

THE END TIMES

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is published for the purpose of disseminating Bible Truths which are seen to be harmonious with the Plan of God as illustrated in scripture.

The Associated Bible Students of Central Ohio is an independent Christian group not affiliated with any denominations. We are committed to a diligent search of the Scriptures to determine through them the Divine Word of Truth.

The goal of *The END TIMES Bible Report Quarterly* is to encourage others in their studies of the scriptures and to share the peace and joy we have learned through this same kind of careful study. The articles covered in each edition are the result of cooperative studies of Bible Students worldwide.

We encourage you to search diligently for the beautiful plan of salvation found in God's word; proving all things and holding fast that which is good. // *Tim. 2:15 & 1 Thess. 5:21*

The Fires of Hell Burning Out

Christians today are facing a real challenge to the traditional doctrine of a literal fiery hell. Martin Marty, a chronicler of American religious trends and professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School, observes that "hell has disappeared and no one noticed."



With the faith of many waning, Christians need to be armed with the facts as to the correct interpretation of *hell*. A short study on the subject reveals the logical and harmonious truth. The key to understanding any doctrine is to square it with these four character attributes of God: **Love, Justice, Wisdom, and Power.**

LAYING A REASONABLE FOUNDATION THE ATTRIBUTE OF WISDOM

Throughout His word, God urges us to seek after truth. "Come now, and let us reason together..." (Isa. 1:18) Our responsibility as Christians is to reflect in our thoughts, words and conduct God's glorious character. Jesus encourages, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48) Wisdom would dictate that this is impossible in our fallen flesh. But, God provided a way in which we could be perfect of intention so that our wills might perfectly conform to His. "...Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption..." (1Cor. 1:30) Through Christ, we have the potential to understand and emulate God's character and purposes.

Therefore, if we are not sure of the doctrine of *hell*, it behooves us to seek to *know* God and His plans that we might glorify Him. His word exhorts: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (2Tim. 2:15) Thus, to glorify God's name and character, we must rightly interpret his word by reasoning together with its message. Only by doing this will we truly understand God's wise and gracious plan.

In His *wisdom*, God created a plan which would permit experiences to teach the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and yet provide a means of salvation. "God...will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all to be testified in due time." (1Tim. 2:4-6) If *all* are promised this opportunity *in due time*, the concept of a fiery hell awaiting the majority *now* is certainly unjust.

THE ATTRIBUTE OF JUSTICE

Let us *reason* on God's **Justice**. When God created Adam, He provided for every need with the condition that Adam would remain obedient: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2:16-17) Notice that the just penalty for disobedience was death, not eternal torment. Ezekiel confirms: "...the soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18:4) And Paul states, "the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23

God's justice is absolute: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life. For this cause,

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Christ came into the world to pay the penalty for Adam's sin: a life for a life. "For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:17-18) Thus, God's *justice* was balanced by His *love*.



THE ATTRIBUTE OF LOVE

"God is love...There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment." (1John 4:8 & 18) Is there fear associated with the doctrine of hellfire? Would love permit for an eternity of torment? Most of mankind cannot understand why God has permitted the evil of this present life, let alone an eternity of flames scorching raw flesh! Could any of us take the hand of our worst enemy and place it on a hot burner? Our instincts of love would not permit for such an *inhumane* act. Even in current death sentences the most heinous of crimes, only the most humane forms of execution are used. Anything more would be considered sadistic and cruel. Would a God of love not have at least the same compassion upon those who have broken His laws? Jeremiah stated, "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." (Lam. 3:22-23) Has not man been created in God's image, and has he not inherited this trait of compas-

sion from God? Would a God who tells us to love our enemies, create in us a desire to burn them forever? Could ultimate joy truly exist in a heaven reverberating with screams from below?

Consider the lesson of the Hebrews who built altars to the false god Molech, and sacrificed their children on the fire. God cried out, "...I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination..." (Jer. 32:35) If God's love could not conceive of such cruelty, how could He create a burning hell?

THE ATTRIBUTE OF POWER

God is all powerful. He certainly could create a place where fire burns forever upon writhing flesh, but His attributes of love, justice and wisdom would not permit for this to be so. God has used His omnipotence for good. Everything He created is "very good." The heavens declare His glory and love for His creation.

God's power will ultimately bring all back from their graves: those who have lived righteously in Christ will receive a resurrection of life and those who have lived selfish or evil lives will receive a resurrection of judgment. (John 5:25-29 NAS) "...when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness." (Isa. 26:9) Those who did not accept life through Christ now will have this opportunity to learn righteousness in due time. But what happens to the incorrigible? "Death and hell (grave) were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." (Rev. 20:14) The punishment of *second death* will extinguish life forever and *death will be swallowed up in victory!* (1Cor. 15:21-58) This is the result of God's almighty power.

ORIGIN OF A FIERY HELL

The idea of a fiery hell may have come from the teachings of the 6th C. Persian prophet, Zoroaster who taught that a "Lord of Lies" who lived in the dark reaches under the earth recorded the deeds of men as debits and credits.

Furthermore, ancient Egypt, Greek and eastern religions have taught various versions of many hells to which the soul must continuously migrate.

As paganism mingled with Christianity under the influence of Constantine, these concepts attached themselves to the symbolic statements of the New Testament. While some lessons taught by Jesus in symbolic parables were thought of as literal, other definitions remained figurative: such as wheat, fish, sheep, weddings, fig trees, vineyards, and leaven. Slowly, the inconsistency of such logic was forgotten and hell's imagery born of Constantinian compromise became Church doctrine.

An exhaustive word search reveals the true meaning of the word hell. (See booklet reviews page 4.) Briefly, in every case of the Old Testament, the word is translated from the Hebrew word *sheol* which means *grave*. Both good and bad went there, but the biased translators assigned the English word *hell* if it was a bad person. Job prayed to go to *sheol* (hell/grave) to hide from his pain. Certainly, he would not pray to go there if it were to burn forever.

In the New Testament, the word is translated from three different Greek words: *hades* meaning *grave*; *gehenna* meaning *garbage dump*; and *tartaroo* meaning a place where the fallen angels were sent between heaven and earth. In every case where the concept of hellfire is used, the context is highly symbolic.

THE LOVING CONCLUSION

We suggest from our lesson on God's character that fire symbolizes destruction and that a literal hellfire is the machination of Satan to slander God's loving, just, wise and powerful character. If you have always been *ashamed* of the doctrine of hell and how it contradicts our loving Heavenly Father's character, study to show yourself approved unto God by *rightly dividing His word of truth*. Let us praise God for His mercy. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee." Psa. 76:10

CURRENT EVENTS: CHURCHES RECONSIDER HELL'S FURY

A recent article in *U.S. News & World Report* reveals, "For much of the 20th century, hell didn't fare well ... paled by the flames of Hiroshima and the Holocaust, hell's frightful imagery lost much of its fury. By most accounts, it has all but disappeared from the pulpit rhetoric of mainline Protestantism. And it has fared only marginally better among evangelicals."

To confirm this, the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England has recently redefined hell as a non-place or a state of nothingness. In addition, Billy Graham states, "When it comes to a literal fire, I don't preach it because I'm not sure about it." (*Time*, 9/15/93) And, the Dec. 1992 issue of *Christianity Today* quotes Clark Rinnock of McMaster Divinity College: "The wicked do not ex-

perience eternal conscious punishment, but rather cease to exist."

It appears that many credible Christian minds, made uncomfortable by the thought that billions of the unsaved will agonize eternally, have decided to reconsider hell's fury. They can no longer deny that there is a plausible harmony of the scriptures proving that God *is* love and has a loving plan for man.

Everywhere we turn, we hear reports about psychics. Tabloids are thirsty for stories on psychics who search for missing children; ads saturate the airwaves encouraging viewers to call their psychic friends and learn their fortunes; and movie stars, royalty, and even politicians consult psychics to receive direction on critical issues of life. Seeking advice from psychics today is as common as consulting physicians or theologians. But what should our position be as Christians on this phenomenon?

The scriptures say there is only one source for true wisdom — God's word. (2Tim. 3:16-17) They warn of lying wonders in the end of the present Gospel age. They also tell of the activity of Satan and the fallen angels who would interfere with men's affairs so as to draw away the faith of many. *"...the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders... And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie..."* 2Thess. 2:9-11

Armed with the scriptural facts, the true follower of God would be very sceptical of these so-called prophets. Is it any

wonder that a fallen angel would be able to inform psychics of the location of dead bodies or tell of someone's past or present? All this would give credibility to their *guesses* of future events which may or may not come to pass. Anyone can make educated guesses. As for us, we will leave the future to the true prophets of old whose words were written for our admonition.

The scriptures are clear, *"Beware of false prophets..."* We must avoid anything akin to spiritism or occultism. There are but two masters. One is God and the other is the god of this present evil world, Satan. (Matt. 6:24; 2Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2) This *"prince and power of the air"* is not the only angel who left the ranks of the righteous angelic realm to practice lawlessness. A host of angels fell before the flood of Noah's day and are now those who whisper in the ears of any who will lend them. The increasing popularity of New Age thinking has opened wide the door for these evil spirits to influence and deceive. *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall*

depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." 1Tim. 4:1 See also Acts 16:16-18; Jude 6

**"Satan himself is transformed
into an angel of light."**

2 Cor. 11:14

The only way to avoid falling into the snare of these *seducing spirits* is to *"Put on the whole armour of God* [His truth and character], *that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."* Eph. 6:11-12

If you have given heed to these evil influences, do not despair, but **do** be aware and heed the scriptures. Call upon the Lord for grace to help and determine not to have anything more to do with them. *"...as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."* Joshua 24:15

FUTURE PROSPECTS: "IF A MAN DIE, SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN?" — JOB 14:14

When we read the story of Job we find a small hint of the resurrection that is to come in the earthly kingdom promised. Job asked, *"If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."* (Job 14:14) Job trusted in the promise of a resurrection. Job did not realize that his experiences would be an illustration of hope for us.

We recall that Job lost everything and suffered greatly as a test of his faithfulness to God. At the end of Job's painful trials, the scriptures relate: *"And the LORD turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends: also the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before."* Then followed a list of what he received. (Job 42:10-13) Observe that al-

though Job's animals were restored twofold, his children were not. Did God neglect his promise?

Since there was no mention of Job's disappointment for what he received, we can assume there is more in this lesson to follow. If we look at Job's experience from his perspective, he fully expected a resurrection of his children who were lost in death, and hence he was not disappointed. He saw God's promises in process of fulfillment.

"That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth." (Eph. 1:10) Job will indeed receive *twofold* when the resurrection work is complete and all his children return to him.

Job's entire experience is an illustration of the life of mankind since the fall



of Adam. Adam lost everything as a result of God's test upon his obedience. The past 6,000 years have been very painful and many lessons have been learned from this permission of evil. But God has promised that he will restore all that was lost in Adam. *"And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."* Acts. 3:20-21

Oh, what a blessed thought that every man, woman and child now in their graves will come forth to be reunited with their families. May this lesson from the experiences of Job be a blessing to you as we await *"the fulness of times."*

What Job Lost:	What Job Gained:
7,000 Sheep	14,000 Sheep
3,000 Camels	6,000 Camels
500 Oxen	1,000 Oxen
500 Donkeys	1,000 Donkeys
3 Daughters	3 Daughters
7 Sons	7 Sons