



LESSON 6: DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED

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During a lunch break, a Christian woman tried to talk to a coworker about God. “Look, the younger woman said, “I don’t want to hear about God. How can God be loving like you say He is and then torture people in hell-fire forever and ever? If that’s what God is like, then I want nothing to do with Him.”

“Well, I’m glad to tell you,” the older woman answered, “that God is not like that;” and she proceeded to explain to her listener how God has been given bad publicity and the subject of hell-fire has been greatly misunderstood.

What is God like? 2 Peter 3:9, 1 Timothy 2:4

God says He doesn’t want anyone to die, but wants all to be saved. Yet, what happens to people who sin? Romans 6:23; Ezekiel 18:20

Even though people may choose to live a sinful life, how does God feel about their death? Ezekiel 33:11

When and where will the destruction of the wicked take place? Matthew 13:40-42; Revelation 20:7-10; 13-15

Hell is not going on now. The destruction of the wicked takes place at the end of the thousand years and it occurs on this earth.

How does Malachi 4:1-3 describe the time of final destruction?

What will happen to Satan? Ezekiel 28:18-19; Revelation 20:10

When the Bible talks about the final destruction of the wicked, it uses phrases like burned up, devoured, consumed and ashes. And it says that Satan will be no more forever. These phrases all sound pretty final. What is burned up will not continue to burn, but will be destroyed. What happens to fire when the matter it is feeding on is gone? It goes out.

Evidently, hell-fire goes out, too. It is not going to burn forever.

But what about those texts in the Bible which use the words “forever and ever” or “everlasting” in connection with hell? Is the Bible contradicting itself or what does it mean? A brief study of some Biblical words will help to clear up these common misunderstandings about hell.

First of all, the word “hell” is used 55 in the Bible and in only 12 cases does it refer to a “place of burning.”

In the Old Testament, the word for hell is “sheol,” which is used 31 times and means as “unseen state or grave.” In the New Testament the Greek word, “Hades,” is used 11 times and means “the nether world or grave.”

One time in the New Testament, the Greek word, “tartarus” is used which means “a dark abyss;” and 12 times the Greek word “Gehenna” is used which

means “a place of burning.” “Gehenna” is the name the gave the burning refuse pile outside the city of Jerusalem and it did not burn forever.

From the weight of evidence, it seems that the Bible words for “hell” simply refer to death or grave, not an unending fire. But there are texts that sound like hell lasts forever. What does Revelation 14:11 say?

First of all, notice that it is the smoke that ascends forever which is simply another way of saying that the effects of hell-fire are forever. Sinners will not live again once they are destroyed.

It is also important to understand the Biblical usage of the word “forever.” Its use depends on what it is describing. When it is used in connection with God, it means unending. When it is used in connection with people, it means for as long as they live or until they die.

How long did Hannah say she gave her son to the Lord? 1 Samuel 1:22

How long was “forever” in this case? 1 Samuel 1:28

By applying the understanding of the word “forever” to the wicked, you find that they burn only as long as life lasts. What does the Bible say about them? Psalm 37:20; Malachi 4:1

Again, notice the words “perish,” “vanish away into smoke,” “be burned up.” This is final and complete destruction. The wicked are not going to be punished forever, but their punishment will last forever. What about the “everlasting” or “eternal fire” mentioned in Matthew 25:41? What terms does the Bible use to describe the destruction of Sodom and Gommorah? Jude 7

These cities are not burning today, yet Bible uses the term “eternal fire.” Again, we see that it is the effects of the fire that are everlasting, but not the fire itself.

In addition to sin and sinners being destroyed at the end of the thousand years, what else will be burned up? 2 Peter 3:10

What does God do with the earth after it has been cleansed by fire? 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1

God is going to make a sin-free new earth! Don't you want to be part of it? How can you be sure you will be? John 3:16-17

Jesus is the only way to eternal life and the only way out of eternal destruction. His life and death and resurrection is proof that God truly loves sinners and is “not willing that any should perish.” Aren't you thankful for a God who loves so much?

TO CONSIDER

1. According to the Bible, hell takes place on this earth, at the end of the 1000 years; after which God creates a new earth. How could the new earth exist in the same place where hell-fire burns unendingly?
2. The Bible uses phrases like “burned up,” “destroyed” and “be no more” to describe the complete destruction of Satan and his followers. Isn't it inconsistent to say that the wicked keep on living in hell-fire when the Bible uses language that says they will cease to exist once they are destroyed?
3. The Bible says that the only way to have eternal life is through Jesus Christ. If wicked people keep on burning, this means they would continue to have a form of life that would never end. How can wicked people have eternal life apart from Jesus?

