

The
Truth About
HELL

by David C. Pack

Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly The Radio Church of God until 1968) until his death in 1986. Hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. God called him in the fall of 1926 and he was converted in the spring of 1927. Over the course of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, God revealed through him a great many true biblical doctrines, which had been lost to the Church through the centuries. After his death, his successors ceased to believe and teach these doctrines. Although copyright law prohibits The Restored Church of God from reproducing and distributing literature produced while he led the Worldwide Church of God, we are committed to the preservation and teaching of all of these truths!

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Printed in the United States of America

The idea of an ever-burning hell has frightened countless millions!

What *really* happens to the wicked after death? Are they “doomed to hell,” where their “souls” roast in “torment” forever? If hell exists, and the wicked go there, *where* is it and *what* is it? And *when* do they go? What about the resurrection of the dead? And the parable of Lazarus and the rich man?

There are many popular beliefs about the fate of unrepentant sinners. Why such confusion? What are the Bible answers? Here is the *truth* about hell!

Some time ago, a well-known, unrepentant mass murderer was executed. A grim-faced relative of one of his victims appeared at a press conference shortly afterwards and pronounced that the killer was now “burning in hell.” It was obvious that the relative also *wanted* this to be true just as sincerely as he *believed* his own statement. What *was* this killer’s fate? *Did* his crimes doom him to roast in hell forever? Most professing Christians would answer “yes.” But is this what the Bible teaches?

Popular Belief

The most common image of people “roasting in hell” pictures a God willing to burn people for all eternity without ever totally burning them up. Apart from what the scriptures teach, ask yourself, what kind of God is capable of this? Modern “human rights activists” recognize the terrible evil of torture—even in its *temporary* forms. Would the loving God of the Bible design an *everlasting* torture chamber? If so, He would have to witness—for the rest of eternity—the suffering of those that He had condemned to such a “hell.”

We might also ask: How enjoyable could salvation be for the saved, if they were forced to watch their children or parents—and other loved ones—screaming in pain and agony for the rest of time? Do you see the absurdity of this idea? Yet millions upon millions come to this conclusion when they accept the beliefs surrounding the popular concept of hell.

Consider what the *Encyclopedia Americana* says about hell: “...As generally understood, hell is the abode of evil spirits; the infernal regions...whither

lost and condemned souls go after death to suffer indescribable torments and eternal punishment...Some have thought of it as the place created by the Deity, where He punishes with inconceivable severity, and through all eternity, the souls of those who through unbelief or through the worship of false gods have angered Him. It is the place of divine revenge, untempered, never ending.” An additional quote, also from the *Encyclopedia Americana*, makes this stunning admission about the almost universal acceptance of the popular belief about hell: “The main features of hell as conceived by Hindu, Persian, Egyptian, Grecian and Christian theologians are essentially the same.”

Dante's Inferno

Almost no one understands that it was primarily pagan poets who authored today's widely believed concept about an underground, ever-burning hell.

Much of the tradition surrounding this subject came from Dante Alighieri's (1265-1321) famous work *Divine Comedy*. In it, he described his view of paradise, purgatory and hell. Notice this quote from a book about his life, *Dante and His Inferno*: “Of all poets of modern times, Dante Alighieri was, perhaps, the greatest educator. He possibly had a greater influence on the course of civilization than any other man since his day...He wrote, in incomprehensible verse, an imaginative and lurid account of a dismal hell—a long poem containing certain phrases which have caught the attention of the world, such as, ‘*all hope abandon...ye, who enter here!*’ This had a tremendous impression and influence on the popular Christian thought and teaching. His *Inferno* was based on Virgil and Plato.”

This makes obvious where Dante got his ideas. He believed that the pagan philosophers Plato and Virgil were divinely inspired. His fascination with the Greek philosopher Plato caused him to accept Plato's ideas about the immortality of the soul as described in his famous work, *Phaedo*. Here is what the *Encyclopedia Americana* says about Virgil: “Virgil, pagan Roman poet, 70-12 B.C. belonged to the national school of pagan Roman thought, influenced by the Greek writers. Christians of the Middle Ages, including Dante, believed he had received some measure of divine inspiration.”

Few know the true origin of the beliefs that they hold. Fewer still even wish to know! We have just laid bare, in the quotes above, the real origin of this belief. Did *you* realize the source of these ideas? The concept of an ever-burning hell comes from *outright paganism!* We will see that the popular version of hell has never had anything to do with the true teaching of the Bible.

A Popular Scripture

Perhaps the most familiar and often-quoted verse in the Bible is understood by almost no one. John 3:16 states, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have

everlasting life.” Millions routinely quote this verse, while ignoring an essential phrase within it.

Reread it! Those who receive salvation are promised that they “should not *perish*” but “have *eternal life*!” If hell is a place of eternal torture, then the people suffering this torment must *also* have eternal life. But the verse says, “should not *perish*.” It does not say, “Should not suffer eternal life in torment.” How does the word *perish* relate to the popular teaching about hell and hell fire? Why did God inspire John to use the word *perish* if this is not what He meant?

The Wages of Sin

If you are employed, you receive regular paychecks. They represent wages paid to you for work done. What about God? Does *He* ever pay wages for work? Notice Romans 6:23: “For the *wages* of sin is *death*; but the *gift* of God is *eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord.” This verse exactly mirrors John 3:16! Eternal life is contrasted to DEATH—to PERISHING! The wages of sin is *death*, not eternal torture in hell.

There is no mystery regarding the meaning of wages that an *employer* pays an employee for his work. Why should there be confusion over the meaning of wages that *God* pays a sinner for his works? God says He pays the wicked a paycheck of *death*—not life in a place of torment. The Bible says what it means and means what it says. It states that “scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35) and “Your [God’s] word is truth” (17:17). If we are to believe that the Bible is unbreakable truth, then we must believe that *death means death* and *life means life*! How sad that most do not understand these straightforward verses.

Before examining a number of additional verses about the subject of hell, important groundwork must be laid. The idea of an ever-burning hell is inseparable from the popular belief that all human beings have *immortal souls*. We must examine what God says about souls. It is not what you may think!

Do People Have Immortal Souls?

Most people do not understand the relationship between physical men and souls. In Sunday school, I was taught that human beings are born with immortal souls. The common belief is that, upon death, the souls of sinners go to hell forever, since they are immortal. Is this what the Bible says? If the wages of sin is *death*, could the Bible also teach that people have immortal souls?

Genesis 2:7 says, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man *became* a living soul.” This verse does not say that men *have* souls, but that they *are* souls. Adam became a soul—he was not given a soul. Then, almost immediately, God warned him, “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree

of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof *you* shall surely *die*” (vs. 16-17). When placed together, these verses reveal that men ARE souls and that souls can DIE!

The prophet Ezekiel was inspired to write (twice): “The soul that sins, it shall die” (18:4, 20). Death is the absence of life. It is the discontinuance—the cessation—of life. Death is not life in another place. It is not leaving “this *life*” for “another *life*”—the “next *life*.” (To learn more about this topic, read our booklets *Is There Life After Death?* and *What Is Your Reward in the Next Life?*)

Further, on the subject of whether or not the soul can die, consider Matthew 10:28: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him [God] which is *able to destroy* both *soul* and *body in hell*.” The Bible says that souls can be DESTROYED! According to this verse, they can be destroyed as much as *bodies* can. We all recognize that bodies eventually die and that, when they do, they naturally decompose and are completely “destroyed” due to the process of natural corruption. Any undertaker recognizes this. This verse introduces the understanding that God does the *destroying* of souls IN HELL! Bodies can die and be destroyed in many different ways. However, souls are destroyed in hell by God.

Before we directly examine the scriptures about hell, some final points must be established.

Are the Dead Conscious?

Human minds are differentiated from animal brains by intelligent thought. Presumably, if the dead are not dead, but are really still alive, then they must be capable of some kind of intelligent *thought*. They must at least be conscious of their surroundings. (As a companion to this booklet, we recommend another booklet, *What Science Will Never Discover About Your Mind*. It will help the reader to understand the doctrine of the “spirit in man” [Job 32:8], which is closely related to the topic of hell.)

Let’s consider a series of scriptures.

First, notice Psalm 146:3-4: “Put not your trust...in the son of man...His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day *his thoughts perish*.” When people die, their thoughts end immediately—“in that very day.” That is what it says. This verse is not compatible with the idea that the dead are consciously suffering in a place of torment. We could suppose that, if they are suffering, they do not have *knowledge* that they are. They are unaware of what is happening to them. Ask yourself: What would be the point of their suffering? It would be as though they were in a coma—i.e., completely unaware of what is going on around them—while their sensory nervous system is feeling the tremendous pain sensation of burning. How would this work?

Use the following analogy. If someone is to undergo major surgery, they are anesthetized—they are made to be unconscious—so that they will *not* expe-

rience pain. Medical doctors understand this—WHY DON'T THEOLOGIANs AND RELIGIONISTS? Why do they deny the plain statements of the Bible?

Some who willingly ignore the message of scripture allege that only mortal thoughts “perish,” in the sense that the dead leave this earthly realm and experience some mysterious, different kind of thought than they previously knew. Is this true? Of course, this is ridiculous, and the Bible does not say this, but we should at least examine the idea. Now consider an even more direct verse: “For the living know that they shall die: *but the dead know not any thing...*” (Ecc. 9:5).

To the honest reader, there is no mistaking the plain meaning here!

Solomon recorded, “For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: *as the one dies, so dies the other*; yes, they have all one breath; so that *a man has no preeminence above a beast...All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again*” (Ecc. 3:19-20).

Now consider Psalm 115:17: “The dead praise not the LORD, neither *any* that go down *into silence*.” Death involves “silence.” This certainly does not square with any of the popular concepts of millions of the dead wailing and screaming in agony. Such a scene could never be described as SILENCE! And, if many of the dead go to heaven, why are they not praising God?

Psalm 6:5 further explains that the dead do not experience conscious memory: “For in death there is *no remembrance of You*: in the grave who shall give You thanks?” Could anyone seriously suggest that the dead, suffering in hell, could experience the normal range of human memories *but not be cognizant of God*—not remember Him? Would God put people in “hell” and then leave them there suffering, forever wondering how they had gotten there and who had put them there—because they have “no remembrance” of anything related to God?

The Resurrection of the Dead

Remember to let the Bible interpret the Bible. Always keep its truth simple, and the deceptive ideas of men will fall like a house of cards.

Here is why the dead have no remembrance of God in the grave.

Jesus said, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which ALL that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and *shall come forth*; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [Greek: *judgment*]” (John 5:28-29).

Christ understood that most would find this astonishing. That is why He told the disciples to “MARVEL NOT at this”—He understood that most people *would* marvel at the thought that everyone who ever lived is now “in the grave,” awaiting the resurrection! My instruction to you is also to not marvel at Christ’s words. *Accept them!* He said that “all” are in the grave. He did not say *some* are there.

The reason there are no conscious thoughts and no remembrance of God after death is that everyone who has ever died is currently awaiting one of the

resurrections to which Christ referred. All people will either be resurrected to eternal life or to judgment. That is what it says.

No wonder David said, “As for me, I will behold Your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, *when I AWAKE*, with Your likeness” (Psa. 17:15). David understood that the resurrection was an awakening—a coming *back* to life.

Like David, Job also looked forward to the resurrection of life. Notice: “O that You would *hide me in the grave*, that You would keep me *secret*, until Your wrath be past, that You would appoint me a set time, and *remember me!* If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I *wait*, till my *change* come. You shall call, and I will answer You” (Job 14:13-15).

Job did not ask that God would only hide his *body* in the grave. He asked God to “hide *me...keep me...appoint me...remember me.*” He also recognized that God would keep him “secret.” Ask yourself how being kept secret would square with being in heaven. If that were the case, God would be pretty poor at keeping secrets and the rest of the verse would make no sense. Now look at the question he asked—“if a man die, shall he *live again?*” If Job was going to still be alive at death, how could he “live *again?*” He understood that he would “wait...in the grave” for his resurrection at an “appointed time” when he would be “changed.” What did it mean that he would be *changed?*

The apostle Paul wrote of a “change” that will come to all true Christians. Carefully examine I Corinthians 15:51-52, 54: “Behold, I show you *a mystery*; We shall not all *sleep*, but we shall all be *changed*, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump...the dead shall be raised...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.”

It certainly is a mystery to the world that there is coming a change to immortality at the resurrection. How can someone go from “mortal” to “immortal” if they *already have an immortal soul?* Do you see the foolish logic of men when they ignore plain scriptures of the Bible?

Just as Job knew that he would be “changed,” David knew that he would “awake,” and Paul knew that Christians will be “changed”—that they will awaken from “sleep”—at the time of the resurrection. At the resurrection, people will literally awaken from death. Do not believe me—believe your Bible!

Ask yourself: How can people be resurrected if they are already alive as immortal souls? Only the dead, like Christ when He was in the tomb, need to be resurrected. That is the purpose of a resurrection. Do not be fooled by deceivers who say that “the resurrection only applies to the *body*, since the soul remained alive after death”! You have already seen several scriptures disproving that fallacy.

Upon even the most basic examination, the ideas of intelligent men are often exposed as outright foolishness. The popular concept of hell was devised by men as a means of scaring people into following the false religion that they had created. The true God would never roast people for all eternity without allowing them to burn up, so that their suffering could mercifully end. This is

what a monster would do. Humanly devised false gods figuratively “do” and “teach” whatever the men who created them have decided.

Many billions have lived and died without ever knowing the name of Jesus Christ and without ever having an opportunity for salvation. Are we to believe that they are now roasting in a manmade “hell” devised by pagan poets? If the unsaved, upon death, go directly to hell, then well over half the people who have ever lived are there!

Now what *is* the TRUTH about hell?

Since no one has ever returned from the dead—from “hell”—and offered a firsthand report, we must either choose to believe the ideas of men or search the scriptures for what God reveals.

Hell: Four Words

The Bible does speak about the subject of *hell* and *hell fire* in numerous passages. Christ referred to it several times, as did some of the apostles. The prophets also mentioned it several times in the Old Testament. The Bible uses three Greek words in the New Testament, and one Hebrew word in the Old Testament, explaining the meaning of hell. Let’s examine these words.

The Hebrew word translated *hell* in the Old Testament is *sheol*. It has a New Testament counterpart, *hades*. Actually, if you look up *sheol* in a concordance, it will reference the Greek word *hades*. They both mean “*the grave, pit, world of the dead or hell.*” Hell is the tomb. In saying this, we have just discovered that all people do, in fact, go to “hell” at death! Since the Bible does say, “it is appointed unto men once to die” (Heb. 9:27), then everyone does die and go to hell—literally. All people eventually go to the grave.

The word *hades* is the most common word used in the New Testament for “hell.” (Actually, some New Testament translations have exchanged the word *hell* for *hades*.) I remember learning over thirty-five years ago that people in England, in the 1600s, spoke commonly of planting or putting their potatoes in hell through the winter. They understood that hell was a dark, cold, quiet place that was a *hole in the ground*. This word held no mystery for them. Virtually all sources agree that *sheol* and *hades* are the same and that both refer to the grave.

It was only with the passing of time that the pagan view of hell, as a blazing underground inferno, came to replace this original intent of the word.

The second Greek word translated as “hell” is found only once in the New Testament. Notice II Peter 2:4: “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to *hell*, and delivered them into *chains of darkness*, to be reserved unto judgment.” The word used here is *tartaros* and refers to angels, not people. It means “*a prison, incarceration, place of restraint or a dark abyss.*” This verse describes the imprisoning of the angels on Earth as their “place of restraint” or “prison” after their rebellion during the pre-Adamic age. (Read our booklet *Who Is the Devil?* to learn more about this rebellion.)

We are now prepared to examine the third and final Greek word translated twelve times as *hell* in the New Testament. Jesus spoke of it when He said, “And if your hand offend you, cut it off: it is better for you to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into *hell*, into the *fire* that *never* shall be *quenched*: where their worm dies not, and the *fire* is not quenched. And if your foot offend you, cut it off: it is better for you to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into *hell*, into the *fire* that never shall be quenched: where their worm dies not, and the *fire* is not quenched. And if your eye offend you, pluck it out: it is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into *hell fire*: where their worm dies not, and the *fire* is not quenched” (Mark 9:43-48).

This verse repeatedly refers to “hell” and “fire unquenched.” It also speaks three times of “worms that die not.” We will return to these terms.

In Matthew 5:22, Christ spoke of those who could “be in danger of hell fire.” We have already examined another of His warnings to “fear Him which is able to *destroy* both soul and body *in hell*” (Matt. 10:28). Christ describes destruction in this verse, not ongoing punishing.

In each case, the terms *hell* and *hell fire* are always translated from the remaining Greek word for hell, *gehenna*. It can be translated either as hell or hell fire. Understanding its meaning will explain the lengthy quote from Mark 9 cited above.

From *Hasting’s Dictionary* comes the following definition of this word: “Gehenna: the word occurs twelve times in the New Testament. This term ‘gehenna’ represents ‘the Valley of Hinnom’ (Neh. 11:30, II Kings 23:10, etc.). The place was...*a deep narrow gorge* in the vicinity of Jerusalem, understood to be on the south side. It is repeatedly mentioned in the Old Testament (Jer. 19:6, etc.). It became *an object of horror to the Jews*, and is said to have been made the receptacle for bones, the bodies of beasts and criminals, refuse and all unclean things. The terrible associations of the place...*the fires said to have been kept burning* in it in order to consume the foul and corrupt objects that were thrown into it, made it [an]...*unmistakable symbol of dire evil...absolute ruin*. So it came to designate the place of *future punishment*.”

I have personally walked through this valley and examined its ledges, the design of its contour and its proximity to Jerusalem. It is a long, steep, trench-like ravine that is not particularly wide, but is quite deep. It is definitely a real place and looks exactly as the above description depicts it. The fires there burned continuously, much as we would see in certain city dumps of the past. Years ago, the city dump in my hometown of Lima, Ohio, constantly burned refuse. I saw this many times and have no difficulty understanding what Christ was referring to.

Some of the bodies that were cast into this valley never made it into the fires burning below. They would get hung up in the brush and trees on the ledges near the rim. In describing the wicked, when Christ stated that “their worms die not,” He was referring to the bodies of certain criminals that were thrown over the edge of the ravine but did not burn up because they got stuck on a ledge. They

literally rotted and decomposed where they were. The maggots that entered their bodies completed the decomposition process without interruption from either the fire or anything else. These worms “died not,” so to speak, because they later developed into flies. This graphic picture is part of the reason that Gehenna was such a place of revulsion to all who were familiar with it!

The Lake of Fire

The Valley of Hinnom—Gehenna—came to represent a place of final punishment—a place of “absolute ruin”—for all who go there. The reference to hell fire actually refers to the “lake of fire” described in Revelation 20:13-15: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell [hades] were cast into the *lake of fire*. This is the *second death*. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the *lake of fire*.”

All who enter this lake suffer permanent death. They suffer complete destruction—a final punishment that is *everlasting—eternal—permanent!* It is not *punishing* but is rather *punishment* that is everlasting. Christ understood this just as anyone that knew of the fires in the Valley of Hinnom recognized that the bodies of criminals and animals thrown there *burned up*. When I walked the valley, I did not see any of them still burning. I could not even find any evidence that there had ever been fires there. Two thousand years have completely changed its appearance.

Jude 7 speaks of the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah having received the “vengeance of *eternal fire*” for their sins. Those cities are not burning today and have been so completely destroyed that archaeologists have never been able to prove with certainty their exact location. What happened to these cities does not reflect a permanent state of visible fire burning for all to see today. Their *destruction* was eternal. When those cities completely burned up, the fires went out. However, their punishment continues to this day!

It should be clear why Paul recorded that the wages of sin is death, not eternal punishing and torment in an ever-burning hell. Most people have seen fires go unquenched. But they always burned out after they consumed whatever combustible material was available to them. Read Jeremiah 17:27 and 52:13. Over 2,500 years ago, after God warned Jerusalem that He would burn her with an “unquenchable fire,” if she did not repent, this happened. I have also seen Jerusalem. You, too, have probably seen it many times on television. It is not still burning today.

More Clear Scriptures

A God of mercy and compassion could never torture anything or anyone—let alone do it for all eternity. Carefully consider these verses:

Psalm 104:35: “Let the sinners be *consumed* out of the earth, and let the wicked *be no more*.” Simply take this verse for exactly what it says, adding nothing to it. It is consistent with all that we have seen so far about the fate of the wicked. The next series of verses is stronger.

Psalm 37:9-12, 20, 22, 29: “For evildoers shall be *cut off*; but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and *the wicked shall not be*: yes, you shall diligently consider *his place*, and it *shall not be*. But THE MEEK SHALL INHERIT THE EARTH; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes upon him with his teeth...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*...For such as be blessed of Him shall inherit the earth; and they that be cursed of Him shall be cut off...The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.” There is no confusing this description of the fate of the wicked. Also, note that the meek do not inherit heaven but rather inherit the *Earth*. Christ quoted this same verse when describing the inheritance that true Christians will receive (Matt. 5:5).

Isaiah 66:24: “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.” It was this passage that Christ quoted three times in Mark 9 regarding so-called “immortal worms.” These bodies will first rot. Then, after they are resurrected, many will be cast into the lake of fire—where “unquenched fire,” which will burn them up, awaits.

Malachi 4 also describes punishment by fire: “For, behold, the day comes, that *shall burn as an oven*; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, *shall be stubble*: and the day that comes *shall burn them up*, says the LORD of hosts, that *it shall leave them neither root nor branch*. But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And you shall tread down *the wicked*; for they *shall be ashes under the soles of your feet* in the day that I shall do this, says the LORD of hosts” (vs. 1-3). Anyone who walks through a fire of any size, that has burned itself out, understands that there would be ashes under their feet! This is the fate of the wicked.

A Summary

Herbert W. Armstrong’s article “Is There a Hell?” summarized the answer to the question with the following concluding quote:

“Do you know that THE BIBLE teaches the *resurrection* of *all* who die? The apostle Paul said his HOPE was the hope of the RESURRECTION! As the resurrection is true doctrine, then the pagan myth of an eternal TORTURE, beginning at death, is as deceptive as Satan himself! If all UNSAVED—even all who never *heard* the ONLY name Jesus Christ—are roasting, screaming, in such a hell, and can never get out, HOW can there be a RESURRECTION!

Examining the Supposed Hell “Proof Texts”

Hundreds of millions of people believe in an ever-burning hell because they have been told “the Bible says so.” By now, you have seen that the Bible states no such thing.

However, there are certain “proof texts” that many cite to prove the “ever-burning hell” fallacy. A thorough study of the subject would be incomplete without examining those scriptures. In this inset, we will examine texts most frequently cited as “proof.” As you read the six additional scriptures with points that follow, ask: Why would God directly contradict the plain statements seen elsewhere in His Word? Some require little explanation. Others require more detail to arrive at the correct understanding.

“Everlasting Punishment”

MATTHEW 25:41, 46: “Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

Is *this* proof of an ever-burning hell?

It is not! The Greek word, *aionios* (from which comes the English word *eon*), translated “everlasting,” means “*agelasting*.” God will punish the wicked in the very same way He will the devil and his demons. There are four separate phases of what could be called Satan’s “hell”:

(1) II Peter 2:4 (latter part): The 6,000 years that he has been cast down to Earth, as explained by the Greek word *tartaroo*, which means *prison, incarcerate* or *place of restraint*. II Peter incorrectly translates *tartaroo* as “hell.”

(2) Jude 13 (latter part): Contains a reference to Satan being cast into “outer darkness,” perhaps outside the universe (likely to last 1,000 years). This will occur when Christ sets up His Kingdom in Jerusalem. Leviticus 16 pictures this event as the devil wandering in “the wilderness” (vs. 10, 21-22).

(3) Revelation 20:2: To fulfill God’s purpose, Satan will later be cast down to Earth again (Rev. 12:9-10). After the period of the three-and-a-half years of the seals of Revelation, he and his angels will be bound for 1,000 more years and cast this time into a bottomless pit.

(4) Revelation 20:10: After the 1,000 years have passed, Satan will be loosed for a little season (vs. 3, 7) before being cast out yet again, this time into the lake of fire.

Matthew 25:46 also refers to an everlasting “punishment,” not “punishing.” Whenever death occurs, it is certainly an everlasting event—as far as the person is concerned. This helps to explain verse 41. Verses 41 and 46 must be understood together.

This subject is not complete until the reader understands that Christ earlier in Matthew, chapter 13, spoke of a “furnace of fire” that burns the wicked (vs. 42, 50), there called the goats in the instruction about the sheep and goats. This is the same furnace that is called an oven in Malachi 4:1, and Isaiah 31:9 says this furnace/oven that burns up the wicked is in Jerusalem—of course where Christ will be when this happens.

“Not Left in Hell”

ACTS 2:31: “He seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption.”

The question here is this: How could Christ have died and putrefaction (“corruption”) of His body not have begun?

First, the Greek word translated “hell” is *hades*, which we have seen simply means *the grave*. A body can go several days or longer without corruption (beginning of decomposition), if all of the blood has been removed. Certainly Christ did shed *all* of His blood, making this more possible. However, due to the extreme temperature in Jerusalem, God would have had to supernaturally preserve Christ’s body from this natural process.

“Spirits in Prison”

I PETER 3:19-20: “By which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.”

Are these “spirits in prison” evil *people* who “went to hell” that Christ “preached to” during the three days and three nights He was supposed to be in the grave? This view is easily and properly corrected by using these keys:

(1) The preaching occurred “*when* once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah”—*not during Christ’s 72-hour period of death!*

(2) The word translated “prison” is not eternal hellfire somewhere under the Earth where the “damned” are roasting. Rather, it is the Greek word *phulake*, which means “a place of restraint or prison.” That place is Earth—to where Satan and his demons (Luke 10:18, 20 “spirits”) have been cast down.

During some of the 120 years of Noah’s preaching—the Bible does not say for how long—Christ simultaneously preached to the *fallen* angels who followed Satan. II Peter 2:4-5 is a helpful reference, because we saw the word translated *hell* there is really the Greek word *tartaroo*, which has been explained earlier in this book.

“Them That Are Dead”

I PETER 4:6: “For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the Spirit.”

Some think this passage validates the claim that the dead are alive somewhere else, for example, in “heaven” or in an “ever-burning hell.”

To understand this verse, it is vital to know who the “dead” are that Peter was speaking about. By the time this epistle was written, in AD 67-69, many thousands of Christians had already received the knowledge of God’s laws, as preached by the apostles, and were living their lives according to those laws. With the passing of time, some of these faithful followers had died in the faith, with others through history martyred by pagan leaders and religious figures.

Recall that King Solomon wrote, “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward... Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go” (Ecc. 9:5, 10). Those who are physically dead know nothing—and are unable to receive any preaching or communications.

Since the dead know nothing, those who were “dead” had received the gospel *while they were still alive!*

But there is another way the gospel is preached unto the “dead.” God’s Word states that those who have not repented of their sins—their transgressions are not forgiven by God—are sometimes referred to as “dead” (Eph. 2:1, 5; Col. 2:13), meaning the spiritually dead.

These are “dead” in their iniquity. They have not received the gift of Christ’s sacrifice, nor God’s Holy Spirit—the “earnest” or down payment of salvation—yet. Christ’s statement to a young man, “Let the dead bury their dead...” (Luke 9:60), was a direct reference to those who could not understand spiritual matters—those still under the death penalty. The apostle Paul further explains that they are “...dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). Although still physically alive, by not hearing the words of life—the gospel of the kingdom of God—they are spiritually dead! Christ explains: “It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing: The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

Today, God’s true Church has been commissioned to preach this same gospel to the world “as a witness unto all nations” (Matt. 24:14). However, most people do not heed this message, nor is God calling them at this time (John 6:44). Thus, they remain in ignorance and sin—enslaved under the death penalty—which is the true curse of the law, spoken of in Galatians 3:13!

“The Smoke of Their Torment”

REVELATION 14:11: “And the smoke of their torment ascends up forever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name.”

Some assume that this verse refers to immortal souls burning forever in “hell.”

The timeframe of what is described here is yet to come. The passage is referring to “Babylon” (vs. 8), “that great city, because she made all nations drink of...her fornication.” This is the final, religious/political revival of the system pictured in its earlier phases in Daniel 2 and 7. Revelation 17:11-12 describes it as the “eighth” head, having ten horns (which has not yet appeared).

Revelation 14:9-10 states, “If any man worship the beast [this final end-time revival] and his image, and receive his mark...he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone...in the presence of the Lamb.” As long as the people who are participating in this “beast” system continue to rebel against God, they will receive “no rest day nor night” (vs. 11). This does *not* state that they will be burning in hell for eternity. What it does say is that once their bodies are burned up, the “smoke” ascends forever. The fire extinguishes itself but the gases from the smoke will continue to circulate in the atmosphere.

The fire that is referenced here is *on* the Earth—not *in* it, as part of an “ever-burning hell.” You will shortly see that Malachi plainly states, “And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the LORD of hosts” (4:3).

“A Lake of Fire”

REVELATION 20:10: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

Does this verse state that the beast and false prophet—human beings—are tormented in the lake of fire forever, and are eventually joined in “hell” by Satan?

This lake of fire is the same one referred to in Revelation 19:20, which indicates that the Beast and False Prophet “were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

The fact that the lake of fire in Revelation 19:20 is referred to as “a lake of fire” and the one mentioned in Revelation 20:10 is referred to as “the lake of fire” is merely a translation error. The context of both accounts shows conclusively that both verses are referring to the same place. The translator’s assignment of “a” lake of fire in Revelation 19:20 is incorrect, while the assignment of “the” in Rev. 20:10 is correct. This is the case because in Greek, only the definite article “the” is used as in Revelation 20:10 and the use of “a” in Revelation 19:20 is simply a translation mistake, since Greek does not use such indefinite articles.

The phrase in Revelation 20:10, “where the beast and false prophet are,” is misleading. As indicated by the italics in the King James Version, translators erroneously added the term “are.” It should read, “where the beast and false prophet *were cast*.”

Recognize that Revelation 19:20 stated the beast and the false prophet were cast into that lake of fire at the very beginning of the millennial age. The

devil and his angels were cast into that fire after the end of the millennial age (Rev. 20:10)—hence; this was an age-lasting fire.

Perhaps the *greatest* proof that there is no ever-burning hell is that even Satan and his demons will ultimately be destroyed. The Bible is most plain about this. Ezekiel 28 describes a figure called the “king of Tyre” (vs. 12). Verses 13-15 describe him as having been in the Garden of Eden, that he was once a “cherub that cover[ed],” and that “iniquity” was found in him. Clearly, this is the devil.

Note the end that God declares he will bring upon the king of Tyre: “You have defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic; *therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of you, it shall devour you, and I will bring you to ashes* upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold you” (vs. 18). The very next verse is even clearer. Once the punishment is finished, God tells the devil that “never shall you be any more.”

Next is a clear passage from Hebrews. The context is about Christ: “through death He [Christ] might *destroy him* that had the power of death, that is, *the devil*; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (2:14-15). What could be plainer? Christ will destroy the devil! He will do this at the time He destroys very death itself (Rev. 20:14), hence then that no one will ever again be in bondage to the fear of death. Even the demons know they will one day be destroyed (Mark 1:24).

Ask: How could there be an ever-burning hell if Satan himself will come to a permanent end? The classic portrayal of Satan and his demons torturing people in hell for all eternity is exposed for the unbiblical, human invention that it always was.

“*Thank GOD!*—there is to be a resurrection to JUDGMENT, as well as a resurrection to eternal life of the dead IN Christ!

“Yes, thank GOD, he SO LOVED the world—we NEED not perish, but through Christ we may have EVERLASTING LIFE!”

The Meaning of Lazarus and the Rich Man

Surely some will ask, “What about Lazarus and the rich man? Didn’t they both die and go to heaven and hell, respectively? Isn’t this the lesson of the story?” Much of this booklet, to this point, has indirectly addressed the most common questions arising from this story.

Sadly, the account of Lazarus and the rich man is almost universally misunderstood. Nearly everyone asserts that it is not a parable but rather a literal representation of the afterlife. This statement cannot withstand the scrutiny of facts. All one must do is start with the *assumption* that it is literal and then attempt to explain the elements in it as though they can only be taken literally. The difficulty in doing this will be made clear by this exercise.

For those who remain unconvinced that it is a parable, turn to Mark 4:33-34. These two verses describe the pattern Christ always used to teach His dis-

ciples: “And with *many* such *parables* spoke He the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. *But without a parable spoke He not unto them*: and when they were alone, He expounded all things to His disciples.” Christ continually used parables to teach. In Mark 4, prior to these verses, He had just spoken three parables. The New Testament contains dozens of others. A parable is a story designed to illustrate a point. Apparently, in one way or another, Christ *always* used parables, for “without a parable spake He not unto them.” Remember—accept the Bible at face value. The story of Lazarus and the rich man *is* a parable and must be accepted as such.

The account of this parable is found in Luke 16:19-31. Take the time to read it—and get a complete picture of this story in your mind. Does it really say that when people die, they immediately go to either heaven or hell? We will see that it says no such thing!

We have only briefly touched on the subject of Christians (the meek) “inheriting the earth” as being the truth of the reward of the saved and how it supplants the common belief that heaven is their reward. This included a short examination of those who will awaken to immortality with God’s likeness at the time of the resurrection. Of course, we much more thoroughly discussed the subject of hell. Therefore, it will be considerably easier to clarify—to harmonize—the real fate of the rich man than that of Lazarus. The rich man suffered hell fire and Lazarus was saved. While this much is plain, what does it mean?

The account is best studied verse by verse with an open Bible. The explanation may periodically reference verses out of order so that we may sometimes examine a verse, phrase by phrase. Be prepared to take careful note of what the account does *not* say as well as what it *does* say. Also, look up each verse referenced (but not quoted) in the explanation.

Verses 19-21: These verses set the stage. They describe the parable’s two principal characters. Obviously, one is very wealthy and the other pitifully poor and miserable. One of the purposes of the parable is to demonstrate that Lazarus is a type of all gentile Christians, who become Abraham’s children upon conversion. Read Galatians 3:7, 29.

Verse 22: Both men die. From this point forward, most people reading the account jump the track by making false assumptions. Most conclude that Lazarus is pictured as immediately arriving in heaven and the rich man as immediately arriving in an ever-burning hell. The account says neither of these things!

Notice! The verse says nothing whatsoever about either heaven or an ever-burning hell—period! Try to find these terms. They are not there. This verse states that Lazarus arrives at “Abraham’s bosom”—with no mention of *when* this occurs. The rich man is “buried!” That is all it says. Remember the rule: Take the verse for what it says—without adding to it or subtracting from it.

Lazarus’ presence at Abraham’s bosom depicts a very close, loving relationship. The apostle John is recorded as having reclined on Christ’s bosom as

“the disciple whom Christ loved” (John 13:23). (Though John does not identify himself, probably because of modesty, it is clear whom the verse refers to.) So a special relationship is shown between Abraham and Lazarus, with no reference to either time or place. Describing a conversation during the time of Christ’s ministry, John 8:52-53 states (twice), “Abraham is *dead*.” At that point, Abraham had been dead for nearly 2,000 years. He is *still* dead! He is not waiting in heaven for people to come, immediately after death, and recline on his bosom. The meek inherit the *Earth* when Christ returns to establish His kingdom! Abraham and Lazarus will be resurrected into the kingdom of God at Christ’s Coming. This is the meaning of the phrase.

Another rule of Bible study is found in II Peter 1:20. It cautions that “no... scripture is of any private interpretation.” Reviewing other essential scriptures makes this clear. Compare Daniel 7:18, 22, 27; Jude 14-15; and Revelation 5:10 with many other verses and it is obvious that the saints *reign on the Earth* with Christ. Then notice that Matthew 25:31 shows that Christ returns with “the holy angels.” Recall that Lazarus was “carried by the angels” to Abraham’s bosom. Finally, compare this with Matthew 24:31 for further proof of the angels’ role in this way. (Read our booklets *Do the Saved Go to Heaven?* and *Just What Is Salvation?*)

Verse 23: The rich man is obviously in hell. However, the word translated “hell” here is *hades*. This makes sense because *hades* is the grave and we read that the rich man had been “buried.” This means that he was put into a grave. There is no mystery about what happened to him. Therefore, the phrase “he lift up his eyes” also makes sense as no more than a reference to the resurrection described in John 5:29. We have previously examined this verse. This phrase is consistent with a resurrection, when people awaken—or “lift up their eyes.”

The rich man was also in “torments.” What does this mean? The Greek word translated “torments” is *basanos*. It is found in only one other place in the Bible. Its meaning is fascinating. It means “a touchstone, having to do with touching pure gold, against the particular stone, to test its purity and validity... to be under a severe trial, torture.” We will see that the rich man was, in fact, *mentally* tortured and in a severe trial. He was facing the lake of fire! Try to imagine a more serious trial than this. He had missed out on salvation and could clearly see Abraham and Lazarus in the kingdom of God.

Verse 24: This verse is usually cited to justify the classic version of hell where people burn but never completely burn up. Read it carefully. The rich man requests that Lazarus “cool his tongue” with a tiny amount of water—no more than a few drops on the *tip of a finger*. If you were roasting in a condition involving walls of fire all around you, would you merely ask for a few drops of water—and only for the purpose of cooling your *tongue*? Would you not rather ask for a whole pool of water to be dumped on you? I would! The rich man is again described as “tormented.” Understanding this word (“tormented”) is the key to explaining the rich man’s condition. It is not *basanos*.

The word translated “tormented” is *odunao*. It means, “to grieve, sorrow, torment, duress, distress, strain.” No reference to roasting or burning is included in its definition. The rich man is described as being in mental torment because he is facing the lake of fire. Fear has seized him and given him the condition commonly referred to as “cotton mouth.” Great fear and distress often dry up the mouth. The rich man was hoping for Lazarus to moisten his tongue. We might also ask the following question of all those who believe in the immortality of the soul and who wish to take this parable literally. Do immortal souls have tongues? The reader may ponder this.

The phrase “*in this flame*” is mistranslated. The actual meaning in the Greek is “*by reason of this flame.*” This critical mistranslation entirely changes the scenario. The rich man was not yet “*in the flame*” but was tormented by fear because he saw it coming. He had good “reason” to be in mental anguish and torment.

Verse 25: This verse reinforces the element of the passing of time to properly understand the parable. Abraham answers the rich man by saying, “Son, *remember* that in your lifetime...” What would be the point of using the word “remember” if the rich man’s lifetime had ended just a few seconds prior to this conversation? Typically, people use the word *remember* when they are speaking of events that happened long ago! The passing of much time, since the rich man’s death, is confirmed at the end of the verse, when Abraham says, “but *now* he [Lazarus] is comforted.” It is apparent that the two words *remember* and *now* are contrasted to one another because significant time has passed. Both men had lain in the grave for a great while, until the time of their respective resurrections from the dead.

Verse 26: This verse describes what is called “a great gulf fixed” between where Abraham and Lazarus were and where the rich man was. Some believe this is a picture of a great *physical distance* between the locations of heaven and hell. It certainly does not say that. What exactly is this “great gulf fixed?”

Notice: “Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither His ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But *your iniquities* [lawlessness] *have separated between you and your God*, and *your sins have hid His face* from you, that He will not hear” (Isa. 59:1-2). Also Jeremiah 5:25: “Your *iniquities have turned away* these things, and *your sins have withheld good things* from you.” Now read Hebrews 10:26: “For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, *there remains no more sacrifice for sins.*”

These verses show that sin, in all of its forms, cuts people off from God! God cannot bless, protect, heal, guide or save people who do not repent of and forsake sin. God is holy—He does not have contact with sin. Because of His perfect righteousness, He CANNOT! The rich man’s sins had cut him off from God. This is why Abraham said that no one on either side of this “gulf” was able to cross to the other side. It was impossible, literally!

Verses 27-28: These two verses can be taken together because they both describe the rich man’s request to send Lazarus to warn his brothers. This

would be a natural request for *any* man concerned about his family. The rich man would have been unaware of how much time had passed since his death. He would have had no way of knowing unless he asked—and the account does not record that he did.

Verse 29: Abraham’s answer to this question is extremely important because it says what everyone alive today should do in their own lives. He warns that the five brothers (and, by inclusion, everyone else who has ever lived) should listen to “Moses and the prophets.” Abraham is emphatic—“let them hear them.” *This is Christ’s instruction to an entire world that ignores the Bible*, in general, and the words of Moses and the Old Testament prophets, in particular! This warning is here for you, the reader, to consider!

Verses 30-31: These two verses are also tremendously instructive, but in a slightly different way. They represent an amazing insight into the careless neglect and general disregard of God’s word that is so typical of human nature. When taken together, these verses demonstrate that people who are determined *not* to obey God—who are determined *not* to heed Moses and the prophets—won’t even be moved to action by a well-known person resurrected “from the dead”! What a stunning indictment of human stubbornness in the face of the plain truths of God. These verses contain a warning. Will you hear them?

The rich man had been given his opportunity in his lifetime. He realized that he had missed out on salvation. He also recognized that Lazarus had been resurrected “from the dead.” The scripture does not say that he was resurrected “from life”—it says that he had been resurrected “from the dead.” The entire account of this parable was used by Christ to teach the resurrection of the dead! This account was never intended to teach the idea of immediately going to heaven or hell upon death.

Many Bible scholars have long understood that this parable was never intended to address the state of the dead. *The New Bible Dictionary* states, “Probably the story of Dives and Lazarus (Lk. xvi), like the story of the unjust steward (Lk. xvi.1-9), is a parable which made use of certain Jewish thinking and is not intended to teach anything about the state of the dead” (p. 388).

A Summary

Under the subhead “The Warning for YOU!”, Mr. Armstrong concluded his booklet *Lazarus and the Rich Man* with the following summary of the meaning of that parable:

“Finally, what is the real lesson?

“Jesus was preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God—the New Testament gospel. He was showing salvation, the resurrection to eternal life as the gift of God—inheritance of the Kingdom of God on this earth.

“The apostle Paul plainly tells us that the New Testament Church of God is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ being

the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Jesus said: ‘I will build my church.’ Paul reveals it was built on the foundation of the prophets as well as the apostles!

“Jesus...teaches you that if you refuse to hear Moses and the prophets—and Moses was one of the prophets—you have no hope of salvation! The Scriptures (Old Testament as well as New), according to II Timothy 3:15, are able to make us wise unto salvation. We are to take the whole Bible, not the New Testament only.

“Those who teach that the commandments of God are done away teach a message of doom! Those who teach the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul—going off to ‘heaven’ at death, or eternal punishing—teach contrary to what Jesus said!

“May you take heed, and hear all the Word of God!”

What About “Baptism with Fire”?

The Bible speaks of two kinds of baptism. It is common for people who have been baptized with water to express that they also want to receive the “baptism by fire.” Is this something that you should seek? What is the “baptism by fire”?

We have seen that God will destroy the wicked in the lake of fire. They will be burned up in this “lake.” Most lakes are composed of water, but the lake of fire probably will be a kind of “liquid fire.” The Bible does not tell us exactly what the liquid portion of the lake of fire will be like. However, it is easy to see that people could be described as being *baptized* into this lake of fire.

John the Baptist wrote, “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but He that comes after me...shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, *and with fire*” (Matt. 3:11). Matthew 3 is the only place where the term “baptism...with fire” is found. A few verses earlier (vs. 7-8), John addressed the Pharisees and Sadducees who were also among the large multitudes (vs. 5) coming to him. He warned them, “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said to them, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the *wrath to come*? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”

Vast numbers of people were listening to John the Baptist preach. Some were sincere and seeking “baptism with the Holy Spirit” and others were, in effect, told that they were candidates for the “baptism with fire.” John understood that both kinds of people were present in such a large audience. He was under no illusion about the attitude of the Sadducees and Pharisees. So these verses plainly connect *fire* with *wrath*!

Notice that the prophet Ezekiel also said, “Son of man, the house of Israel is to Me become *dross*: all they are brass, and tin, and iron, and lead, in the midst of the furnace; they are even the dross of silver. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD; Because you are all become *dross*, behold, therefore I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. As they gather silver, and brass, and iron, and lead, and tin, into the midst of the furnace, to blow the *fire* upon it, to melt it; so will I gather you in My *anger* and in My *fury*, and I will leave you there,

and melt you. Yes, I will gather you, and blow upon you in the *fire of My wrath...*" (Ezek. 22:18-21).

Most in ancient Israel were as stiff-necked, stubborn and rebellious as their modern descendants (the democratic, largely Anglo-Saxon, peoples of the Western World today). God has long planned to punish these nations in His wrath. Ezekiel was speaking of a time when God was going to "burn away" all those who were "dross."

What then was the "wrath to come" to which John was referring? It was the same time period referenced by Ezekiel. In Matthew 3:10, John sets the stage for his reference to baptism with fire: "And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees: therefore every tree which brings *NOT* forth *good fruit* is hewn down, and *cast into the fire*." Plainly, this is not a fire anyone wants to have contact with! It is designed for people who did *not* bring forth good fruits. Remember, John had called the Sadducees and Pharisees "vipers" and warned them to "bring forth *fruit* meet (suitable or acceptable) for repentance."

In verse 12, John continued, "Whose *fan* is in His hand, and He will thoroughly *purge His floor*, and gather His *wheat* into the garner; but He will burn up the *chaff* with unquenchable *fire*." The wheat represents the true saints of God and the chaff represents the wicked that will be burned up with "unquenchable fire." The fire will not go out until there are no more wicked to serve as fuel for it.

The Wheat and Tares Prove It

Christ spoke a parable that explains these things in careful detail: "Let both [wheat and tares] grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather you together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into My barn" (Matt. 13:30).

Christ continued by explaining the various terms He used in His parable: "The field is the world; the good seed [wheat] are the children of the kingdom; but the tares [chaff] are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the *tares* are gathered and burned in the *fire*; so shall it be in the end of the world. 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" (vs. 38-42). When Christ "gathers out of His kingdom all things" is the time He "purges His floor" (Matt. 3:12).

Some try to assert that "purging His floor" is a reference to Christ burning dross from the lives of Christians—thus purging them of sin or chaff in their lives. This faulty idea continues by assuming that the wheat of Matthew 13 is the good part of individual Christians that remains after the chaff (sin) in their character is burned up.

However, it is obvious that the "floor" of Matthew 3:12 is the same as the "field" of Matthew 13:24 in the parable of the wheat and tares. This parable

explains that God's angels are sent to "baptize" the tares—the wicked who are chaff—with fire! The wheat is gathered into His barn, which is His kingdom.

The parallels between Matthew 3 and Matthew 13 are unmistakable. However, we can examine several additional scriptures and more clearly understand the terms "purge," "fan" and "wind." Keep in mind that a fan is often used to create wind, which brings oxygen to a fire, intensifying it. Of course, fire always purges whatever it burns. John had said that God would baptize with fire as one "whose fan is in His hand."

Consider several important verses!

What is chaff? In Hosea 13:3, God is speaking of unrepentant sinners (vs. 2) when He says, "Therefore they [lost sinners] shall be as the...*chaff* that is driven with the *whirlwind* out of the *floor*..." Jeremiah 51:1-2 further explains the relationship between wind and fanning: "Thus says the LORD; Behold, I will raise up against Babylon [the wicked of the soon-coming, final religious Babylon existing at Christ's Return]...a *destroying wind*; and will send into Babylon *fanners*, that shall *fan* her, and shall empty her land..."

Daniel 2:35 explains these terms further. Notice: "Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the *chaff* of the summer threshing*floors*; and the wind [created by a fan held by God] carried them away..." Obviously, the chaff was carried away to be burned or purged. Ezekiel 20:38 explains *who* Christ will purge when He returns: "And I will purge out from among you *the rebels*, and *them that transgress against Me*...and they shall not enter into the land of Israel..."

We have also previously studied Isaiah 66:24 and Malachi 4:1-3, which both explained that the wicked are burned up *with fire* at the time of God's final wrath on those who have rejected His way of life.

When God says He is going to purge (baptize) with fire, He can also be talking about a process of purifying saints (Dan. 11:35; 12:10; Rev. 3:18). He is speaking of destroying or burning up sinners with fire—the hell fire described in His word and in this booklet. The above scriptures show that He will "fan" the flames so that the fire is hot enough to *completely burn up* and *destroy* all the "chaff" that did not choose to become "wheat" qualified to be in His kingdom. Be thankful that a loving God will not permit miserably unhappy, disobedient and unrepentant rebels to cause further suffering to others, or to continue to suffer themselves, for all eternity.

It should now be clear that NONE should ever desire to be baptized with fire—while ALL should desire, upon repentance, to be baptized with the Holy Spirit!

Mr. Armstrong concluded his article "Do You Want the Baptism by Fire?" with the following statement:

"Surely that settles it. John was speaking to both sinners and those to be saved. When he said Christ shall baptize YOU—the YOU included BOTH. The saved He would baptize with His SPIRIT—the others with the FIRE!"

The following literature expands on topics discussed in this booklet:

- Do the Saved Go to Heaven?
- Is There Life After Death?
- Just What *Is* Salvation?
- What Is Your Reward in the Next Life?
- What Science Will Never Discover About Your Mind
- Who Is the Devil?

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