

20 -- THE FINAL PHASE OF THE JUDGMENT (The Punishment of the Wicked)

The sanctuary has unveiled to us the three phases of the judgment: 1) *the investigative judgment of the righteous starting in 1844 (pre-advent judgment), 2) the judgment of the wicked during the 1000 years, 3.) and the execution of the judgment at the end of the 1000 years.* In this lesson we want to study carefully the third phase--the execution of the judgment.

The final phase of the judgment is the meting out of punishment to the wicked. According to popular teaching today, a wicked person goes to hell as soon as he dies, yet the sanctuary clearly revealed to us that the wicked are not judged until the 1000 years, and that they are punished at the end of the 1000 years. How could this be true if a lost person goes to hell when he dies?

This lesson is very closely related to the previous one and will examine three questions: 1) When does hell take place? 2) Where does it take place? And, 3) How long does the punishment last?

1. What two cities are given as an example for the destruction of the wicked?

2 Peter 2:6 and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly;

Note: God destroyed those two cities with eternal fire--the same kind of fire that will destroy the wicked in hell.

2. When will the wicked be destroyed in hellfire?

John 12:48 ... the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.

2 Peter 2:9 ... the Lord knows how to ... reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment.

Matthew 13:40- 42 Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather ... those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Note: In the above texts, the Bible clearly states that the wicked will be cast into the fire in the day of judgment at the end of the world--not when they die. This obviously means that no one is in hell now. It is only fair that no one should be punished until his case has been decided in the judgment. People are rewarded or punished at the end of the world, and not before (Revelation 22:12).

3. If the wicked who have died are not in hell yet, where are they?

John 5:28, 29 Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth ... those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

Job 21:30, 32 For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; They shall be brought out on the day of wrath ... Yet he shall be brought to the grave,

Note: The Bible assures us that the wicked who have died are reserved in the grave until the resurrection at the end of the world. They will hear Jesus' voice calling them and will come forth from the grave, not from hellfire.

4. What is the reward, or punishment, of sin?

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.

Note: The punishment for sin is not everlasting life in hellfire, but the exact opposite--death. We all die the first death (Hebrews 9:27), but the Bible says that the death the wicked will die in hell is the second death (Revelation 21:8). From the first death, all are raised for punishment or reward; but there is no resurrection from the second death. It is final.

5. What are the only two choices for all men?

John 3:16 ...that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Note: A stronger word cannot be found to describe the cessation of life than the word “perish.” The concepts of limbo and purgatory are not found in Scripture. The Bible teaches only two choices--eternal life or eternal death (Deuteronomy 30:15).

6. What will happen to the wicked in hellfire?

Psalms 37:10, 20 For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; ... But the wicked shall perish; ...Into smoke they shall vanish away.

Malachi 4:1, 3 For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, ... all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, ...You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet

Note: The wicked in hell will go up in smoke . Only ashes will remain.

7. Where will hellfire be located?

Revelation 20:9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Note: As the wicked encircle the Holy City, fire comes down and destroys them. They are not inside the earth somewhere, they are right on the earth.

8. Will the devil be in charge of hellfire?

Revelation 20:10 And the devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone...

Note: No! Far from being in charge of hellfire, the devil will be cast into the fire. It will finally turn him to "ashes upon the earth," and God says of Satan, "Never shalt thou be any more." Ezekiel 28:18, 19.

9. Are both soul and body destroyed in hell?

Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Note: Many believe that the soul never dies, but twice God says, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Ezekiel 18:4, 20. So according to Scripture, the wicked will be destroyed in hellfire--both soul and body.

10. When the fire has done its work, how much will be left?

Malachi 4:1 ... the day which is coming shall burn them up, ...that will leave them neither root nor branch.

Note: When a tree is burned up, both its branches and its roots, there is nothing left of the tree. After sin, sinners, and everything on earth is destroyed, the fire will go out. It will not burn throughout the ages. An eternal hell of torment would make it impossible to ever get rid of sin. God's plan is to isolate sin and destroy it, not perpetuate it. Revelation 21:5 says, "Behold, I make all things new."

11. For whom will hellfire be kindled?

Matthew 25:41 Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:

Note: The purpose of the fire is to destroy Satan, his evil angels, and sin. If I refuse to turn loose of the plague of sin, I will have to be destroyed with it, because if sin is not destroyed, it would again contaminate the universe.

12. How does the Bible refer to God's destruction of the wicked?

Isaiah 28:21 The Lord ... shall be wroth ... that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.

Note: God can't stand the thought of destroying those He loves. "*The Lord is not ... willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*" 2 Peter 3:9. He is constantly saying to them, "*Turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?*" Ezekiel 33:11. Destroying people is so foreign to God's ways that hellfire is called His "*strange act.*" God leaves nothing out in His desire to save people. Before they are destroyed, every wicked person will admit that God has been fair (Romans 14:11).

13. Doesn't the Bible phrase "unquenchable fire" indicate that the fire never goes out?

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Note: No! Unquenchable fire cannot be put out. However, when it has burned everything up, it goes out. For example, Jeremiah 17:27 warns that if God's people were not faithful, He would kindle a fire in Jerusalem that "*shall not be quenched.*" And the Scriptures declare that this prophecy has already been fulfilled. "*They burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire. ... To fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah.*" 2 Chronicles 36:19, 21. That fire could not be put out until it had consumed everything; then it went out. It is not burning today, even though the Bible calls it "*unquenchable.*"

14. Doesn't the phrase "everlasting fire" mean "unending"?

Jude 7 as Sodom and Gomorrah, ... are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Note: We must let the Bible explain itself. We can see in this verse that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with everlasting fire as an example of hell, but those cities are not still burning. They were turned into ashes and then the fire went out (2 Peter 2:6), which is what eternal fire does. It is eternal in its consequences not in its duration. (See supplement entitled "The Rich Man and Lazarus" at the end of this lesson.)

15. When Revelation 20:10 states that the wicked will be tormented "for ever and ever," doesn't that indicate endless time?

Jonah 2:6 ... the earth with her bars was about me forever: ...

Note: No. Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17), yet he said "*for ever.*" I'm sure that it felt like forever! The Greek word translated "*for ever*" in Revelation 20:10 is "*aion*," from which we get our word "*eon*." It often represents an unspecified period of time, limited or unlimited. The words "*for ever*" are used 56 times in the Bible referring to something already ended. In one instance, "*for ever*" describes the life of a faithful slave (Exodus 21:6), and in another place "*for ever*" means 10 generations (Deuteronomy 23:3). With man, "*for ever*" often means "*as long as he liveth*" (1 Samuel 1:22, 28)

16. After sin and sinners are destroyed, what will Jesus do for His people?

2 Peter 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Revelation 21:4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

Note: On the ashes of this purified world, God will create new heavens and a new earth. He promises joy, peace, and indescribable happiness for all living creatures throughout eternity.

17. Will the sin problem ever rise again?

Nahum 1:9 ... Affliction will not rise up a second time.

Note: No! The promise is specific. Sin will never rise again. Isaiah 65:17 says, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind."

18. What penetrating question does Job ask?

Job 4:17 Can a mortal be more righteous than God?...

Note: If your son became a hardened murderer, would you feel that he should be punished? You probably would. But would you want him to burn alive in a fire, in terrible agony, for even one day? Of course not. You could not stand that. Neither could the loving Lord stand to see His children so tortured. That would be worse than the very worst of all war atrocities. Is God like that? No indeed! An eternal hell of torment would be unbearable for God and diametrically against His character of love and justice.

Your Response

Jesus wants you to dwell with Him in His glorious new kingdom occupying the mansion He has prepared for you. Won't you accept His offer?

ANSWER: _____

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Many have used the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to try to prove that people go right to heaven or to hell at death. This was never Jesus' intention in employing this story. The word Jesus used for "hell" was "Hades," a place of torment in Greek mythology. All of the Jews listening to this discourse would have understood that Jesus was using a well-known myth to illustrate a point. If we take a closer look at Luke 16:19-31, we will quickly see that this parable is filled with symbols that Jesus never intended for us to take literally. For example, do all the saved go to Abraham's bosom? No. Will the people in heaven and in hell talk to each other? No.

Would a drop of water cool the tongue of a person burning in hell? No. Does Abraham decide who is saved and who is lost? No. In the same way, this parable cannot be used to teach that people who die before the last judgment day at the end of the world will go right to heaven or to hell when they die. John 12:48 declares, "The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." So what does this parable mean? The rich man was a symbol of the Jewish nation, feasting on the Scriptures while the beggar at the gate--the Gentiles--were starving for the Word. Jesus concluded the parable with the observation that "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." Luke 16:31. Indeed, Jesus did later raise a man named Lazarus from the dead, and most of the Jewish leaders still did not believe (John 12:9-11).