" (Gen. 18:25).

These issues were initially addressed in the oral and written ministry of the late Otis Q. Sellers, founder of the Word of Truth Ministry. Beginning in 1943, Sellers published a series of studies on the nature of man and his destiny. These were based on articles published in his magazine **The Word Of Truth**, and in 1955, he returned again to re-examine the whole subject, expanding and rewriting much of the earlier work. His deep concern was for the vast complacency of men regarding this subject. He was aided by the writings of F.W. Grant, author of **Facts And Theories As To A Future State**, and **Human Destiny**, by the late Sir Robert Anderson. Since that time, and as a result of our own efforts to promote progressive Bible study, further advances have been made regarding our understanding of the meaning of "everlasting punishment." One thing that has become increasingly obvious is man's inability to deal with crime and disobedience being committed by sinful men. The existing laws and judgments of men are often inadequate to deal with the punishment they deserve.

The primary focus of this booklet is to demonstrate that God will, in His own way and time, administer justice (His righteous order) on behalf of every man, woman and child who has ever lived. Understand that God is not willing that any man should permanently perish, but rather achieve everlasting life.

EVERLASTING PUNISHMENT

By John C. Ribbens

Chapter 1

Introduction

Probably one of the least understood doctrines in Scripture is that concerning the nature and duration of future punishment. While many will agree that God should punish men for sins committed in this life, there is no consensus as to the reason why men should be punished, or how. Dating back to the a period of early American history known as "the great awakening," men like Jonathan Edwards appeared on the scene proclaiming a message of cruel torture and great fear. Edwards, a staunch Calvinist, delivered many highly charged emotional sermons designed to strike fear into the heart and soul of every living man. He depicted "the woes of sinners in Hell," not because of grief to the saints in heaven, but of rejoicing. "Though they hear you moan and sigh, and gnash your teeth, these things will not move them at all to pity you. After your Godly parents have seen you lie millions of years, or ages in torment, day and night, they will not begin to pity you then. They will praise God that His justice appears in the eternity of your misery. The torments in Hell will be immeasurably greater than being in a glowing oven, a brick kiln, or fiery earthquake."

These grotesque concepts of sinners, suffering in a fictitious place called "Hell" (also referred to as hades), are still being proclaimed by men today claiming to be ministers of a loving and just God. Other word descriptions of Hell can be found in the writings of the great Scottish theologian Samuel Rutherford. These coarse and crude ideas concerning the nature and duration of future punishment still persist today. Men speak of Hell with as much detail as if they had recently been there and returned to report on its geography, climate, mean temperature, and vital statistics. Every so often, men will speak of "Hell-bound sinners" and make reference to "the doomed and the damned," seldom going beyond these generalizations. One well-known evangelist proclaims, "There is a Hell in this life, but there is a Hell to come." People don't like to think about the fact that they might go to Hell. There is our natural death, and we all know that one day we will die and be buried or cremated. We don't know when that moment will be. Death is a return of our body to the earth (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 3:20) and our spirit goes back to God who gave it (Eccl. 3:21). Spiritual death is the penalty for sin. To describe it, Jesus used the words, "lost, condemned, punishment and torment." It will be a most deplorable experience.

The fact that such words are found in the Bible cannot be denied. But the question remains, are they a description of the nature and duration of future punishment? The term "natural death" defined as "the death of the body" is not Scriptural. At the

moment of death, it is a man who dies, not merely his body. These opinions of men are totally lacking in the Biblical concept of the nature of man and the character of future punishment. As a believer in the inerrant word of the living God, I hold these illiterate concepts of the nature and duration of future punishment to be grossly in error and they cannot be substantiated by the living Word of God. The tragic consequence of embracing these false doctrines is that they impugn the character of a just and holy God. The idea of God taking delight in seeing men suffer eternally in an imaginary place called Hell is both repugnant and void of the truth. Dr. Billy Graham believes that "when the physical body of a believer dies, his spirit remains alive, and goes to be with Christ in heaven." He also says, "When an unbeliever dies, his spirit goes to Hell," a place of eternal separation from God. Unbelievers are in a conscious state waiting the resurrection of the body and the judgment of the Great White Throne.

How can this be true, when the Bible emphatically declares that at the moment of death, "... then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7)? The Bible does not discriminate between the spirit of the believer in Christ or the unbeliever. In death the spirit, a term synonymous with the breath of life, returns to the source of all life, even the Lord Jesus Christ. As Scripture says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4). Men who die are not in a conscious state, as many men believe. They are dead. To think otherwise is to succumb to the lie of Satan to the woman, "... ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). Scripture most clearly denies the Platonic concept of the immortality of the soul. The Greek philosopher Socrates (470-399 BC) explained that "the immortal soul, once freed from the body, is rewarded according to good deeds it has done, or punished for its evil." This philosophic doctrine has no foundation in Scripture, but since the Hellenizing of the conquered nations by Alexander the Great, it has since spread to all the religions of the world. Any religion which implies the gift of eternal life is being liberated from the body is not based on faith in Jesus Christ and is false, being under Satan's influence

Augustine (354-430 AD) claimed that "death meant the destruction of the body, but the conscious soul would continue to live in either a blissful state with God, or an agonizing state of separation from God." This is nothing less than the satanic lie that somehow men can survive this experience called "death." Centuries later, Thomas Aquinas (about 1225-1274 AD) crystallized the doctrine of the immortal soul in his *Summa Theologiae*. He taught that "the soul is a conscious intellect and will not and cannot be destroyed." This satanic doctrine is refuted by Scripture which declares that Jesus Christ is the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality, dwelling in light which no man can approach, whom no man hath seen, nor can see, to whom be honor and power everlasting (1 Tim. 6:15-16). Doubtless. God's Word clearly levels the philosophies of men.

Another writer claims that "many religionists" who deny the Biblical teaching

of eternal conscious torment do so on strictly emotional grounds. They reject "everlasting punishment" not because they have carefully studied Scripture and arrived at their opinions on an intelligent and knowledgeable basis, but because in their view of "eternal punishment" just doesn't seem fair.

Obviously these opinions are totally lacking in credibility. The Bible knows nothing of an unbeliever spending an undisclosed period of time in an unconscious state in anticipation of resurrection. This idea is contrary to the nature of man. A man having died cannot sustain a conscious condition. On occasion, living men can become unconscious for a number of reasons, but sometimes they recover, even the comatose, except for severe illnesses and accidents. The fact remains, whether men are believers or unbelievers, that at the moment of death they simply expire and cease to exist as living souls. They become dead souls. Their life-sustaining breath (spirit) returns to God who gave it, and that body which remains, called "dust," returns to the earth as it was. Thus death is called a "return" and in this process God loses nothing. That concept espoused by Dr. Billy Graham, that at the moment of death believers are escorted by angels into the presence of Christ, is a satanic lie, rejecting the process of resurrection. It cannot be confirmed by Scripture and should be rejected. Dr. John F. Walvoord, chancellor at the Dallas Theological Seminary, believes that every unsaved person who has died, or will die, goes at the moment of death to a place called sheol in the Old Testament and hades in the New Testament; there they suffer punishment in conscious existence. He claims that this has been going on for thousands of year since the race of men began

How can mortal man survive this experience called "death," when the Bible makes clear that "in death there is no remembrance of Thee: in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?" (Psa. 6:5)? The generally accepted view of death makes resurrection a non-essential and an anti-climax. If death ushers the believer into the presence of Christ, then resurrection can do nothing that would compare to this grand experience. Every suggestion that man can somehow survive this experience called "death" is totally inconsistent with the character of a righteous and just God.

The purpose of this booklet is to demonstrate that no man will suffer everlasting (perpetual) punishment, as conceived by man, in a fictitious place called Hell. God alone will, at the appropriate time, make an excruciating determination of the fitting punishment that is righteous. As the result of sins that have been committed in his life, God will assume the exceedingly complex task of the administration of divine justice. No man living today is qualified to render these judgments. This judicial process will affect the life of every man, woman and child since the creation of Adam.

There will also be a demonstration that the nature of everlasting punishment is inextricably linked to the Scriptural definition of the nature of man. This study will venture into the Biblical interpretation of future punishment, hades, torment, gehenna, and destruction. The foundation for understanding this subject was derived in part from the writings of Sellers, published in Seed & Bread, Nos.

SB182 - SB186, among his final works. Commentary aiding this study was written by F.W. Grant, *Man And The Future State*. The primary aim in the presentation of this study has been the search for truth; in the words of Solomon, "Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom and instruction and understanding" (Prov. 23:23).

The position proposed is verified by an honest examination of the facts of Scripture. If this is not done, then we have no authority to superimpose simple opinions on the living Word of God. In the words of that great prophet Isaiah, For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

Chapter 2

A Doctrinal Statement

It is my unwavering conviction that Scripture teaches the fact that unless forgiven by God there is "future punishment" for sins committed by men during the course of their lifetimes. The Bible declares, "Fools make a mock of sin, but among the righteous there is favor" (Prov. 14:9). The future Kingdom of God is, among other things (theocratic government included), a moral government. God's government would be an appalling riddle if, at the commencement of Eonian Times (the premillennial Kingdom), there would be no punishment of wicked men. At the same time I reject the unscriptural notion that every man who has ever lived will be punished for sins committed in ignorance. I further believe that no man will be punished, nor will justice have been served, unless men have first been given a clear cut opportunity to both hear and receive a message from God regarding the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither will God arbitrarily punish a man without first having a clear-cut understanding of the nature of the sin and its guilt for which that individual deserves eternal punishment. This is a fundamental principle of law.

The guilt of every man judged worthy of eternal punishment is based on the fact that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being und erstood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:19-20). This positive witness is the portion of every living being. This great truth is further established in the fact that God is "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). Every man born of woman has been endowed by his creator with the basic knowledge that he or she bears a distinct responsibility for his/her actions and beliefs. No man can hide behind the facade of ignorance, given the fact that he possesses this conscience. Every responsible young person or adult knows that by virtue of the fact of this God-given conscience certain actions, including murder, lying and lust, are plainly sinful and constitute an offense against the Most High God

I do not believe that God takes delight in seeing even one man perish, but I recognize that some men, in their lifetimes, have made a conscious decision to reject the light that God has given them. Men, having committed some heinous crime or intentionally lied against the knowledge of the truth of God, will not go unpunished. God is scrupulously honest in dealing with the guilt of men. The core question which determines the nature of sin must be defined by the Word of God and not by some religious creed or dogma. I categorically deny and reject the doctrine of "universal reconciliation" or "universal restoration" in which God is alleged to be obligated, according to some men, to grant the gift of life to every being, including Satan and "the angels which kept not their first estate" (Jude 1:6). The fact that Satan "was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth" (John 8:44) is sufficient cause for God to destroy that being in "the lake of fire and brimstone" (Rev. 20:10). No man living on earth today can compel God to assure him that any specific human being will be permitted to enjoy eternal life on planet Earth, regardless of his or her moral conduct. Scripture makes it plain that God, acting in judgment, will exercise the most meticulous review of the life of every person who has ever lived since Adam. That judgment will be flawless and irrevocable, with respect to that person, whether he is granted eternal life or is sentenced to eonian destruction. No man can expect to enjoy the gift of eonian life, having transgressed against a just and holy God.

God declared through the prophet Isaiah, ". . . there is no God else beside Me; a just God and a Savior; there is none beside Me" (Isa. 45:21). Absolute justice is an intrinsic aspect of the character of a just God. In the book of Job, Eliphaz, the Temanite asked, "Shall mortal man be more just than God? Shall a man be more pure than his maker?" (Job 4:17). In conclusion, it needs to be clearly understood that in our perception of the nature and duration of "eternal punishment" there exists but one source of the knowledge of the truth, which is the inerrant and verbally-inspired Word of the living God. Human claims of superior knowledge or wisdom, regarding this doctrine can only be described as the foolishness of men. God's response to these alleged claims of superior intellect can best be described in the words of the Apostle Paul, For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent (1 Cor. 1:19).

In view of the fact that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), God, in His infinite love and compassion, has made provision for the sins of men, which if ignored or rejected, could lead that person to experience "everlasting punishment." God in grace has already made provision for the sins committed by individual men in the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross of Calvary. As Paul makes plain in 2 Corinthians 5:21, For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. What a magnanimous display of the love of God!

Chapter 3

Crucial Questions

No intelligent understanding of the nature and duration of "eternal punishment" is possible apart from a consideration of a number of questions having a direct bearing on our understanding of this doctrine. The task of uncovering the truth, that bears on this teaching, is a necessary process to arrive at a clear understanding of this subject. Proverbs 25:2 declares, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings to search out a matter." This work is not simple or easy, but the rewards are great. With these thoughts before us, we need to consider the following questions:

1. Is God punishing men today? If so, on what basis?
2. What is meant by the term "tormented with fire and brimstone"?
3. What is the Biblical definition of the word "eternal;" of the Greek word *aionion*.
4. Does Scripture teach that men can survive this experience called "death?"
5. Does the Bible teach the separation of the body, soul, and spirit?
6. Are unbelievers who die immediately sent to a place men call Hell?
7. How can any man experience the "torments of Hell" if, at the moment of death, the spirit of man returns to God who gave it?
8. How can a believer enter into the presence of Christ if, at the moment of death, his spirit returns to God who gave it?
9. Is it a righteous thing for God to allow some men to suffer in Hell for thousands of years, while other men who have more recently died are sent to Hell to begin a life of suffering?
10. Of what value or importance is there in resurrection if men can survive this experience called "death?"
11. Has God planned to "torment men in Hell" eternally who have never had an opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ?
12. What is meant by the term "everlasting destruction" found in 2 Thessalonians 1:9?
13. When some men allege they can survive this experience called death, are they then considered immortal?
14. If Hell is a place where some men are sent because of unbelief, where on earth is this place located?
15. If a believer dies and is sent to heaven, how does he/she get there? And where is it?
16. Will God permit the alleged existence of death and Hell to continue into the new

heavens and earth?

17. On what basis does God determine the destiny of a man, whether a believer or unbeliever?

18. Is the suppositional story of "the rich man and Lazarus" a testimony of what Hell is like?

19. Is it gam to die (Phil. 1:21)?

20. What did Christ mean by the statement, 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 (Matt. 10:28)?

21. What Scriptural basis exists for believing that believers are sent to Heaven at the moment of death?

22. What is the future destiny of men who believe that Jesus Christ is their Savior?

Having these questions before us, we can now proceed to deal with the core issues that relate to our understanding of "eternal punishment."

If the Bible teaches the doctrine of eternal conscious torment for the unbeliever, as many men allege, it would be reasonable to assume that this doctrine would be clearly stated in the Old Testament. When God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, did He announce a divine law which claimed the obedience of all mankind on the penalty of endless torment? When God placed man in the Garden of Eden and told them not to eat 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 (Gen. 2:17), did He say that, if He failed, it would be on the penalty of experiencing eternal conscious torment? To say "thou shalt surely die" is certainly not saying that man would be subjected to the torment of eternal Hell.

Who can believe so terrible a doctrine apart from some demonstration of unquestionable evidence? In Genesis 4:1-16, we have an example of the greatest of all crimes which is murder, the murder of a brother. Surely, we have the right to expect some revelation of the doctrine of endless punishment if this were the penalty for such a sin. Yet, when the whole account is examined, there is not the slightest intimation that any such punishment was threatened. There is no hint or suggestion that endless torments would be inflicted upon Cain when he died. And it is evident that Cain did not understand the threats of judgment as eternal conscious torment. Upon hearing the judgment of God, Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Gen. 4:13). Can it be, beside the punishments here named, that Cain was to be subjected to endless torments after death? And, if this guilty man thought that these punishments were actually greater than he could bear, what would he have said if there had been also threatened the additional agonies of an endless period of suffering in a fictitious place called Hell?

Consider the record of the great deluge in the days of Noah, as recorded in Genesis 6-8. Here we have one of the most remarkable examples of men's wickedness and God's judgment recorded in the Bible. If ever anything is to be said on the subject of endless punishment, should we not look for it here with some certainty of finding it? Genesis 6:5 records how God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. In verse 12 we read, And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh (mankind) had corrupted his way upon the earth. Here then was precisely the time and circumstances which required the revelation and preaching of endless punishment, if, as affirmed by Bible scholars, this is to be the experience of every man guilty of such terrible sins. Yet here too not one word is said about it in the subject of the whole account. Noah was a "preacher of righteousness," not a preacher of endless punishment.

Now if, as asserted by scholars, they were not only destroyed by the flood, but were afterward subjected to the tortures of endless punishment, does it not seem strange that no mention is made of this—not even an allusion to it? And yet any reference to the alleged endless and indescribable torments of Hell, the most frightful part of the judgment and most important to the scholars, should be wholly omitted, and that, without one word of explanation, seems implausible. Yet this blasphemous doctrine is widely acclaimed by scholars today.

Next, recalling the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 and 19, here we have another instance of remarkable wickedness and frightful judgment. Genesis reveals how the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground (Gen. 19:24-25). Yet on examination we find no evidence here or warning given to these people of an endless fire to which men would be subjected after the time of a man's death. How is the omission of any reference to eternal punishment to be explained with the acknowledged principles of justice, to say nothing of mercy? God's judgments with respect to future punishment are just and righteous, but not cruel.

Jude 1:7 records: Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, 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. These sins are explicitly condemned in Scripture, but one thing that must be clearly established is that this passage does not establish the idea of endless suffering in a place called Hell. What this passage does clearly establish is that the final destruction some men may experience is the result of God judging and ultimately rejecting them. The adjective aionion describes the nature of the vengeance of fire, a word used symbolically to describe the nature of destruction. It has absolutely nothing to do with some endless experience in a place called Hell. If these sinners were given over, after suffering the punishments reported in the Bible, to infinitely greater

punishments to be perpetuated without end, then the most studied concealment has been purposely maintained by the writers of the sacred Scriptures, or else they were as utterly ignorant of this whole matter as we are, but such is not the case.

The only possible inference is that the people living before the giving of the law certainly knew nothing about the doctrine of endless torment after death. If this doctrine were true, then it had not been revealed in the long period of 2,500 years starting with Adam and up to the giving of the law to the Israelites at Mount Sinai in Moses' day. If it were a true doctrine then God had kept His children in the dark all this while, since no hint of it, no allusion to it, can be found any place in His revelation to the patriarchs. God never gave any threatening allusion to it, even in such cases as that of Cain, the Sodomites and the corrupt inhabitants of that ancient antediluvian world.

The only just and inevitable conclusion then is that for 25 centuries God had no design or thought of inflicting so dreadful and evil a thing as eternal conscious torment on His children. Furthermore, if we find it revealed in any subsequent portion of the Bible, it will be evident that it is a purpose that was not part of His original plan for the world, but something that ignorant and unlearned men have incorporated into it since then.

Chapter 4

Eternal Conscious Torment And The Mosaic Law

Under Mosaic law God gave the people of Israel clear and explicit instructions regarding capital crimes, as opposed to committing other sins which were also considered trespasses against the Lord (Num. 5:5-10). Moses declared that, "He that smiteth a man so that he die, shall be surely put to death" (Exod. 21:12). This is God's clear instruction for the penalty for murder. Note, the Scripture says nothing in regard to mitigating circumstance involving the commission of these particular crimes. God's instructions were not open to negotiation or the intervention of defense attorneys. Also observe that no mention is made respecting the age of the guilty party; he could be young or old. Moses adds, And he that smiteth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death, and he that stealeth a man and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand (in his possession) he shall surely be put to death, and he that curseth (or reviles) his father or his mother shall surely be put to death (Exod. 21:15-17). Here observe that when the scribes and the Pharisees asked Jesus saying, "Why do Thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?" He answered them, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honor thy father and thy mother: and, He that curseth father or mother let him die the death" (Matt. 15:1-3). Here Jesus confirmed the severity of the crime first spoken by Moses 1,500 years before the birth of Christ.

Suppose that this penalty for reviling father or mother were invoked in the year 2000; consider the impact on society. Obviously, these punishments inflicted on guilty men or women were extremely rigid. You and I might tend to disagree with the severity of the penalty for these sins committed within the nation of Israel. However, they filled a specific judicial need within that company of people living in Moses' day. Let us consider the implications on mankind once God assumes sovereignty for men found guilty of these insidious crimes. We understand that the imposition of this judicial process or form of punishment would not be workable for men living today in the Dispensation of the Grace of God. If men were found guilty of these kinds of transgressions today, who among men living in our midst would be willing to inflict the death penalty?

In our current legal system a man having committed such crimes is considered innocent pending a legal investigation of the charges, and has a right to a trial by jury of his peers. There were no defense or prosecuting attorneys living in Moses' day. Nevertheless, under the Mosaic government God gave Israel "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness" (Exod. 18:21). These men were empowered by God to make critical decisions affecting the life of both the guilty and innocent parties. I often wonder how many attorneys would qualify for such positions today?

Moses made it plain: At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness shall he not be put to death (Deut. 17:6). This principle of fairness protected the life of innocent men. However, if a man were found guilty, then this would follow: The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put away evil away from among you (Deut. 17:7). Obviously, this carried with it an enormous responsibility on the lives of those men in Israel to whom this grave responsibility was given. No doubt these men appointed to carry out this awesome responsibility enjoyed an abundant measure of the Spirit of God. The stem principle of a "life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Exod. 21:23-24) left little doubt as to the severity of the punishment deemed appropriate for those men in Israel having committed such grave offenses.

Understand that the implementation of such punishment did not in any sense convey to the guilty party the idea of endless suffering in a fictitious place called Hell. I believe that even if a man were found guilty of these capital offenses, and paid the penalty of his life, that person would still have the opportunity to stand before a just and righteous God at some time in the future. In other words, if there were mitigating circumstances, such as the age of the offending party or the circumstances surrounding the commission of such crimes, God will take these into account. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom. 14:10); For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ: that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). At the same time I recognize and firmly believe that

all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ have "the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). However, having this forgiveness does not confer on the life of any believer the right to commit offenses worthy of capital punishment. Or, in simple words, "Fools make a mock (ery) at sin: but among the righteous there is favor (grace)" (Prov. 14:9). Men should not be misguided by the premise that, God cannot see if one engages "in an evil matter" (Psa. 64:5). However, if He wants to take notice for some reason, He could do so at any time He desires, as He did in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:13).

Under Mosaic law God gave further explicit instructions to the people of Israel regarding the atoning offerings for sins committed. Specific instructions are given to man in Leviticus 4, whether he be a ruler or one of the common people. Note what is precisely found in Leviticus 4:22-24, 27-28. Two things stand out here. First, the basis of these sin offerings was the result of a person having sinned through ignorance. Second, God's provision for those sins committed was identified. An example is given: And if any one of the common people sin through ignorance, while he doeth somewhat against any of the commandments of the Lord concerning things which ought not be done, and be guilty; or if his sin, which he hath sinned, come to his knowledge: then he shall bring his offering, a kid of the goats, a female without blemish, for his sin which he hath sinned (Lev. 4:27-28).

Note that guilt is established on the principle of knowledge. In the case of an Israelite these instructions were instilled in a child from the days of his youth (see Deut. 6:4-7). Knowing God's statutes made compliance with the commandments of the Lord a relatively simple experience. We who are now living in the Dispensation of Grace cannot lean on a specific set of commandments, yet we are not without knowledge, as Paul makes clear in Ephesians 4-6. We need to understand that these specific provisions, outlined under Mosaic law, were made to a people in a covenant relationship with God. God made possible a course of action on the part of the sinner whereby he could be forgiven of his sin. In this respect a man who was an Israelite had an advantage over a man of the nations for whom God made no such provision.

It is also important to recognize that none of these provisions has any bearing on a man living in the Dispensation of Grace. This applies equally well today to any man, whether that person is of the nations or a man whose ancestry could be traced back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the obligation on every man who has ever sinned has been met in the provision of the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior. In the words of the Apostle Paul, For when we were without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die, but God commendeth us His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us: (Rom. 5:6-8).

Chapter 5

Sheol, Hades And Destruction

The prophet Jeremiah declared, Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart: for I am called by Thy name, O Lord God of Hosts (Jer. 15:16). The importance and value of the Hebrew word sheol (Old Testament) and the Greek word hades (New Testament) are critical in our attempt to understand the state of a man, whose spirit has returned to God who gave it. Failure to understand the precise meaning of the terms sheol (the divine term) and hades in the New Testament has led to a series of doctrinal errors greatly distorting the truth of God. When asked, "What will Hell be like?" men point to a number of Scriptures that only demonstrate how little they know of the real meaning of these words. One popular Bible teacher claims that Christ described Hell as "a place of indignation, wrath, tabulation, anguish, flaming fire, and everlasting destruction." The teacher added, "It is a fiery place where the smoke of suffering will rise forever."

Obviously, with no exception, the Greek term hades has been made to describe a place of endless suffering and torment, but nothing could be further from the truth. Men who make these sadistic and false claims have failed to grasp that in no instance in Scripture is sheol or hades ever made to refer to such a place. This insidious error is compounded by the assumption put forth by Billy Graham: "When an unbeliever dies, his spirit goes to Hell, a place of eternal separation from God. When there, unbelievers are in a conscious state waiting for the resurrection of the body, and the judgment of the great white throne." These ideas are typical of views held by the vast majority of men living today, but cannot be substantiated by Scripture. The Bible reveals nothing about a man's spirit going to Hell. As stated before, at the moment of death, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). Inasmuch as the spirit of the man who has died returns to God who gave it, it cannot remain in a conscious state waiting for resurrection. Of what possible value is resurrection if, as Billy Graham believes, men are consigned to a place of eternal separation? Why then do men hold to such false doctrines? The answer lies in the fact that Satan has deceived them, even as he did Eve in the Garden of Eden.

The real meaning of the word hades is primarily derived from sheol, as used in the Old Testament. When the 65 occurrences of this word are examined, it will be noted that in 54 percent of these cases sheol is rendered "the grave." Other translations are "pit" and "hell." This Hebrew term is used symbolically in Scripture, and speaks of the finality of those who have died, based upon what is said in Genesis 3:19. Isaiah recorded the words of Hezekiah, the king of Israel who declared, For the grave cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit (grave) cannot hope for Thy truth (Isa. 38:18). This passage clearly dispels the notion that a man, whether a believer or not, is able to survive this experience called "death." There is absolutely no justification to insist that at the

moment of death a believer goes to heaven or the unbeliever to a place called Hell.

Dr. E.W. Bullinger in his *Critical Lexicon And Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* said, "As to the rendering, 'hell,' it does not represent sheol because both by dictionary definition, and by colloquial usage, 'hell' means the place of future punishment. The term sheol has no such meaning, but rather denotes the present state of death. The grave is therefore a far more suitable translation because it visibly suggests to us what is invisible to the mind." The student will find that "the grave," if taken literally as well as figuratively, will meet all of the requirements of the Hebrew word sheol, not that sheol means so much a grave, as genetically "the grave." The basic nature of the word sheol is used to describe "the state of death," not "the act of dying" for which we have no English word. Sheol therefore means "the state of death with resurrection in view." The dominion of sheol or the grave will continue until resurrection, which is God's only provision of exit from it. We note God's Word to Israel, I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes (Hosea 13:14).

If the eleven occurrences of the Greek word hades in the New Testament are carefully examined, it will become plain that hades is invariably connected with death, but never with life; always with dead people, but never living ones. All who are now in hades (the grave) will not live again until they are raised from the dead. This fact is certainly made clear in Revelation 20:5 where we are told: "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." If they do not "live again" when they are raised, then it is perfectly clear that they cannot be alive now, otherwise the entire doctrine of resurrection is false and has no purpose. That hades can only mean exactly what sheol means is clear from the following comparison, as made by David: For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (sheol); neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see (experience) corruption (Psalm 16:10). David knew the time would come when he would enter the state of death. In an obvious witness to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Apostle Paul declared, Wherefore he saith in another psalm (Psalm 16:10),

Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep (a divine figure for death), and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption. But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption (Acts 13:35-37).

This is a undeniable reference to Christ and is supported by Acts 2:29-31. Here Peter declares, Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on His throne; he (David) seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell (hades, the state of death), neither His flesh did see corruption. This is precisely speaking of the

person of Christ, that although He was "three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40), He did not experience decay or corruption. No mention is made either in the Psalms, Matthew, or the book of Acts that would suggest during His three-day death interval He was in some place of torment or destruction. The word hades, improperly translated "hell," is used figuratively in Matthew 16:18 where Jesus stated, And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter (petros, a little rock) and upon this rock I will build My (of Me, what I am in essence) church (out-called ones); and the gates of hell (state of death) shall not prevail against it. Even if these men, who were part of the ekklesia of God, should die, the Lord made an irrevocable promise that the gates (powers) of hades (the state of death) would not prevail against His ekklesia. When God assumes sovereignty these men who have since died will be resurrected to be living, working, and serving in the ekklesia once again. There is absolutely no suggestion that these men are now either in heaven or suffering in a fictitious place called Hell They are in fact dead souls. Once resurrected, they will once again join the ranks of the living.

The satanic concept of men living endlessly in a place of excruciating torment is based in part upon a prejudicial interpretation of Luke 16:19-31, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. This "parable" has been repeatedly used by men to describe the torment unbelieving men will endure without end. If ever a passage of Scripture was placed on the torture rack in support of these false concepts of life after death, this is singularly the most falsely proclaimed. The fact is that this is not a parable in which a story is told in parallel to illustrate the severity of life in a place called Hell. Rather, the tale of "the rich man and Lazarus" is a suppositional story, told to indict, expose and rebuke the Pharisees It is a satire used to expose and ridicule these false teachings of the Pharisees. One important principle, that should be kept in mind while studying the story of "the rich man and Lazarus," is that these words were spoken to the implacable enemies of Christ. This story is not a revelation of the nature of or duration of future punishment; it has to be a rebuke and exposure of the Pharisees for teaching false concepts based on their lack of understanding of their own Scriptures. Apparently, their teachings were designed to keep poor people in subjection to them by saying that they would have their good things in the life to come. Thus, this strong satire ridiculed their teachings and enflamed them against Christ. Readers are encouraged to examine a more detailed account of this narrative in a booklet written by the late Otis Q. Sellers titled, SS018 - The Rich Man And Lazarus. In addition, a companion study was produced by the same author titled **SS016** - Sheol, Hades and Destruction

No attempt to understand the nature and duration of everlasting punishment is possible without a consideration of the meaning and significance of the word gehenna. This word is found a total of twelve times in the New Testament and is uniformly translated "hell." At the time Christ lived in Palestine there existed a small piece of land immediately south of Jerusalem called "the valley of Hinnom." The history of that place can be traced

back to the days of the wicked King Ahaz. He was a king of Judah, but it was said of him, For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen (nations) whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel (2 Chron. 28:2-3). Thus, by Christ's time this place had become a burning trash dump, as designated by the name gehenna, a place for the disposal of worthless and useless materials. The word is used figuratively as a place of final destruction. Examples are seen in the beast and the false prophet, who are destroyed in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 19:20). And Satan is cast and destroyed in the same place (Rev. 20:10). It will exist once again under divine government as a repository for rebellious and worthless men. This place has NO reality or existence at the present time.

It is significant to note that when God governs the earth, there will be a place under His government for the total destruction of worthless men. Speaking to His twelve disciples Jesus said, Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear (stand in awe of) Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (hades) (Matt. 10:28). The word "soul" is the Greek word psuche, but its meaning is controlled by the Hebrew term nephesh. The message of Matthew 10:28 is that man's judgments are limited to the body and cannot touch the man himself, the soul. But, God's judgments are final. The most severe punishment that man can inflict is capital punishment. Whereas man's judgments cannot touch the soul, God's judgments are final. Man's judgments do not finalize a man's destiny; only God's judgments can actually settle that, as expressed in Luke 12:4-5. An example of "worthless men" is revealed in 1 Samuel 2:12. Here we are told that the sons of Eli "were (the) sons of Belial"; that is, worthless men. Men such as these will, by divine decree, be sentenced to die the second death with the added penalty that they shall be cast into gehenna. From this death they will never come forth to be living men again in the future. This place, gehenna, will be a consuming fire; it is God's incinerator.

This view is not shared by all believers. Dr. Dwight Pentecost believes that the resurrection of the body of the unsaved, evidently, will be of such a character that it is indestructible, even in the midst of the lake of fire. This cannot be true, for if such men could be beyond the reach of destruction, they would qualify for immortality. We recall 1 Timothy 6:14-16, where Paul declares that our Lord Jesus Christ is the one "who only hath immortality." In Luke 12:5 our Lord explicitly stated, But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He has killed hath power to cast into hell (gehenna); yea, I say unto you, Fear Him. The first act is one of punishment, but the second act is one of disposal. That is fraught with great significance. It is said of them that "their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44, 48). If there is any place in Scripture where we find the metaphorical use of words, it is here in these passages. Some personal condition that is related to these sinners is

called "their fire" which is not an actual state of combustion. Also, something is called "'their worm" which is not a worm at all. Since this is "an individual's fire" and "an individual's worm," we need to determine what these metaphors mean. As to the term "fire" we can say that when God makes an adverse determination concerning a person, or a judgment as to his guilt, then that verdict decrees a certain punishment shall be exacted, and that becomes the individual's "fire."

With every divine decree that will consign a person to gehenna there will be the additional shame; there will be an additional act of degradation, "and they shall be an abhorring (abhorrence) unto all flesh" (Isa. 66:24). This is the shame, disgrace, infamy, and stigma of all that are destroyed in gehenna. It is spoken of as "their worm." Christ's enemies decreed that His punishment should be death by crucifixion, the most shameful and humiliating death that one could die. Of this He had spoken in advance, "But I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Psa. 22:6). This was His fire; the worm that came on Him when "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Phil. 2:8).

Chapter 6

The Principle Of Sin And Death

The Apostle Paul in writing to the Romans declared, Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world (kosmos, the system or arrangement), and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come (Rom. 5:12-14). In this important passage Paul reveals the operation of the principle of sin and death. This principle is binding today on the lives of every man, woman and child. The irrefutable fact is that this detrimental experience is in the world today. Its operation is such that no man can claim immunity from its effect. Ethnicity, education, or any one of hundreds of wellness and fitness programs provide no antidote to this cancerous condition.

We learn from Genesis how that Satan speaking to the woman said, 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 (Gen. 3:1-3). The language could not be more clear. By means of this explicit instruction, God gave Eve positive information prohibiting eating and touching the fruit of the Tree of Life. Any violation of these clear directions could only lead to life-threatening consequences. Eve could not claim ignorance with respect to God's clear commandment (see 1 Tim. 2:14). No sooner had God spoken these words when "the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:5). For this

reason Jesus said to the Pharisees, Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father (source) of it (John 8:44). So it was that he lied to Eve, and as the result of this insidious lie perpetrated on mankind, Paul reports, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Since that early day in the Garden of Eden, some 6,000 years ago, an innumerable company of men have been beguiled by the serpent called Satan.

The Apostle Paul used the occasion of writing to the Corinthians to illustrate the corruption that Satan brought in through his subtlety, turning men away from Christ, telling them, "so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). The fact of this incorrigible lie has been compounded in that as the result of sin having been introduced into the world, the companion principle of death fell on all men. Sin and death are a dual threat to the survivability of the human race. Think of the tragic perpetuation of this lie that has brought immeasurable misery and destruction upon the human race. No man living today is impervious to this principle of sin and death. Upon learning of the deception Satan worked on Eve, the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shall thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise His heel (Gen. 3:14-15).

By means of this judicial decree God has made clear that the time will come when He will overwhelm Satan with the forces of light, truth and judgment. In simplistic words, God will yet crush the head of Satan with resounding defeat. Paul in writing to the Hebrews declared, Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil (Heb. 2:14). Once God assumes sovereignty He will act in a myriad of ways to annul, frustrate and overwhelm the work of Satan. Speaking to the ruler of the synagogue who had criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath day Jesus said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? (Luke 13:15-16). Think of the millions of lives Satan has bound throughout past centuries with crippling disease and death. At the inception of divine government every living man, woman, or child afflicted with some physical ailment, whether it be AIDS-related or any other of hundreds of diseases, will be immediately set free. For every person suffering from chronic disease that individual will immediately experience a plethora of life, health and strength. One of the names of God is Jehovah Ropheka, meaning "I am the Lord that healeth thee" (Exod. 15:26), and He will imbue every person with the gift of eonian life.

Dr. Bullinger points out that the figure of speech, "He shall crush thy head," means that all Satan's plans and plots, policies and purposes, will one day be finally crushed and ended, never more to mar or hinder the purposes of God. "On thy belly shalt thou go" means infinitely more than the literal belly of flesh and blood. It paints for the eyes of our mind the picture of Satan's ultimate humiliation. "Dust shalt thou eat" tells of constant continuous disappointment, failure and mortification, such as when deceitful ways are spoken of as feeding on deceitful food. Scripture says, "Bread of deceit is sweet to a man; but afterwards his mouth shall be filled with gravel" (Prov. 20:17). This does not literally mean gravel, but something far more disagreeable. It means disappointment so great that it would gladly be exchanged for "gravel."

Finally, God speaking to Adam said, Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, til thou return to the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (Gen. 3:17-19). This was the punishment God imposed on Adam which unfortunately we also share. But in no way can this punishment be construed to mean eternal punishment in some fictitious place called Hell. Although men universally suffer because of the operation of this ominous principle, God has in His great wisdom provided eonian life for every man through Jesus Christ who is "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). The penalty for sin has been met in the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross of Calvary, where Paul says, He (God) hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Cor. 5:21). God will one day annul the principle of sin and death by an infusion of life. The undeniable fact is found in Romans 5:21: "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

Chapter 7

Everlasting Punishment And The Destiny Of Man

No understanding of the nature and duration of future punishment is possible without a clear definition of the words "everlasting" and "punishment." No subject arouses more animosity than this one. For centuries past and even today, man's perception of everlasting punishment has been seriously flawed. God has been portrayed as both vindictive and cruel, finding great delight in seeing sinful men suffer. Invariably men turn their attention to the suppositional story of the "rich man and Lazarus" in Luke 16:19-31 to support their ideas of everlasting punishment. In this study Christ exposed the false teachings of the Pharisees who went to extreme lengths to protect their wealth and control by leading the common people to believe that poverty was a cardinal virtue. In His censure of them He

took their own teachings, held them accountable for their idle words, judged them out of their own mouths and bound on them what they had laid on others. He, by means of satirical stories, developed their teachings to all their logical conclusions and forced on them all its consequences. If a man on the good side of a great gulf in this life enjoyed great material prosperity, then he should be on the evil side in the life to come.

In this story a certain beggar named Lazarus was fed with crumbs from a rich man's table. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell (hades) he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom (Luke 16:22-23). We need to understand that the teaching of the Pharisees about the angels carrying the dead to a place called "Abraham's bosom" is a concept completely unknown to the Word of God. But it was not unknown in the tradition of the Pharisees, as the Talmud and the writings of the Jewish historian, Josephus, give abundant witness. We also note that while both the beggar and the rich man died, by some mysterious means both men are seen alive and recognize each other in this place called Hell. This story is nothing but absolute folly. The ideas about Abraham's bosom, the rich man's eyes, Lazarus' finger, the rich man's tongue all serve to heighten the satirical story told by our Lord. From Luke 16:23 men have been seduced into thinking that Hell is a real place and that men ending up there are in great torments. First recognize that the Greek word hades, translated "hell" eleven times in the New Testament can only mean what the Hebrew word sheol means, that is "the state of the dead."

Therefore, I insist that what most men call Hell is a profound satanic lie. Furthermore, as we will demonstrate from a proper understanding of the Greek word basanos, translated "torment," it does not refer to torment in a physical sense. Yet ignorant and foolish men have seized upon this word to mean that men cast into Hell will suffer unimaginably both torment and affliction for an eternity. This sadistic concept of cruel torture in Hell is further compounded by the rich man, And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame (Luke 16:24). The Greek word translated "tormented" here and in Luke 16:25 is odunomai, the more common word for "sorrowed." It occurs also in Luke 2:48 and Acts 20:38 as the word "sorrowing" (odunao). We read in Luke 2:48 how that the parents of the twelve year old Jesus said, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing (odunao)." Both Mary and Joseph had brought their child up to Jerusalem where he had confounded "the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). It is not possible to misconstrue the meaning of this word. Indeed, Joseph and Mary were in great distress and sorrowing, but by no stretch of the imagination were they being tormented. Any attempt, therefore, to suggest that the story of the rich man and Lazarus is a description of "everlasting punishment" is patently false.

The distinct phrase "everlasting punishment" occurs only once in Scripture and is found in Matthew 25:46. A second phrase is found in 2 Thessalonians 1:9, which reads, "everlasting destruction." It is interesting to note that the phrase "everlasting covenant" occurs 14 times in Scripture, and the highly important phrase "everlasting life" is found 9 times in the New Testament. In Matthew 25:46 we are told, "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." For the benefit of the reader, I refer you to my booklet titled, Matthew 24 And The Consummation Of The Eon, Chapter 23, "The Sheep And Goat Judgment." F.W. Grant, the author of Man And The Future State, points out in his book, "It is not a parable but a very simple statement of the separation of the living upon the earth when the Lord comes to it and sets up His throne there, which is compared to a shepherd separating his sheep from the goats." With this I fully agree. As a result of this judicial process, a number of the nations, in their representation, are consigned to "everlasting punishment" because of their treatment of the Israel of God, described in Matthew 25:40 as "My brethren." Exactly what is this punishment? Who is affected? No proper understanding of this passage in Matthew 25:46 is possible apart from a clear meaning of the word "everlasting," which is a translation of the Greek term *aionos*. One thing should be made absolutely plain is that our English word "everlasting" is not an adequate translation of the Greek adjective *aionos*.

In our common vernacular, the word everlasting simply means "never coming to an end, or perpetually." Such a definition is totally inadequate to express the Biblical meaning of *aionos*. This in turn reflects the fact that most men have absolutely no concept of the Hebrew word *olam*, from which the meaning of the Greek word *aionos* is derived. Once again it needs to be understood that the basic concept intrinsic to the meaning of *aionos* is that which is flowing. Again, I refer the reader to my booklet, Matthew 24 And The Consummation Of The Eon, where in Chapter 3 there is a discussion on "The Coming Eon." For example, "everlasting life" is life perpetually flowing out of God, and hence, "everlasting punishment" is a flow of punishment likewise out of God. With these thoughts in mind, understand that what our Lord specifically stated is that those of the "goat nations" will experience a punishment defined as that flowing out of God. The precise nature of that punishment is that these nations will be specifically excluded from any place of privilege during the thousand-year reign of Christ. In other words, they will be excluded from the privilege of living on the earth during the Parousia of Christ. This does not involve men being sent someplace to suffer "endless torment" or physical suffering.

This punishment may not satisfy the sadistic concept of future punishment as conceived by poorly informed men but it will satisfy the righteous demands of a thrice Holy God. Furthermore, this form of punishment may not seem sufficiently severe to the uninformed man, who has absolutely no comprehension of the quality

and character of life on the earth during the thousand-year reign of Christ. Everlasting punishment is not primarily concerned about suffering, but it is about deprivation.

Turning to 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 we read about one of the most significant events connected with the Day of the Lord and the Parousia of Jesus Christ. This passage of Scripture cannot be understood apart from recognizing that mankind will have lived about 500 years on earth during the Day of Jesus Christ. Throughout this period of divine government men will be enlightened by God and will have had the enormous privilege of learning about the judgments of God. No man living during this time of the manifest Kingdom of God will fail to have acquired a true knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the day of Jesus Christ draws to a close, God lifts the divine restraints which have long been in operation during the Kingdom of God. At this time, in God's dealing with mankind in general, suddenly a company of men become manifest in the earth, identified for us as "the tares, or the sons of the wicked one." Matthew 13:40-41 tells us, As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of the this world (eon). The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

You may ask, "Who are these men?" They are precisely those of whom the Apostle Paul spoke of in 2 Thessalonians 1:8 as 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. In the phrase "everlasting destruction" we have two important words. The first is *aionos* or "eonian" which signifies the fact that destruction flows out from the presence of the Lord. The second word, the Greek word *olethros*, means "complete destruction" and occurs only four times in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 5:5 Paul is addressing the punishment of those in Corinth who had become involved in the sin of fornication. The severity of such illicit sexual intercourse is dealt with in Leviticus 18:17, 29 with respect to the children of Israel. Verse 29 makes this plain stating, For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. This was extremely severe punishment in that it implied the deprivation and divestment of every blessing God promised to the nation of Israel.

The Greek word *olethros* occurs again in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 with respect to those in Israel who had failed to understand the character of that scenario of events which will commence early in the Day of the Lord. There Paul says, For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction (*olethros*) cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape. After having lived about 500 years in peace and tranquility, there comes a dramatic transition between the Day of Christ and the Day of the Lord. No sooner are the restraints lifted than a series of conditions begin to occur in the earth, because Satan is again free to exert his influence and power in the world. I believe that the emergence of these

conditions has reference to the "sudden destruction" of which Paul speaks in 1 Thessalonians 5:3. The word destruction (olethros) occurs also in 1 Timothy 6:9. In this passage Paul offers words of exhortation in the context of the severity of the times they were about to face. Among his words of exhortation Paul reminds us, But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition (1 Tim. 6:7-9). This destruction only serves to deprive men of the basic and essential things of this life. Clearly "eonian destruction" is not about men being sent to a mythical place called Hell, but rather of experiencing great deprivation, up to and including life itself.

For a vast company of men who have involved their lives in acts of transgression, terrorism, lies and wickedness, they can only expect the outpouring of the wrath of God. Psalm 37:9-11 makes this plain stating, For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth... But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The future destiny of man is inextricably involved with the greatest experience he can enjoy which is called the Kingdom of God. Exclusion from this divine extravaganza can only signify everlasting punishment.

Chapter 8

Punishment For Sin In The Dispensation Of Grace

It has been almost 2,000 years since the Apostle Paul pronounced those momentous words found in Acts 28:28 which declare, Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent (authorized) unto the Gentiles (nations), and that they will hear it (with the guarantee that it would reach out to them). This declaration concerns God's present purpose which is to demonstrate the grace which is inherent in His character by means of this present Dispensation of Grace. During the major part of these last 2,000 years of God's dealings with mankind every act of God has been one of pure and absolute grace. The late Dr. Louis Sperry Chafer said, "Grace is infinite love expressing itself in infinite goodness." If God cannot now act in grace, He will not act at all. Nothing men have done or are capable of doing, during these past two millennia, has been able to divert God from His present purpose. This fact has led some men to reject the very existence of God.

Every act of men during this present Dispensation of Grace involving the commission of some crime has been left unpunished by Him. If God were compelled to act in justice instead of grace, that act in and of itself would constitute a direct violation of His present purpose. On numerous occasions men have fallen victim to some inexplicable act of violence causing severe trauma or even death. If this involved some evil or wicked person, men have been inclined to say, "That person surely got

what he deserved." Indeed there have been countless men who have been the sources of extreme cruelty and death. In fact the cruelty of some men has been a serious blot on the character of some nations. The psalmist David declared, Remember this, that the enemy hath reproached, O Lord, and that the foolish people have blasphemed Thy name. . . . Have respect unto the covenant, for the dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty (Psa. 74:18-20). Earlier David cried out, Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty (Psa. 27:12).

Any number of men living today would fully acquiesce to similar experiences. The pages of history are filled with acts of incredible violence against innocent men, women, and children. Solomon, the author of the book of Ecclesiastes, declared, Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil (Eccl. 8:11). It would appear in countless incidents that men have deliberately chosen to ignore both human and divines laws to the detriment of society. While God is not obligated to do so, I believe He is fully cognizant of the acts of violence now being perpetrated by some men. The same can be said of the most responsible men and women living today. As a civilized society, nations have chosen numerous ways to deal with crimes committed by their citizens. This includes capital punishment for the most serious crimes. In some far eastern countries the methods of punishment may seem extremely cruel, such as the severing of the right hand of the man convicted of the crime of stealing.

At issue for men living in the Dispensation of Grace is the crucial matter of the nature of punishment. What would be the appropriate punishment for crimes committed by some young boy, or for some "white collar" crimes in which murder may not have been involved but which resulted in great misery and grief to the aged or infirm? Recently, a seventeen-year-old boy living in Eugene, Oregon was sentenced to the rest of his life in prison for the murder of his parents and two fellow high school students. A year earlier, this was preceded by the killing of twelve students and a teacher by two minors at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Crimes such as these, like numerous drive-by shootings, defy human understanding and make the task of apprehending the killers, as well as imposing appropriate punishment, exceedingly difficult. Regardless of whether or not we agree with the present nature of human punishment, of one thing we can be certain: that the punishment men may impose on their fellow man is not the result of some divine decree. Simply stated, God is not directly involved today in the judicial process leading up to the imposition of some form of punishment.

This does not mean that men are immune from the knowledge of God, but that certain sins are worthy of exclusion from the Kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul confirms this saying, Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit (enjoy an allotment) in the Kingdom of God? Be not deceive: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the

Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). While I may agree that crimes such as these are deserving of divine retribution, I do not believe that even the least of these sins are being punished by God in this present dispensation.

If God should see fit to openly intervene on behalf of some innocent victim of crime in this present time, it would mark the end of this Dispensation of Grace. But this is not how this present dispensation will end. It will come to an end as the result of one final, supreme act of grace, that being of God imposing His divine government over the sons of men. This act of God will be initiated by the Epiphaneia of Jesus Christ, even His Kingdom. At that time the Lord Jesus Christ shall judge the living and the dead (2 Tim. 4:1). For Christ to judge, is not to punish, but to establish His righteous order in the earth. This will lead to the implementation of the judgments of God, as Isaiah 26:9 explains. At that time God will make the determination as to who will continue to live on into the Kingdom of God and who will not enjoy that privilege. I do not believe that men who have been found guilty of serious capital crimes will be granted pardon or immunity. If so, the question then remains as to the nature of future punishment in the Day of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 9

Future Punishment And The Day Of Jesus Christ

One of the greatest lies perpetrated upon the human race by Satan is the doctrine of eternal conscious torment. Support for this false teaching is based, in part, on what men call, "Hell-fire imagery." Dr. Robert A. Peterson, professor of Systematic Theology at the Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, contends that when Jesus warned of being "cast into the eternal fire," the fiery Hell (gehenna in Matthew 18:8-9), what He described was a fate unlike fires on earth, in a place called Hell where "the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44, 48). This is the picture of everlasting suffering, not of destruction. He then adds, Jesus' explanation of the parable of the weeds bears out the fact that Biblical hell-fire imagery signifies pain:

As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be at the end of this world (age). The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity (all who commit lawlessness); and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Matt. 13:40-42).

These are the views held by the overwhelming number of mankind. Not only are these ideas without Scriptural warrant, but they are a slander on the character of a just and righteous God. What men have done is to interpret figures of speech as a fully literal description of a place of intolerable and endless suffering. John Wenham, an evangelical Bible scholar, has said, "I believe that endless torment is a

hideous and unscriptural doctrine which has been a terrible burden on the mind of the church for many centuries and a terrible blot on the presentation of the Gospel." I believe that Wenham is absolutely correct in his views. In fact I think that to assert that this tormenting punishment is what God has planned for the sentence of sinners is totally abhorrent and void of the truth. In his work, Wenham proceeds to point men to Philippians 3:18-19, in which the Apostle Paul said, For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction He also quotes 2 Peter 2:1 in which Peter spoke of false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

In order to combat the false teachings of many popular evangelists today, Wenham says, "These references to eternal ruin, destruction, and loss signify the literal destruction of the unsaved that is their annihilation." I would again agree except to differ with his belief that "annihilation" and "destruction" mean the same thing. We should be very clear that when the Bible speaks of as destruction, it is not annihilation. When the Bible speaks of the destruction, as in Matthew 7:13-14, it is describing the state of those men where no resurrection is in view. In this instance, the life such men possessed returns to God who gave it. The body will have returned to soil (or dust) and the spirit to God, Who loses nothing. This important fact denies the plausibility of the Platonic philosophy that the soul is immortal and goes on living in a different place. The Bible knows nothing about annihilation; it is a word not found in Scripture (though "perish" seems more appropriate—see below). In contrast, Scripture uses the Greek word *apollumi* to describe the fact of destruction (the second death). The strength of this word is based in part on the context in which it is found.

For example, Jesus, speaking to His disciples, said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). The word "lost" is the translation of the Greek word *apollumi*. In this verse it can only refer to those in Israel who had been waiting for the Messiah, the consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25). They had been deprived of their hope, but in no sense were they to be destroyed. In John 3:16 we read that, For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish (*apollumi*), but have everlasting life. This passage makes clear that failure to believe in Jesus Christ can only result in the most severe penalty, namely, that of being deprived of eonian life. Speaking of the word *apollumi*, Dr. E.W. Bullinger in his *Critical Lexicon And Concordance To The English And Greek New Testament* says, "The fundamental thought is not annihilation, but ruin, loss. "

The word *apollumi* occurs in Luke 17:27 where it refers to those in the days of Noah, "and the flood came, and destroyed (*apollumi*) them all." It is generally believed that this flood resulted in the destruction of an entire civilization of innocent men, women, and children. However, this conclusion cannot be sustained when we

carefully examine Genesis 6:11-13. I believe that those who perished in that flood were the "sons of God" (or the Nephilim) and their sterile progeny, the giants of old (the Rephaim). These were a corrupt, degenerate company of angelic beings which God destroyed in that flood, and not human beings. In this instance their destruction was final. In Luke 17:28-29 we read of those men in the days of Lot: "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" (Gen. 19:24). I believe this has reference to that company of men whose "sin was very grievous." I believe that in their abhorrent practice of sodomy, God saw fit to destroy them lest they continue to pervert the human race.

It needs to be recognized that God is under no obligation to preserve the life of even one man who has failed to measure up to God's righteous demands. There exists today a company of sincere men who claim to be Universal Reconciliationists. They claim that because of God's great delight to reconcile all enemies through the blood of Jesus Christ's cross, that "nothing will be lost, for all creation is the work of God's hands." The fallacy of their argument stems from their failure to distinguish between the pure acts of God in creation, and the vicious deeds of vile and sinful men. I believe their position to be indefensible in light of Philippians 3:18. I find no suggestion in Scripture that those who are the avowed "enemies of the cross of Christ" will ever be privileged to enjoy the fruits of eonian life. We need to understand that a man born of a woman is intrinsically made of "the dust of the ground" and endowed with "the breath of life." At the moment of death, the breath of life (God's spirit) returns to God who gave it and the man becomes a very dead soul. The idea that man is indestructible comes from Greek philosophy and NOT from the Word of God. Again, the reader is encouraged to read the booklet titled, Sheol, Hades And Destruction by the late Otis Q. Sellers.

It is my firm belief that once God assumes sovereignty in the Day of Jesus Christ, every man who has ever lived or in fact may be living still, will experience the most penetrating judgment of God. The Apostle Paul makes this exceedingly plain in 2 Timothy 4:1. Here Paul declares, I charge thee therefore before God, and (even) the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge (set the order for) the quick and the dead at His appearing (epiphaneia) and (even) His Kingdom. In my opinion this will be an irreversible and crucial judgment with respect to every man, woman and child. Those deemed worthy of eonian life will enter into the joy of living in the Kingdom of God. Those men whom God has determined to have failed to respond to the light and truth given to them will be destroyed from among the living and will perish in the lake of fire and brimstone.

The Bible does not teach, as many believe, that sinners will be sent to some fictitious place called Hell. Neither will they be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb (Rev. 14:10). I would have you understand that those not deemed to be worthy of life after resurrection will be destroyed in gehenna (the burning rubbish heap). Recognize that there is no man

on earth today who is really qualified to say what a merciful and loving God would or would not do. Nevertheless, as the psalmist David explains, For evil doers shall be cutoff: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit (enjoy an allotment in) the earth. . . . 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 (Psa. 37:9-20).

Imagine living in a world where it will not be possible to find one man guilty of having rejected God's provision for eternal life. In Paul's words, But as it is written, 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 Cor 2:9). What a glorious future God holds out for all mankind.

Chapter 10

Tormented With Fire And Brimstone

One of the most controversial issues relating to everlasting punishment is found in Revelation 14:9-11. This passage in its strong figurative form states: And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: 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. Tragically, this important passage of Scripture has been used by careless students to depict the nature of future punishment in a place called Hell. In order to understand the meaning of the phrase "tormented with fire and brimstone," it becomes necessary to consider two important factors. The first of these relates to the context in which this passage is found, while the second is our responsibility to understand the meaning of the Greek verb translated "tormented" (*basanizo*) and the related noun (*basanimos*).

It needs to be understood that the events leading up to and including Revelation 14:9-11 occur in the Day of the Lord and, to be more specific, during Daniel's seventieth week. We must recognize that these events which will occur belong to the distant future (or at least 500 years from now, assuming divine intervention to be imminent). As a prelude to understanding the scenario in Revelation 14, it becomes important to become familiar with the events related in Revelation 13. In that chapter the time has come when the dragon, also known as Satan, gives his authority to "a beast rising up out of the sea (out of mankind)." This is not a literal beast, but a satanic being (like the vile person of Daniel 11), who will wield power and men will regard in high esteem because

of the blandishments, attractions, and allurements (as well as his cunning) which will be put forth in the interest of human greatness and happiness. The extraordinary power given to him by Satan is revealed in Revelation 13:7-8: And it was given to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. I cannot speculate with regard to the identity of this being, except to say that his satanic authority provides the stage or prelude to another beast coming up out of the earth (this is the false prophet) And deceiveth them that dwell on earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on earth, that they should make an image to the beast And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name (Rev. 13:11-17).

In order to grasp the significance of this strange event, understand that those who are involved in this satanic revolt against the government of God are individuals who have lived long under God's government, have seen its wonders, have enjoyed its blessings, and have partaken of the glorious outflowings of God which characterize that future eon. Millions upon millions of men living on earth at that time will become the target of Satan's attempt to destroy or abolish the result of God's work in government. During that 500-year period men will have enjoyed the extraordinary array of physical, spiritual and material blessings. It appears almost inconceivable to think that mankind should be so victimized by Satan in this final hour of his deception. Since all judgment has been committed to the Son (John 5:22), this rigorous examination will be done in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. The words used to describe this judicial procedure are "with fire and brimstone." Since Scripture uses these as metaphorical terms, we should not take them as a literal description of men being tormented with fire and brimstone. Revelation 14:11 tells us, "And the smoke (a figure of shame) of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever (in relation to the eons of the eons)," or the results of those men who have enjoyed living in Eonian Times. Reference to "the smoke of their torment" signifies the consequences of this crucial judgment, not a physical suffering in some mythical place called Hell.

This brings up the second issue. If the words "tormented" and "torment" do not speak of physical torture in Hell, what did the Holy Spirit intend by the use of these words? The Greek word translated "tormented" in Revelation 14:10 is *basanimos*. It is derived from the word *basanos*. It occurs only three times in Scripture, once in Matthew 4:24 and twice in Luke 16:25, 28. In Matthew 4:24, it

speaks of "all sick people that were taken with divers (numerous) diseases and torments." Here the word *basanos* is used figuratively of the pains of disease which cause men excruciating suffering. In Luke 16:23-24 it is used figuratively to denote intense physical suffering and pain. This represents a conclusion which the Pharisees included in their teaching. When on earth Lazarus begged for crumbs, then in hades (the false Greek place of the afterlife) the rich man was seen begging for a drop of water. Jesus was satirizing the Pharisees' teachings. The parallelisms about Abraham's bosom, the rich man's eyes, Lazarus' finger, the rich man's tongue intensify this satirical story told by our Lord. The story makes fun of the teachings of the ancient Greeks and the Pharisees. In no sense is this satirical story a description of men actually suffering in a place called hell.

The derivation of the Greek word *basanos*, also called *basanite*, is from Latin which means a "touchstone," a stone by which gold or other metals were tested. This word is also used, figuratively speaking, of the rack, an instrument of torture by which men were forced to tell the truth. The English word "tormentors" is used as the translation of *basanistees* only once, in Matthew 18:34. It is used there as a description of that person who elicits the truth by means of the rack, thus an inquisitor or tormentor. This story, told by our Lord in Matthew 18, illustrates a Kingdom principle whereby men ought to be forgiven. Applying this principle to the interpretation of Revelation 14:10, we note that those men who have yielded to the enormous pressure imposed by the beast will be subjected to the most exacting judicial procedure to determine why that person yielded to these cruel demands of the beast. The absolute fairness of this judicial process will be performed "in the presence of the Lamb" (Rev. 14:10). In the course of that experience, called being "tormented with fire and brimstone," every man's action will be determined on the most open and honest basis. No man living today is capable of saying how he would respond if he were to face the problem of not being able to buy and sell in that day of great physical duress. A man facing the possibility of starvation for himself and his family could easily accept the mark of the beast to escape this consequence.

In simple terms, God, who is intrinsically just, righteous and merciful, could easily find extenuating circumstances to justify such a man's actions in yielding to the sadistic demands of the beast. Of one thing we can be certain, that this unusual time of testing will be a singular experience for a number of men. However, in no sense are we justified in believing that because a man may have failed to resist the temptation to accept the mark of the beast, then that person is going to spend eternity suffering the unimaginable torture of fire and brimstone. We can be certain that it is not God's intention to submit men to the rigors of eternal conscious torment. God's judgment regarding future punishment is not to heap unimaginable suffering on individual men, but rather is to determine their qualification about entering into the joy of eoman life. Exclusion from enjoying the privilege to live on earth in fellowship with God is "sufficient punishment for any man. God is not sadistic, He is

exceedingly merciful and kind. The Psalmist speaks of His character: The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether (Ps 19:9).

Chapter 11

The Second Death And Immortality

That God will ultimately triumph over death is clearly taught in 1 Corinthians 15:53-54. In this important passage we are told that this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. The achievement of this important goal will forever eradicate death from the world. Not every man born of woman will be able to share in this victory. There will be a certain company of men who have already experienced the first death who will also experience the second death. The same can be said for a vast company of men living today who, because they have forfeited the right to live, will be excluded from enjoying eonian life. However, it is not a forgone conclusion that simply because a man is born subject to the principle of sin and death that he will automatically be consigned to experience the second death.

For literally millions of men who have perished because of the fact that "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (Rom. 5:12), there is the opportunity God holds out to achieve eternal life (Romans 2:7). This is not a second chance, but a final opportunity to respond to a "clear-cut presentation of Christ." Those who respond positively can rest assured that their names will be recorded "in the book of life." Two thousand years ago the Apostle Paul spoke of a company of his "fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life" (Phil. 4:3). It is my conviction that every man or woman who becomes a believer in Jesus Christ through an act of faith will automatically have his or her name entered into the book of life. No greater privilege can come to any man than to become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. While we have physical access to a physical book, God knows exactly who, when and where men have made their commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Becoming a believer in Christ provides that individual with the gift of eonian life. Every man born into this world becomes a recipient of the great gift of life. That life belongs to God and remains man's possession until the moment of death. Life intrinsically cannot be destroyed, but that is not true of the man. In Hebrews 9:27 we are told, "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." This undeniable fact relates to the "first death."

The Apostle Paul declared that man as created is sown a natural (soulish) body; it

is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit (1 Cor. 15:44-45). The man God created became a living soul; he could see, smell, hear, taste, and feel. He was a sentient, intelligent being—a living soul. When the apostle speaks of a "natural body," he is speaking of a psukikos being, having primarily a sensual capacity to enjoy life. In resurrection God makes a dramatic change as Paul explains, "Howbeit that was not first which was spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual" (1 Cor. 15:46). It needs to be recognized that what a man becomes as a result of the union between a man and a woman is that called a natural or soulish being. What man becomes as a result of his union with God, through resurrection, will be called spiritual. That does not mean he ceases to be a man capable of enjoying his renewed capacity to think, eat, or drink. Following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to Simon and the eleven and stood in the midst of them. But they were terrified and thought that they had seen a spirit: . . . And He said to them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see: for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have (Luke 24:36-39). Men raised in resurrection will not lack a physical presence, but they will be removed from the bondage of sin and death.

In Revelation 20:4-5 John, the author of Revelation, speaks of a company of men that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years This company of men are designated in 1 Corinthians 15:23 as "they that are Christ's at His coming (parousia)" which is the second company. It is these men who lay down their lives as martyrs in the uprising against God's government which occurs just before His second coming. This company of men who live and reign with Christ are part of the first or former resurrection. None of these men is alive today. This company of men is the second of three distinct companies, the last of whom is called the totelos (the end, or last company). This is the company described as "the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Rev. 20:5). Their resurrection occurs before the Great White Throne. The fact that a man is not raised until this final resurrection does not indicate that he will be cast into the lake of fire. The facts about each person brought out to be judged before God's Great White Throne will determine the destiny of those who stand there. However, even if those who are raised in the final resurrection should escape the penalty of the second death, they will have missed the experience of living on earth during the thousand-year reign of Christ.

At this point it is necessary to understand that what Scripture speaks of as "the second death" is in reality a description of "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (see Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14; 21:8) What is important to observe is that for the number of men who succumbed to the lie of Satan in accepting the mark of the beast, their final deposition in the "lake of fire and brimstone" will in

fact be their "first death" in order of time. No person consigned to this lake will ever survive this experience inasmuch as their destruction is final, meaning they have no resurrection in view. By way of comparison, I do not believe that any man living today, being a believer in Jesus Christ, will ever experience "the second death." Although that individual may well die, while having lived in this present Dispensation of Grace, he will never experience "the second death."

The destiny of those men living today, having rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, will be determined at the Epiphaneia of Christ. At that time Christ will judge "the quick (living) and the dead" (2 Tim. 4:1). The fate of the unbeliever will be decided by God at that time. That man's "first death" will definitely not be the "second death." Recognize that the "lake of fire and brimstone" will come into existence during the Kingdom of God, and is NOT to be compared to a non-existent place called Hell. In no event will that person consigned to that lake ever spend eternity suffering eternal conscious torment.

Concluding Commentary

Having examined all the main issues that relate to the doctrine of "everlasting punishment," we find no support in Scripture for the claims of most men that the unbeliever will be punished by God forever and ever in some fictitious place called Hell. What most men have done is to succumb to a doctrine of future punishment which is basically satanic in origin.

God will indeed punish ungodly and sinful men, but the nature of that punishment is primarily one of suffering great loss, including a man's life. Over recent centuries, and even at this time, men have been grossly deceived by the unsubstantiated claims of certain theologians and evangelists. In the process they have forced their false doctrines upon innocent men and women and in the process have slandered the name of the One whose "name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).

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Bibliography

In the course of preparing this study, I have sought the help of some noteworthy Biblical scholars. It soon became apparent to me that there is little comprehension of the nature and duration of everlasting punishment. I soon realized that much of that which has been written in the past century is clearly in error. The philosophy of Plato has usurped the minds of most men even up to the present time. It is essential that in formulating our understanding of the Biblical message that we make even effort to become familiar with the facts of Scripture bearing on this subject.

The following is a recitation of the writings of a few men who have made significant contributions to our understanding of this subject:

Otis Q. Sellers (a pioneering explorer in dispensational truth):

The Word of Truth, Volume V, Issue No 2

Seed & Bread, Issue Nos. **SB132, SB182- SB186**

The Study of Human Destiny

Is It Gain To Die?

The Rich Man And Lazarus

What Is The Soul?

J. Gresham Machen, DD, LittD:

* The Christian View of Man, Chap. 11, How Did God Create Man?

* The Origin And History Of The Doctrine Of Endless Punishment

(in his preface, written in 1871, he wrote, "The doctrine of Endless Punishment is not of divine origin, but traceable directly to a heathen source.") F.W. Grant:

*Man And The Future State E.W. Bullinger, DD:

*Selected Writings of E.W. Bullinger (The Rich Man And Lazarus, The Resurrection Of The Body)

NOTE: Books marked with an asterisk (*) are no longer in print. Mention of these books in this bibliography does not imply the complete concurrence with all that is written.

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