

Hell? NO!

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INTRODUCTION

"The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29).

When mankind presumes to speak on any subject, he must speak either by past experience, knowledge, human reason, or by revelation. He may speak from a combination of all these factors but ultimately all his ideas must be judged by the ultimate standard of TRUTH -- the "revealed things from God."

In examining the subject of the "immortality of the soul", any commentary must ultimately agree with Divine revelation. This is certainly self-evident simply because mankind is "mortal." Therefore we, as "mortals", cannot comment on "life after death" from a personal, provable, and objective experience. If, for example, we are to understand that man possesses by his very NATURE immortality, the understanding must come from the "mouth of God" and NOT the "heart" man.

All of us are a product of our backgrounds, our cultural moors, our upbringing, and even our longings, fears, hopes and dreams. It is almost impossible to completely divorce oneself from these things as we study Divine revelation. Coupled with this innate difficulty, is the nature of the Bible itself. It is a very ancient book composed of literary standards that are NOT "twenty-first century." The Scriptures are composed of distinct methods of communication. As the Hebrew writer explains,

"God, who at different times and VARIOUS WAYS spoke in times past unto our fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his son..." (Hebrews 1:1-2).

The Holy Writ includes history, poetry, prophecy and its own "peculiar" language of judgment called apocalyptic speech. Consistency of understanding breaks down if we try to apply twentieth century literary standards to apocalyptic language. Examples of this problem will be covered within the framework of this thesis. Subsequently, the successful student MUST -- with all his might -- endeavor to delve into the Scriptures with an open mind, ASSUMING that not everything he learned or was taught in the past is true.

The question this work will attempt to answer is this: **Does the "orthodox" view of the "immortality" of the soul come from the inspired pages of Holy Writ or from a philosophy contrary to Biblical teaching?** The supplemental issues will include the questions concerning the concept of eternal fire, hell, and torment.

It is very easy for all of us to assume that the traditions that we believe in and accept are true. Most of us do not stop to think about where the view came from or from whom. Many of our values are what we call "givens". We've received them from our parents, schools, religion, or some other "authority" figure. We have generally accepted them without question.

From a religious perspective a good example is the "Three Wise Men" of the Christmas saga. These are shown surrounding the baby Jesus as he lies in the manger. Most people are surprised to find out that the Bible does NOT speak of three, but simply uses the general term "wise men" (magi) from the east. It is also not generally known that Jesus was a toddler at the time of their visit and was no longer in a manger. The ignorant and uninformed also assume that Jesus was born on December 25th -- never having read the historical account for themselves.

Just a cursory look at the Scriptures show the fallacy of this "tradition" but most have continued in their benightedness for various reasons. The examples could be multiplied but my point is this. If these superficial facts have been so easily misconstrued and passed down AND accepted as fact by millions -- why not other more important tenets? We can easily see the "anomalies" in other people's thinking. However, many of us are reluctant to examine "sacred cows" common to OUR particular fellowship -- sometimes thinking that we have "arrived".

Along this vein, I feel we have accepted the "orthodox" teaching of the "immortality of the soul" without questioning it. If we dare to look into it, we may be surprised to find that this theology is found -- not in the sacred scriptures -- but in our "sacred" traditions.

Historical Roots of the "IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL"

Philosophy

"...unto the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can

approach unto; whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen" (1 Timothy 6:14-16).

If the above Scripture teaches nothing else, it teaches that man by his nature does NOT possess immortality. Speaking concerning God's nature, the apostle Paul tells Timothy that ONLY GOD HAS (POSSESSES) IMMORTALITY! If only God possesses it then man doesn't have it. The Greek word for "has" is *εχεν* which means to own, have as a possession, either physically or mentally. This Scripture is speaking about God's nature. His essence. He possesses by his nature and being IMMORTALITY. He is the author of it. Immortality can flow only from HIM because He is the ONLY ONE THAT OWNS IT! Immortality, then, if possessed by any human, is borne as a GIFT from God and not innately from within himself. Notice this:

"The wages of sin is death, but the GIFT of God is eternal life THROUGH Jesus Christ" (Romans 6:23).

Not only is immortality a GIFT but it comes only through Jesus, the Christ. It is redemptive in nature. Outside the redemptive scheme of God immortality does NOT exist. Second Timothy puts it like this.

"...according to the power of God; Who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus from times eternal, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light, THROUGH the GOSPEL" (2 Timothy 1:8-10).

"Immortality" was not possessed by man, it was brought to light by the Christ. When and how was it "brought to light"? It was at the time when Christ appeared. It became available when death was ABOLISHED! It was an occurrence that was "part and parcel" of redemption. James says,

"every good and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variation..." (James 1:17).

Since "immortality" is a gift -- it comes from the Author of EVERY good Gift -- which is God. If it has to be given then we don't possess it outside our relationship with Christ.

You may be asking, what is the point? The point is that many of us have assumed that we "have" immortality innately through our created nature. Many have interpreted the statement by God which says, "let us make man in our own image" (Genesis 1:26), to mean or at least to include that our "soul" is immortal. The meaning of this statement, in the writer's opinion, refers to the created ability of man to understand the "things" of God. To judge between good and evil and to exercise his power of choice. He was created with "REASON" and "CHOICE"! God invited man to reason with Him. "Come,

let us reason together, says the Lord" (Isaiah 1:17). Notice how God describes this idea in Genesis 3:22.

"And the Lord God said, behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil."

This may not completely satisfy you but God tells me it can't mean "immortality by nature"! Not if ONLY HE POSSESSES IT! In addition, God told Adam plainly,

"In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, until you return to the ground; for out of it you were taken: For dust you ARE and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19).

Adam's nature was dust! Paul says, "the first man Adam was of the earth -- earthy" (1 Cor. 15:47).

To demonstrate further that God had no intention of creating a "soul" that possessed BY ITS NATURE immortality, he placed in the garden of Eden the "tree of life" (Genesis 2:9).

It is certainly implied that if Adam was not going to cease existing he would have to partake of this tree. Thus, God demonstrated plainly that eternal life was a gift. It was to be enjoyed by the grace of God as our first parents ate from the tree PROVIDED for them. If they HAD possessed immortality by their created nature, why did God have to provide them a source of continued renewal? In light of "orthodox" teaching this questions begs for an answer!

After our first parents sinned, God pronounced the sentence of death upon them, drove them from the garden, and placed a Cherub at the entrance to guard "the way of the tree of life" (Genesis 3:24). God put it this way.

"Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and live forever...." (Genesis 3:22).

Theology of the "immortality of the soul" teaches exactly the doctrine that God intended to arrest -- that man will LIVE FOREVER! His essence, his thoughts, his personality, his "soul", says "orthodoxy", are Immortal. A "proper" theology on this subject will have to deal with the above contradiction!

This view of human innate immortality has caused many doctrinal conclusions that have to be questioned if the view is NOT correct. The entire "orthodox" view of heaven and hell -- eternal, conscious torment or bliss -- has been based on this assumption.

The argument goes something like this. Man by his created nature possesses an immortal soul. Therefore, when a man dies physically, his immortal soul must spend eternity "somewhere". Depending upon your religious background, either in heaven, hell, purgatory, limbo, or ongoing reincarnation.

On the other hand, what if man does not have an immortal soul? Then the conclusions concerning man's state in death would change dramatically. This point cannot be over emphasized. Our presuppositions -- those beliefs we hold to be "givens" -- cause conclusions to be drawn to support these biases. For example, in the mind of an atheist, the theory of the Spontaneous Generation of Life has to be true. Why, you might ask? Because he presupposes (holds to be true) the belief that there is no God. The logical argument would go something akin to this:

Major Premise: There is no God;

Minor Premise: But here we are;

Conclusion: Therefore, the Spontaneous Generation of life must have occurred.

Does this argument "hold water"? Of course it does IF you assume the Major Premise that God does not exist. ASSUMING otherwise brings other results.

The same holds true with the "orthodox" view of the immortality of the soul. The conclusion that the "soul" would spend eternity "somewhere" is true and logical IF the Major Premise is true -- that man possesses by his very NATURE immortality. The syllogism would look something like this:

Major Premise: Man possesses by his created nature an immortal soul or spirit;

Minor Premise: But we all die;

Conclusion: Therefore, his soul or spirit will spend an eternity somewhere.

The key to this discussion is OUR presupposition or assumption. The Biblical verses that seem to speak on the subject would have to be interpreted based upon one's presupposition. On the other hand, if we assume that man does NOT have an eternal soul, then our conclusions based upon the same passages would be vastly different.

Doesn't this make perfect sense? This is the reason the subject is so crucial. A vast amount of "theological" conclusions HAVE been drawn, based upon the Major Premise that man possesses by his nature an "immortal soul".

At this point a person may ask: why, if the Bible does not teach it, have so many scholars concluded that the soul of man is immortal?

As mentioned in the introduction, many assumptions are made concerning popular beliefs that have no basis in fact. We have been guilty of "assuming facts not in evidence," as lawyers like to say it. Every reader could think of many examples in his personal experience. Certainly, scholars are not immune to this intellectually destructive behavior. They, like you and me, are products of their experiences, backgrounds, training, and personal biases. False information has always been a major danger to the seeker of TRUTH. Jesus, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, warned specifically of this peril.

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few that find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matt. 7:13-15).

There is also, at times, a general lack of knowledge of the Old Testament and its figures, especially when dealing with the language of judgment. Many do not treat the Bible -- Old and New Testaments -- as one continuous revelation. Many discount the fact that the New Testament prophets draw repeatedly from Old Testament figures. They borrow the language and subsequently apply this language to current events and situations of their day. Therefore scholars, by the very nature of their influence, bear special watching. They simply may not be right!!

The theology of the "immortality of the soul" falls into this category. It is evident that the Old Testament Scriptures do NOT teach the view of soul immortality. on the contrary, this view can be traced to Plato. It is therefore of Greek rather than of Biblical origin.

Thus the object of this thesis is to prove that "soul immortality" is not taught in the Bible, separate from the supernatural and redemptive intervention of Almighty God.

It has not been uncommon, at any particular time in history, for man to borrow ideas from pagan sources and incorporate them into God's theology. A very good example is the doctrine of forbidding marriage to the "clergy". This idea came from the Greek philosophy of Gnosticism. This deviation was identified and condemned repeatedly by the apostles in the first century church. Paul says the doctrine of "forbidding to marry" was the teaching of demons (1 Tim. 4:1,3). As we can see, however, the Roman Catholic church is still incorporating this doctrine into their theology, believing that it came from God.¹ It may surprise many, but the doctrines of the "immortality of the soul", eternal torment in the fires of hell, and other like doctrines have also been perpetuated by the Catholic Church. These concepts, like gnosticism, originated from Greek and not Biblical thought.

As previously mentioned, the philosophy of the "immortality of the soul" sprang from the writings of Plato. Plato was a Greek philosopher who lived around 400 BC. Plato, like many before and after him, was interested in "personal survival" after death. Since everyone knows -- "experientially" that "all men are mortal" -- argumentation needed developing that would make credible the idea of "survival". Plato expositied three ways to circumvent the massive difficulties of mortality. They could be classified as the Immortal - Soul Doctrine, The Reconstitution Doctrine, and The Shadow - Man Doctrine. It is not my intention to repeat Plato's theory but to demonstrate where the theory originated. If you have an interest in reading it for yourself, it can be found in Plato's *PHAEDO* and *PHAEDRUS*.

¹ John refers here to marriage of priests. The Catholic Church not only accepts marriage for others but promotes it as a sacrament. Although the issue has been reconsidered several times in Catholic history, the Church will not allow its priests to marry.

I realize that just because the doctrine existed in Greek thought, that doesn't necessarily prove that it is unbiblical. However, it helps to show that the philosophy could have other "ancestries" besides the sacred text.

THE BIBLE AND THE "SOUL"

"Soul" in the Old Testament

"All those who are fat upon the earth shall eat and worship: all those who go down to the dust shall bend before him: and none can keep alive his own soul" (Psalms 22:29).

As previously mentioned, many assume that the scriptures teach that man possesses by his nature an "immortal soul". That this teaching is clearly untrue can be demonstrated very easily. As the above verse states, "none can keep alive his own soul." Why should one try to keep alive that which is by nature immortal? Isn't that a valid question? It begs for a reasonable answer!! The Scriptures speak, "Only he [God] possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, which no man has seen or can see" (1 Timothy 6:16).

If God doesn't keep your "soul" alive friend, you can kiss it good-bye!

The word that is translated "soul" throughout the KJV is the Hebrew word *nephesh*, which is defined as a breathing creature -- man or beast. It is derived from the Hebrew word *naphash* which means "to breathe". There are two different words for "spirit". These are the Hebrew words *nishma* and *ruwach* and can be translated breath, spirit, or wind depending upon the context and/or translators.

If we compare Genesis 1:20 to Genesis 1:30, we see that both man and beast are referred to as "living souls". In other words, man does not contain a "soul," he IS a "soul". The KJV uses the word "creature" and "life" instead of "soul" but the same Hebrew word *nephesh* is used. The Bible also includes animals within the category of "souls" in Numbers 31:28. The children of Israel were to take "one soul out of five hundred, of humankind and of the beasts, and of the asses, and of the sheep."

At the end of the New Testament animals are also included in this idea of "soul". "...And every living soul died in the sea" (Rev. 16:3). In Job 41:21, even the "Leviathan" is called a soul (*nephesh*) although the KJV translates the word "breath".

"His breath (*nephesh*) kindles coals, and flame goes out of his mouth."

It would have been better translated, "His soul (*nephesh*) kindles coals..." It is the only time *nephesh* was translated breath in the entire KJV Bible.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:13, the apostle Paul alludes to the three elements of our humanity -- soul, spirit, and body. In Genesis 2:7, Scripture puts it this way, *"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."

If we break this verse down, we can see the three elements of our nature" *"God formed man from the dust of the ground."* At this point we have a body. It is lifeless but nevertheless it is a body. James said, "... the body without the spirit is dead...." God had to "vitalize" this lifeless form so He, *"breathed in his nostrils the breath (**nishma**) of life"*.

The Hebrew word for "breathe" is *naphach* which means to puff, inflate, blow hard, kindle, to expire. The word translated breath can be and often is translated "spirit". It could actually be translated that God breathed into his nostrils the spirit of life. Many have erroneously concluded that this "spirit" was a conscious, thinking, essence in its own right, independent of the body. We shall see that this is not what the scriptures teach.

A startling thing happened at this point, *"...man BECAME a living SOUL"*.

What were the "ABC's" necessary to make up this "living soul", this "unit"? A body and breath or spirit from God. With this combination of body AND spirit or breath, you now have a living "soul". Therefore the "soul" is the UNIT of body and spirit or breath from God.

From this knowledge, it is evident that once the separation of body and spirit takes place, the soul ceases to exist. "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26). The necessary inference is that the "soul" is not immortal. When the spirit of life leaves the body, the UNIT or "soul" ceases to exist. In other words, "you can't have one without the other." The "soul" consists of a body and spirit! You will find this is the continual teaching of the Scriptures.

Let's look at a few examples. The Scripture at the beginning of this chapter echoes this theme.

"All those going down to the dust will bend down, and no one will ever preserve his own soul alive" (Psalm 22:29).

This verse strongly states that man has no power to preserve his SOUL ALIVE. Why? Because the body that makes up a vital and necessary part, returns to dust AND *"...the spirit returns to God who gave it"* (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

"The soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20).

These passages are a direct commentary on the MORTALITY and not the immortality of the soul. Take a brief look at Joshua 10:28-39. I counted seven places where "souls" were spoken of as being killed or destroyed. In the prophesy concerning the death of Jesus the Bible says, "He poured out his soul to the very death" (Isaiah 53:12). Jesus, as our atoning substitute had to die! He had to die in our stead. He had to die in order

for us to have life. He had to pay sin's wage, which is death (Romans 6:23). The Hebrew writer says that Jesus "TASTED DEATH for every man" (Hebrews 2:9).

At this point we are tempted to make a distinction between "physical" death and "spiritual" death. It is the author's contention that God makes no "real" distinction between the two. What kind of death did Jesus taste for us? There is certainly no distinction made in His case. If a distinction is made, it must be supplied by our assumptions. It is the SENTENCE OF DEATH that is implied. This sentence was carried out on Jesus. Whether we personally cease to exist immediately when we are counted as sinners is NOT the question. Our God "calls things that are not as though they are" (Romans 4:17).

So when God told Adam, *"the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die"* (Genesis 2:17), He meant that they would come under the sentence of death! For all intents and purposes -- in God's mind -- the couple were dead. This would have been his final end WITHOUT THE DIRECT INTERVENTION OF GOD!²

We have been led into accepting a theology of "spiritual death" and "physical death" by our assumption that we have an immortal "essence" apart from our UNIT or soul. This calls for the interpretation of "spiritual death" in place of "physical death" if one is technically still "alive". In Ephesians 2:1, Paul says, "And you were dead in trespasses and sins." Since we all know that Paul was referring to people who had never literally been in the grave, we have concluded that their death was something other than physical. Of course it was! But reader, wouldn't the assumption that Paul was referring to them as being under "THE SENTENCE OF DEATH" work even better?³

It is this argument -- that we "were dead" -- that has led some to create the doctrine of the "direct operation of the Holy Spirit" to make possible a response from faith from those the scriptures describe as "dead." In this view, a "resurrection" must take place BEFORE "faith" is even possible. In their argument, dead men cannot hear. Dead men cannot believe. Dead men cannot have faith!

In the author's opinion, when the scripture says, "you who were dead in trespasses and sins", it means that the law had brought the sentence of death upon them all! Men who are under death's sentence can hear, believe, and obey whatever demands are put upon them to escape the sentence. So God's intervention was required. How was it made available? Through the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). If the Christ had not died, the sentence would have been carried out! It's as simple as that. When Jesus "tasted death" on our behalf, he made possible our survival from the grave. When he paid sin's

² On this point, John and I disagree. I believe that Adam and Eve died immediately when they ate the fruit, and that this death was in a metaphorical sense. The couple lost their innocence. This minor point of disagreement has no bearing on John's premise. Jesus' "tasting death" clearly refers to physical death. In fact, there is no need to bring up "spiritual death" at this point, because it can otherwise be demonstrated that when the body of an evil person dies, so does the inner person, or spirit. For this, though, we need the later understanding of "spirit," and John is addressing the Old Testament at this point.

³ Here, I see a metaphor similar but not identical to that used in Genesis. Paul does not mean that they were "dead" in any real sense but uses "you were dead" as a metaphor for their condition.

wage, he died. If dying "dead in sin" means eternal, conscious, banishment and torment, then Jesus didn't really pay the penalty. He was in the grave only three days!⁴

As we have already seen, our spirit is something completely different from our "soul". It is the life force that sustains our body. It is the "oxygen" of our being. It encompasses every cell and fabric of our essence. Without it, the body is dead and the "soul" or UNIT ceases to exist. The body decays and turns back into dust.⁵

The preacher of Ecclesiastes put it this way:

"...the dust returns to the earth... and the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Ecc. 12:7). As far as death is concerned, HUMAN nature has no advantage over the animals.

"For the fate of mankind and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath (*ruwach*), and man has no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the human spirit (*ruwach*) goes upward and the spirit (*ruwach*) of animals goes downward to the earth?" (Ecclesiastes 3:19-22).

In the above verses, I have put the Hebrew word in parentheses next to the English. As you can see, the same word is translated breath the first time and then translated spirit the next two. Contextually, the word should have been translated spirit all three times. This is the normal usage of this Hebrew word. It is translated spirit 237 times and breath only 31 times.⁶

It is easy to see, in this instance, the assumptions of the translators who being Church of England men, believed in the "immortality of the soul". It should say, speaking of both man and animals, that "...as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same spirit." Those of us who have assumed that we possess "immortality" have always gone to great lengths to explain these scriptures away. One thing we know, however, is that the Holy Spirit of Ecclesiastes didn't teach that man possessed by his NATURE immortality!

⁴ Or we might say that one is either "dead" when not following God or "alive" when following him. It is the teachings of Jesus that make someone "alive."

⁵ In the Old Testament, "spirit" is generally "the breath of life," whereas a "soul" is normally the equivalent of "being" or of natural life. In later Jewish thought -- as well as in Greek thought -- both "soul" and "spirit" came to have other meanings.

⁶ Ecclesiastes, which was not part of the canon officially until after the time of Jesus, is a good example of later Jewish thought. Here, the "spirit" is everything about a living being which is not physical. In this later thought, the "soul" becomes the source or location of the emotions and is part of the "spirit." This is evidenced in some early passages, but most especially later, as in Dan 2:1 ("his spirit was troubled"), Pv 1:23, ("I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you,") and numerous other passages. In Da 5:12, "an excellent spirit" refers to Daniel's rational capacity. Thus, the "spirit" is everything about someone that is not physical. John is correct in noting that even in later thought, the spirit dies when the body dies, unless there is action on God's part. Consequently, there were schools of thought in Jesus' time which did not acknowledge any form of afterlife, even though they had a complete Torah and Prophets.

You remember that God said to Adam, "you ARE dust." (Gen. 3:19). In this verse God was emphasizing man's "essential" nature -- Dust!⁷ Now the presupposition that man has an "immortal soul" has forced many to conclude that the phrase, "spirit returns to God who gave it," refers to some conscious, mental essence that lives on "somewhere" waiting for the resurrection. However, if we understand that the "spirit" is simply the life giving force designed to "vitalize" a dead body -- man or animal -- then we will not be forced to "strain" the text to make it mean something that it doesn't.

This verse brings home to us the idea that our hope for the future lies **exclusively and entirely** on the power of Almighty God. Only by HIS power can the spirit or life-force be given back so that we may live again.

*"You hide your face, they are troubled: You take away their breath (**ruwach**), they die, and return to dust. You send forth your spirit (**ruwach**) they are created: and you renew the face of the ground" (Psalm 104:29-30).*

Remember, assumptions can mean everything in theology. In the New Testament, the Greek word translated "soul" is ψυχη (psuche). It is "variously" interpreted by modern Greek scholars depending upon their presupposition of man's nature. Since we know that the Bible is continuous revelation, then we must accept that whatever the "soul" meant in the Old Testament, it means in the New.⁸ To demonstrate this, "soul" is also used to refer to both animals and humans in the New Testament. In Revelation 16:3, "...every living soul (ψυχη) in the sea died."

"Soul" in the New Testament

The word translated "spirit" in the Greek New Testament is πνευμα. The word is translated "wind" in John 3:8, and many other places. It is also the word used when referring to the Holy Spirit (πνευμα). It is translated spirit as well when referring to the human spirit. Both ψυχη and πνευμα are used in Hebrews 4:12, describing the power of the Word of God.

"The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword; piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul (ψυχη) and spirit (πνευμα)...."

There is nothing found in the New Testament that would negate the conclusion that the "soul" is the UNIT consisting of body and spirit.⁹

⁷ Or at least Adam's.

⁸ This is where John and I disagree, but our disagreement is not fatal to his or my common understanding that the "soul" is mortal by nature.

⁹ More accurately in my opinion, there are passages in the NT which share one of the common OT meanings of "soul," which in Greek is called ψυχη. The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* notes, "Only in individual cases can one decide whether the choice of the word (ψυχη in the Septuagint) is due primarily to its association with vital force or with soul as the seat of the spirit or mind." (IX, p. 632) TDNT notes that in Jewish Greek the soul was not viewed as entirely disconnected from the body but was

As previously shown, God "abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light THROUGH the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). Immortality was connected by the apostle Paul with the FUTURE, new body NOT with man's nature. Listen to his description:

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that what is MORTAL may be swallowed up of life" (2 Cor. 5:1-4).

Many have interpreted this to prove that we have some permanent "essence" in addition to the unit, "groaning" to be clothed. If we assume that we possess by nature "immortality" these verses might possibly seem to help. My question to this would be, if we DO have an eternal "essence" that is immortal and lives on, why the quest for another "tabernacle". Who needs it? It is not difficult to draw the conclusion -- minus our assumptions -- that we DO NOT possess immortality! That immortality is inseparable from a NEW and Heavenly body! That our whole, entire being or soul is the "entity" that's groaning, longing to be immortalized! This is plainly taught!

If we expect to enjoy "immortality of the soul" we will have to receive from God a body that is incorruptible and eternal. This is necessary so that the UNIT (or soul) -- made up of body and spirit -- can escape death. Remember, "The first man Adam was made a living SOUL, the last Adam (Christ) was made a life giving spirit.... The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). Paul explains the order of this occurrence in 1 Cor. 15:35ff. He tells us that *"As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly"* (verse 49). This will be accomplished at the "last trump" (verse 52). The Greek word for image in this verse is "εικον". It denotes an exact representation. It is the same word used to describe Christ in Colossians 1:15. "He is the image of the invisible God." Jesus carried all the attributes of Deity. Man, on the other hand, carries all the qualities of mortality.

The context of these verses is very important. Paul is emphasizing man's mortality! He stresses the necessity for a resurrection to obtain immortality. The subject had arisen in

instead connected with it. But the term ψυχη, particularly in the NT, is not always equal to the Hebrew usage of "soul" = "being" or "life." The souls (ψυχαι) of people are led away by different teachings (Ac 15:24). The emotion of suspense is connected with the soul in Jn 10:24. The soul, or seat of the emotions, can be strengthened to resist evil (Ac 14:22). It is the soul that experiences joy, love, and sorrow, such as "My soul is troubled to the point of death," which does not express Jesus' perception of death but his painful feelings.

However, those who live by their emotions are called, literally, "soulical" (ψυχικός), and it is the soul (natural life) which must be hated in this life in order to gain the next (Jn 12:25, where it is traded in the next life for ζωη). Thus, TDNT concludes, "The ψυχη is not an immortal soul." Since "soul" is connected with physical life but can be made -- by God alone -- to continue beyond physical life, it "is constantly given by God" and therefore cannot exist without his involvement. At the point of death, it ceases to exist, unless we become part of the afterlife ("resurrection").

Corinth by some who were teaching that there was no resurrection. Paul makes the statement that "if there is no resurrection from the dead, then we of all men are most MISERABLE" (1 Cor. 15:19).

Listen to the full force of the apostle's argument:

Now if Christ is preached that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ whom He did not raise up -- if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (1 Cor. 15:12-18).

My question would be, Paul why are you making such a big deal out of this resurrection "thing"? Don't you know that we possess an "essence" and personality that lives on regardless of our body? Who needs one anyway?

The "immortality" referred to in this chapter is linked with the NEW body to be received at the "last trump". It doesn't really make any difference to my argument when the "last trump" is -- immortality will begin at that time. This is called the resurrection. Paul says that if there is no resurrection, then even those who have fallen asleep in Christ (Christians) have PERISHED. They have ceased to exist!! He tells us why. They are still in their sins. They are yet under the sentence of death! We know that the "wages of sin is DEATH" (Romans 6:23). In other words, excluding the resurrection, Christians have no advantage over the unbeliever! Paul says further that "...if the dead do not rise, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Cor. 15:32). Paul continues with his argument as he speaks of the resurrection:

"Now I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'" (1 Corinthians 15:50-55)

Reader, let me ask you again. Does this sound as though we possess by our nature immortality? Does it sound like there is some "essence" that is going to survive the grave? Immortality is to be enjoyed in the resurrection and not before. Verse 55 of the above quote makes it plain that both death and Hades are destroyed at the resurrection.

Until then, the dead are in Hades or the grave. And "the dead know nothing" (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Jesus was "proved to be the son of God WITH POWER, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). The power to do what? The POWER to raise us up! The POWER to ransom us from sin's claim -- death! The power to commute the sentence of death!! Paul says that if this didn't happen (Christ's resurrection), then all who have died in Christ have perished. This word in the Greek is *απολλυμι*, which means to destroy fully.

If Christ didn't rise then it would be stupid to live for anyone other than ourselves. If Christ didn't rise there would be no logical reason for self-denial UNLESS IT PLEASED YOU PERSONALLY!! Paul says,

"If in the manner of men, I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me? If the dead do not rise..." (1 Corinthians 15:32).

He makes it plain that self sacrifice ("in the manner of men") as a mortal without the hope of immortality is of no advantage whatsoever.

Reader, it is the necessary logical conclusion that if we have an eternal essence that lives on -- whether in or out of the grave -- this statement by Paul would be meaningless. That eternal "essence" could receive the reward of selfless living for God without the need for a new and resurrected body!

These Scriptures and others tell us that death is final without the intervention of God. The theology that would have some "mysterious" part of our being living on -- apart from the body -- is not found in the Holy Writ. As before stated, it comes from a presupposition stemming from Greek thought coupled with a sometimes general ignorance of Old and New Testament figures and not from the Bible.

THE BIBLE AND "HELL"

"Because you will not leave my soul in hell, Nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27, KJV).

One of the conclusions that is derived from the presupposition that man has by nature an "immortal soul" is the concept of "hell" being a place of fiery torment. The assumption of "immortality" coupled with the figurative use of "fire" in the Bible has led many to this conclusion.

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "The Roman Catholic Church teaches that hell will last forever; its suffering will have no end." This teaching, the Encyclopedia goes on to say, "is still held by many conservative Protestant groups." We also know that many Hindus, Buddhists and Muhammadans opine that hell is a place of torment. This teaching has been a principle motivation of "salvation by fear".

It is therefore necessary to ask the question: did Almighty God create such a place of torment? One thing is for sure. God reacted very negatively when the children of Israel followed the pagan example of burning their children in the fire.

"They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, in order to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, a thing that I had not commanded and that had not come into my mind" (Jeremiah 7:31).

It simply "blew God's mind" that His people would get involved with such a grievous abomination! Yet, "orthodoxy" attributes to Him the will and intention of tormenting the lost in fire forever. You see that our presuppositions can cause us to attribute things to God that He would never, EVER consider.

Let's take a look at the Hebrew word *she'ol* and the Greek word ᾠδης (Hades). In the Bible, the King James Version translates the Hebrew word *she'ol* "hell" thirty-one times, "grave" 30 times, and "pit" three times. In the New Testament, the King James Version translates the Greek word ᾠδης "hell" all eleven times that it appears -- Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; and Revelation 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14. The Catholic Douay Version translates *she'ol* all sixty four times as "hell" in the Old Testament.

It's easy to prove that the Hebrew word *she'ol* and the Greek word ᾠδης have the same meaning. If you look at Psalm 16:10 it says, *"For thou didst not leave my soul in hell (she'ol)" --KJV.*

This Psalm is quoted by Peter in Acts 2:31, in referring to the death of Jesus: *"He foreseeing this spake concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was his soul left in hell (Hades) nor did his flesh see corruption." -- KJV.*

Whatever hell is, Jesus' soul spent three days there. If your theology has "hell" as a place of torment and the soul being immortal, then you MUST conclude that God tortured his son there.

The question is, what kind of place is *she'ol* or Hades? The fact that the King James Version translates *she'ol* three different ways -- "hell", "grave", and the "pit" -- shows that our interpretation can be questionable. In the same way, since Hades and *she'ol* are used interchangeably, they must also carry the same meaning. Let's look at some Biblical examples of the usage. I will be substituting the Hebrew word *she'ol* and the Greek word ᾠδης (Hades) in place of their English translations for clarity.

When Jacob was mourning for his son Joseph, whom he thought had been killed, he said:

"I shall go down mourning to my son into she'ol" (Genesis 37:35).

The KJV translates *she'ol* "grave" and the Douay translates it "hell". Do you think that Jacob believed that his son Joseph was in hell being tormented there? Did he want to join him in a place like that? Or do you think that he simply believed that Joseph was dead and that he felt like joining him?

Job, a righteous man, cried out in his anguish,

"O that in *she'ol* (KJV "the grave", Douay "hell") You would conceal me, ... that you would set a time limit for me and remember me!" (Job 14:13).

Just think of it! If *she'ol* means fire and torment, would Job had wanted to wait for God there? He was wishing to be RELIEVED from his pain. He was in so much pain that the "grave" looked like a bargain.

In all places where *she'ol* occurs in the Bible it is rarely associated with life, activity or torment. Rather, except for unique usage that will be mentioned later, it is linked with death and INACTIVITY of any kind. For example, in Ecclesiastes 9:10, we read:

"All that your hand finds to do, do with all your power, for there is no work nor devising nor knowledge nor wisdom in *she'ol*, (KJV "grave", Douay "hell") the place to which you are going."

This Scripture makes it plain that not only is the PHYSICAL person dead, but also his "devising", "knowledge", and "wisdom" are also extinguished in the grave. There is not some conscious "essence" floating around someplace. The Psalmist continues this theme by stating,

"For in death there is no remembrance of you; In *she'ol* (KJV "the grave") who will give you thanks?" (Psalm 6:5).

If there is an essence that lives on, it will not be remembering God. This was spoken by David, a man of faith. In Psalm 88:11, the "grave" is equated with DESTRUCTION. "*Shall your loving kindness be declared in she'ol (KJV "grave")? Or your faithfulness in destruction.*"

No declarations are going on in *she'ol*! This is an example of Hebrew "parallelism". The first and second sentences say the same things in different words. In this verse "grave" is parallel with "destruction". You can't be destroyed and live on at the same time. Hezekiah knew that *she'ol* was the end of all consciousness and he wanted to live on.

"For *she'ol* cannot praise you, DEATH cannot celebrate you: those who go down into the pit cannot hope for your truth" (Isaiah 38:18).

In this verse, *she'ol* (KJV "the grave"), death, and the pit are all used interchangeably. Yet some would continue to believe that our "essence" lives on. In Isaiah 14:11, we find that worms¹⁰ are in *she'ol*.

Remember, this is the same word translated "hell" and corresponds to Hades in the Greek which is also translated "hell". The conclusion is that *she'ol* and Hades do not refer to a place of torment -- fiery or otherwise -- but the common grave of all mankind AND the animals. We can see that both the righteous and the unrighteous "go to hell" (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:31). We will deal with the other Greek words translated hell in the next chapter.¹¹

THE BIBLE'S SYMBOL OF JUDGMENT

*"For a fire is kindled in my anger, and shall burn to the lowest **she'ol** (KJV hell); It shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains"* (Deuteronomy 32:22).

The introductory verse above, is a perfect example of the Bible's use of fire in the context of judgment. In this Deuteronomy context, God is looking at Israel's past and future disobedience and telling them what is going to happen. This "burning" of the lowest hell, the earth, and the mountains is described in the surrounding verses. Let's walk through a few of them:

Verse 23 -- "I will heap disasters on them."

Verse 24 -- "They shall be wasted with HUNGER, devoured with pestilence."

Verse 25 -- "The SWORD will destroy outside."

The explanation of all this is found in the remainder of the chapter. God would have allowed Israel's enemies to completely destroy them but for his mercy and promise to Abraham. In the middle of this description of judgment, God introduces the graphic concept of "fire" into the prophecy. Everything was going to be burned. *she'ol*, the earth, and the mountains. Remember what I said in the introduction. The Bible is a "Jewish" book and it contains its own peculiar language of judgment. Fire is "part and parcel" of this language.

Was he planning a LITERAL burning? How did God "burn" them? He sent hunger, pestilence, and the sword on them!! That's HOW he was going to "burn" them! This point cannot be over emphasized. Let's look at few more examples. In Isaiah 34:1-11,

¹⁰ *maggots*

¹¹ *In fact, changes in the English language have contributed to this misunderstanding of "hell." Both the word "hell" and the word "Hades" come from words meaning "concealment." "Hell" indicated the ground and also any place of discard or concealment. Thus, the term "hellbox" was used of a box wherein printers discarded damaged or obsolete type. Carl Anderson reports usage of "hell" as a place where potatoes are grown -- i.e., the ground. As The Divine Comedy and writings like it came into vogue, hell as a place of torment became the most popular meaning of the word.*

the entire gamut of "apocalyptic" speech is ran in reference to God's judgment upon Edom. Let's stroll through it:

"Come near, you nations, to hear, and heed, you people! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it. The world and all things that come forth from it. For the indignation of the Lord is against all nations, and his fury against all the armies. He has utterly destroyed them, he has given them over to the slaughter. Also their slain shall be thrown out, Their stench shall rise from their corpses, And the mountains shall be melted with their blood. All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll; and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falls off from the vine, ...For my sword shall be bathed in heaven; behold, it shall come down upon Edom, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of the Lord is filled with blood... or the Lord hath a sacrifice in Bozrah (capital of Edom), and a great slaughter in the land of Edom... For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompense for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch, it shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever; from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever, But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it; the owl also and the raven shall dwell in it...

The "universal" language of this passage such as "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved" applies, in this instance, to Edom ONLY. This apocalyptic language will confuse the reader who is not careful to stay in the context. You must allow the prophet to tell you who or what the prophecy is referring. Isaiah identifies Edom very plainly several times in this chapter. Verse 5 tells us it's Edom. Verse 6 tells us it's Edom. If anyone thinks this refers to something else, he says so from his OWN mind and not from the context. So let's look at this "language".

We have mountains "melting with blood" in verse 3. We have the starry host of heaven dissolving in verse 4. We have the heavens rolling up as a scroll in verse 4. We have the sword of the Lord filled with blood in verse 6. In verse 9, Edom's streams are burning pitch, its dust is brimstone. It's going to burn forever in verse 10. It will never be traveled through in verse 10. In verse 11, it will be inhabited by pelicans, porcupines, owls, and ravens. God uses all of this language JUST for Edom!!

Now consider this. If you take all these "figures" LITERALLY they contradict themselves. For instance, if the land is going to burn forever, how are the porcupine, owl, pelican and raven going to live there?? In asbestos suits?? Here, in this text, God talks about judgment on EDOM by describing a huge sacrifice, verses 5-7, and throws in fire, burning, and brimstone for good measure. He even talks of heaven dissolving. This is the common language of judgment and is not to be literalized!

In the previous chapter -- Isaiah 33 -- God used the same kind of language to speak of Jerusalem's destruction. God's breath would be as devouring fire, verse 11. The people would be like burning of lime, verse 12. The sinners would not be able to dwell with the devouring fire of verse 14, and these were everlasting burnings. Do you know who destroyed both Edom and Jerusalem?

BABYLON! God said they would, and they did. We have the record of this in both secular and Biblical history. Look closely at Jeremiah:

"I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to me. And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given to serve him. So all nations shall serve him and his son and his son's son, until the time of his land comes; and then many nations and great kings shall make him serve them. And it shall be, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and which will not put its neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation I will punish, says the Lord, with the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand." (Jer 27:5-9)

Babylon was the tool God used to "burn" Edom and Jerusalem. Babylon was the weapon God used to "dissolve the heavens". Later God used similar language to describe judgment upon Babylon:

"Behold they (Babylon) shall be stubble, the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; It shall not be a coal to be warmed by, nor a fire to sit before" (Isaiah 47:14).

Are you getting the idea? This is just God's way of saying "a bad day at black rock". It's God's way of saying that Edom would be destroyed and not rise again. He said it by describing it as "burning" forever! As you can see, it is the "language" used to describe Babylon's discomfort also. This fire was not to be the kind that you sit by and warm yourself. This fire was going to consume them. Isaiah had already told us the nation that would accomplish Babylon's demise -- the Medes (Isaiah 13:17). This is very common in the Bible and the examples can be multiplied. I refer you to the appendix on "fire" scriptures.

In the opening example of Deuteronomy 32:22, God described all the things that he would do to disobedient Israel -- tossing in the language of "fire" and "burning." In Israel's history, God brought many disasters upon them: war, plundering, famine, and plagues of locusts -- just to name a few. Their final Old Testament destruction came at the hands of Babylon, in circa 587 B.C. The language of "fire" and "burning" could be applied "figuratively" to all of these judgments. The Jews were well acquainted with this kind of language from their prophets. When they heard terms like "coming of the Lord",

"everlasting fire", "stars falling from heaven" and "coming in the clouds" they didn't think LITERALLY. They thought of LOCAL and NATIONAL judgment. So when John the Baptist describes a future destruction of Jerusalem and Judaism, he borrows these familiar Old Testament Figures. Notice how John knew his audience.

You generation of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the FIRE. I baptize you with water for repentance but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and FIRE. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with UNQUENCHABLE FIRE" (Matthew 3:7-12).

They were expecting another destruction according to Daniel 9:24-27,¹² This future destruction was connected with the coming Messiah. This judgment was to be associated with the "abomination of Desolation" (Compare Daniel 9:24-27 & Matthew 24:1-35, especially verse 15). In Daniel's prophecy, both salvation and judgment were in view. John the Baptist refers to both when speaking to that "GENERATION of vipers." Salvation would be found in Christ's "baptism with the Holy Spirit." This pointed forward to Pentecost and the establishment of the church. The "baptism of fire" was the opposite -- Judgment upon the unbelieving Jews and Judaism. Notice that the ax was ALREADY LYING at the root of the trees.

Again, the figures of "fire" and "burning" are used. In Matthew 24:1-37, Jesus includes the "figures" of "stars falling" and "heavenly powers shaken" and the whole range of apocalyptic speech. However, he tells everyone listening plainly that it applied to THEIR time and THEIR generation NOT thousands of years in the future.

"Truly I tell you, THIS GENERATION will not pass away until all these things have taken place" (verse 34).

This prophecy was fulfilled in 70 A.D.! The Romans were the "burners" THAT time. Again, this is the common, familiar, language of JUDGMENT.¹³

What is the point? The point is that the term "everlasting fire" is God's way of saying He will judge the wicked. It is not to be taken literally. The results of "eternal fire" are everlasting, NOT the action! Listen to Jude's commentary on this point.

¹² or, similar to that described by Daniel

¹³ For more about how the predictions in the New Testament were fulfilled between 66 and 74 AD, see the paper, [It's ALL Over](#).

"As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 7).

Is Sodom and Gomorrah still burning? Well, is Edom still burning? Is Israel still burning? No, the RESULTS were eternal not the action (burning)!

So, in the New Testament, when Jesus wanted to use a figure for judgment, he didn't use the term Hades which corresponds to *she'ol* of the Old Testament, but Gehenna. This term is used eleven times in the New Testament -- Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; and James 3:6. This was an actual place. In the Old Testament, Gehenna was called the "valley of Hinnom." This is where the Israelites burned their sons and daughters in the fire to pagan gods (Jeremiah 7:31). In time, the good king Josiah completely destroyed the place (2 Kings 23:10). It was turned into a huge garbage dump.

So during Jesus' time, Gehenna was Jerusalem's garbage dump. Fires were kept burning there by the adding of sulfur (brimstone) to consume the garbage. *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* explains:

"It became the common laystall (garbage dump) of the city, where the dead bodies of criminals, and the carcasses of animals, and every kind of filth was cast."

Jesus could point to a fitting symbol of eternal judgment in the eyesight of those Jewish leaders that were in constant opposition. It was a place where the "the fire was not quenched, and the worm died not" (Mark 9:43-44). You can see the similarity of language. Edom would be turned into burning pitch (Isaiah 34:1-11). Wicked Jerusalem would be devoured with eternal fire (Isaiah 33:8-12). Babylon suffered the vengeance of fire. Nothing different here in the New Testament. The proper understanding of the use of "fire" in the language of judgment coupled with the knowledge that man by his nature does NOT possess immortality, should clear up many problems in our theology.

There are several "figures" regarding the end of the wicked. If these "figures" are LITERALIZED they will contradict themselves. For example, in Mark 9:43, you have both "unquenchable fire" and "worms" that don't die. I would say these are durable worms, how about you? In 2 Thessalonians 1:9, the term "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord" is used. Is this literal or figurative? If the wicked are going to be tormented forever, this verse must be FIGURIZED! You CAN'T torment what is destroyed. In Matthew 13:42, the wicked were to be thrown into a "furnace of fire". This is described in another place to be everlasting. However, Jesus in Matthew 22:13, speaks of the wicked as being thrown into "outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Now which is it? Is it a furnace of fire or outer darkness? Perhaps it will be a "dark" fire. We also have "teeth". Are these teeth literal or figurative?

The problem arises when the language describes "consciousness". Even though we must agree that these terms are figurative, we have trouble dealing with the idea of an ultimate END and an awareness at the same time. It is not unusual for God to use words from the grave to make his point. God, in Isaiah 14, describing the "taunt" against the king of Babylon, has "voices" speaking from *she'ol*.

Then you shall take up this taunt against the king of Babylon... she'ol from beneath is moved for you to meet you at your coming: it stirs up the dead for you, even all the chief ones of the earth; it has raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations. All they shall speak and say unto you, Are you also as weak as we? Have you become like us? Your pomp is brought down to she'ol, and the noise of your viols: the worm is spread under you, and the worms cover you... (Isaiah 14:4-11).

God has those in the grave speaking to the king of Babylon. What are they saying? They are telling him that he is going to end up in the same condition as they -- Dead and covered with maggots.

In the Luke 16 account of the "Rich man and Lazarus", you have a "conscious" tormenting and speaking from Gehenna. This can be explained from the vantage point of what Jesus is trying to teach. He is going to make a point that even if someone would return from the dead, the Jews would NOT believe. If they wouldn't believe the scriptures, even a miracle wouldn't convince them. In order to teach this point, he had to converse with those who had suffered judgment. In Genesis 4:10, God says that Abel's blood is speaking to Him from the ground in order to prove that Cain is responsible for his brother. In Revelation, God refers to the "souls underneath the altar" crying out for revenge (Revelation 6:9). This figure is used to show that God will not forget those who have sacrificed their lives for the cause of Christ.

These examples all allude to a "speaking from death" to illustrate certain truths. Was Abel's blood literally speaking from the ground? Were those in *she'ol* actually and literally welcoming the king of Babylon? Was the "Rich man" really speaking from Gehenna? Were the slain souls literally crying for vengeance? In the light of the Bible's common use of figures, must we literalize all these passages?

Now we come to the "ultimate" example: the "lake of fire" of Revelation. Is this a figurative lake or literal? No one will deny that Revelation contains many symbols. For the most part, however, the "orthodox" assume that the "lake of fire" is a literal place. They assume that the phrase "smoke of their torment" to mean that God is going to "barbecue" the lost forever. They even see a final judgment in Chapters 20 and following. However, the prophet says that the vision of Revelation was "national" in scope and FIRST CENTURY FULFILLED!

Jesus tells John to write the things which would "shortly take place" (1:1) and that the time was "near" (1:3). In case you had become confused by the figures in the vision, the historical time frame of the prophecy is restated twice in the final chapter, verses 6 and

10. In verse ten it says, *"Don't seal up the prophecy of this book for the time is AT HAND"*.

Those who look for a MODERN FULFILLMENT do so because they fail to deal with the "figurative" nature of the language.¹⁴

What then, is the "lake of fire" mentioned in the book of Revelation? It is a similar figure of judgment corresponding to the use of "fire" throughout the sacred text. It parallels closely the verse of Deuteronomy 32:22. In that verse God speaks of "burning" to the lowest hell (*she'ol*). This verse, along with the verses in Revelation, symbolizes DEATH and destruction. Neither could mean a place of conscious torment for several reasons. One, in Revelation, even death and Hades were thrown into it (Revelation 20:14). From this lake there is no resurrection. So death and Hades will be no more. We know that death and Hades cannot be tormented or burned but they could be and would be rendered powerless.

"...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your sting, O Hades where is your victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55).

The word torment is also used in connection with jail and captivity. Jesus said, *"And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the TORMENTORS, till he should pay all that was due unto him"* (Matthew 18:34).

Those who go into the "lake of fire" and suffer the "second death" are put into the custody of death (the eternal jailer) never to live again. In the vision, the lake was the final end of the "beast" and the "false prophet" that persecuted the church. So they, like Sodom and Gomorrah, suffered the "vengeance of eternal fire"!

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16), the symbol of "fire" is also present. Jesus, speaking to the religious Jewish leaders, shows that there will be a final reckoning for all those who reject him. Some would, because of their assumption concerning man's nature, literalize these figures. What figures, you may ask? The figure of a physical body and tongue. The figure of one drop of water cooling the "burning" man. The figure of a visual vicinity between Gehenna and "Abraham's Bosom". The figure of "Abraham's Bosom" itself.

The text is full of figures that the Jews could relate to. They were familiar with "burning" judgments. They considered themselves Abraham's children. They glorified in the Old Testament but didn't seem to notice that Moses spoke of Jesus. They were continually looking for a "sign" from Jesus. So Jesus concluded, *"They have Moses and the prophets, let them listen to them... For if they will not believe them they would not be convinced even if someone returned from the dead"* (Luke 16:31).

¹⁴ Once again, this matter is discussed in the paper, It's ALL Over.

This was the main thrust of the parable. As previously mentioned, the man had to be "conscious and conversant" so that Jesus could make his point.

So what's the conclusion? The Bible is full of references to fire in both testaments (see the appendix of uses of fire). "Fire" is a symbol of JUDGMENT. It carries with it the idea of being consumed and totally destroyed. It is indicative of the destroying capability of Almighty God. The one who is capable of destroying completely. In this light, it is descriptive of the God of judgment.

"For indeed our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29).

God "burned" Sodom and Gomorrah forever. God "burned" Jerusalem forever. God "burned" Edom forever? God burned Babylon forever. God "burned" the rich man forever. God "burned" the beast and the false prophet forever. God "burned" death and Hades forever. Shall I continue? Must we conclude that they are all still burning?

GOD'S VIEW OF JUSTICE

"And if any mischief follow, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe... If there be laid on him a sum of money (ASV ransom), then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him" (Exodus 21:23-25, 30).

Here, in a capsule, is God's principle of crime and punishment. Many times, when we consider the principle of "eye for eye", we think of the severity of God. This Scripture actually teaches the fairness of God. It emphasizes his concern for the TRANSGRESSOR as well as the victim! It is BECAUSE of human nature that God had to impose this law on His people. He imposed this law in order to PROTECT the guilty as well as execute justice upon the perpetrator. He understood man's tendency to "over respond". For example, if you knocked out my tooth, I would want to knock off your HEAD. Man's feuding tendencies include an impulse toward escalation NOT de-escalation. James put this tendency to words in James 1:20.

"For man's anger does not work the righteousness of God."

So in Exodus, the most you could exact from the man that knocked out your eye was his eye. Most people have missed the point, however, of Exodus 21:30. A victim did not HAVE to exact the eye. He could take it to the judge and the judge could put a monetary value on the loss. The victim could accept this as compensation. If he refused monetary compensation, however, he could only take an eye for an eye, etcetera.

There were some offenses that required a public "rodding". The number of blows was determined by the priest, but could not exceed forty. This was what the apostle Paul was referring when he wrote, "Five times I received forty stripes minus one" (2 Cor. 11:24). There were many sins that required the death penalty. For such things as

murder, adultery, homosexuality, and kidnapping, there was no sacrifice. Offenses that were not considered as a threat to the breakdown of the home and/or the community required restitution -- usually a payback of that which was stolen plus an added one-fifth. There were no prisons. God didn't believe in torture or prison.

Knowing these things, don't you think it strange that God would "barbecue" the unsaved for an eternity in conscious pain and suffering? Doesn't placing God in that particular light disturb you? If God would not allow man to exact more from man than the crime called for, how do we square that with a literal, eternal torment of fire for his disobedient children?

Our emotions get involved when we think of some of the gross killers and barbarians of this world or its past. People like Hitler and Idi Amin. Butchers like Stalin and Mao Tse Tung. Human wisdom might think some of these people deserve torture.

Consider again the atoning power of the Christ. He was made to "taste death for every man" (Hebrews 2:9). Peter writes that "who himself bore our sins in his own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). John makes sure that we understand the universal application of Christ's sacrifice in 1 John 2:2.

"And he himself is the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." Paul adds further that God "...made him who knew no sin, to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

These verses speak plainly that Jesus paid the penalty for every sin that was ever committed and for all sins that will be committed in the future! He paid for Hitler's sins. He paid for Stalin's sins. He paid for Attila the Hun's sins. The penalty that he paid included crucifixion and death for three days. It DID NOT include a literal, eternal burning and conscious torment. If those who die without Christ are going to suffer these things then Jesus DID NOT experience death for every man!

One thing I know, "the judge of all the earth will do right" (Genesis 18:25). I've got to believe that He will make all things right. I've got to believe that He will avenge all wrong. But this does not force me into a position that cannot be backed by the Bible. The idea that God would torment and torture His created children of flesh for eternity is against the whole spirit of His revealed nature and laws. I challenge anyone to prove differently.

CONCLUSION

"Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out -- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29).

For years I assumed, when I read the above Scripture, that the "resurrection of condemnation" was "hell fire". It was a "given" to me. It was not questioned as to the "root" of the teaching. Now, we know that if man spends a "conscious" eternity in burning flames, God will first have to give him immortality. God will also have to provide the kind of "fire" that would be able to torment the immortal and incorruptible body. The Scriptures plainly teach that the "redeemed" will receive that gift. However, there is not even a hint that the unredeemed sinner will inherit anything but DEATH. Whether God punishes the lost with "few stripes" or "many stripes" (Luke 12:41-47), that is in His jurisdiction. I know He can handle it. But careful study does NOT force one to conclude that God will "barbecue" anyone for an eternity. DEATH is, as far as this author can determine, the ultimate end of the unredeemed. To my way of thinking, missing what God has prepared for me would be "hell" enough.

If this paper has proved anything, it has proved that man by his own nature, does NOT possess immortality. It is a source of comfort to the author to know that this gift lies squarely on the Author of Immortality -- God Himself. I'm as interested as the next person in "survival". From this particular vantage point, Jesus, the King of kings, looks better every day.

Appendix on "Fire" God's Symbol of Judgment

Genesis 19:24	Sodom and Gomorrah
Deut. 9:3	God's destruction of the sons of Anak
Deut. 13:12-18	The wicked, idolatrous city to be burned with fire
Deut. 32:15-43	Judgment on Israel for forgetting God
Josh. 6:24	Jericho to be utterly destroyed and all things burned with fire
Josh. 8:8; 19	Ai to be utterly destroyed and all things burned with fire
Josh. 11:6,9,11	Hazor was utterly destroyed and burned with fire
Judges 1:8	Jerusalem was taken and burned with fire
2 Kings 2:11	Elijah goes to heaven in God's chariots of fire
2 Kings 6:17	Elisha's servant sees God's Chariots of fire bringing Judgment
Job 15:34	Fire will consume the tents of the wicked that take bribes

Job 20:26	A fire shall destroy all that is left of the wicked
Psalms 11:5-6	Fire, brimstone and smoke the portion of the wicked
Psalms 18:6ff	A great psalm of judgment, many mentions of fire
Psalms 21:9	God's enemies to be put into a fiery furnace & devoured by fire
Psalms 50:3-6	God's judgment to be accomplished by fire
Psalms 68:2	The wicked perish as wax before the fire
Psalms 78:21	God brings Jacob into judgment by fire (captivity)
Psalms 79:5ff	The nations that know not God to be judged by fire
Psalms 83:14-18	All of Israel's enemies to be pursued and destroyed by fire
Psalms 97:3ff	All idol worshippers judged by God's fiery judgment
Isaiah 1:7	Israel's cities to be burned by fire
Isaiah 5:24-25	Judah judged for rejection of Jehovah
Isaiah 9:5	God's enemies' weapons fuel for God's fire
Isaiah 10:16-19	Judah to be destroyed for its self trust
Isaiah 26:11	The enemies of God to be destroyed by fire
Isaiah 29:6	Jerusalem to be destroyed by a flame of devouring fire
Isaiah 30:27-33	Assyria to be destroyed in the blast furnace of God
Isaiah 31:9	Assyria to be burned by the fire of Zion in the furnace of Jerusalem
Isaiah 33:11-12	The proud Assyria shall burn like stubble
Isaiah 33:13-15	The sinners of Israel shall be destroyed with an everlasting fire
Isaiah 34:1-10	Edom will be burned into pitch
Isaiah 47:14	Babylon to burn like stubble
Isaiah 64:1-11	Zion to be burned into a waste place

Isaiah 66:15-24	Zion to be judged by unquenchable fire
Jer. 4:4	Jerusalem to be burned with unquenchable fire
Jer. 15:14	Judah to be burned by the fire of God's anger (Babylon)
Jer. 17:1-4, 27	Judah to be judged by fire for not keeping the law
Jer. 21:10-14	The King of Babylon will burn Jerusalem with unquenchable fire
Jer. 34:2,22	Nebuchadnezzar shall burn Jerusalem with fire that will make it unlivable
Jer. 37:8, 10	Jerusalem shall be judged by fire
Jer. 38:17,18, 23	Jerusalem will be judged by fire (Babylon)
Jer. 43:12-13	Egypt and her gods will be judged by fire (Babylon)
Jer. 48:45	A fire from Hesbon and Sihon has destroyed Moab
Jer. 50:32	Babylon judged by fire because of pride
Jer. 51:58	Babylon and all nations gathered for the fire
Jer. 52:13	Nebuzaradan burned the house of Jehovah
Lam. 2:3-4	God poured out his fire of wrath and burned up Jacob
Lam. 4:11	God poured out his fire of wrath and destroyed Zion's foundations
Ezek. 5:4	The house of Israel to be cast into the fire
Ezek. 15:1-8	God's unprofitable vineyard to be burned up
Ezek. 10:2	Coals of fire from God's throne to be cast upon Jerusalem
Ezek. 19:10-14	God's unfruitful branches to be burned up
Ezek. 20:45-49	The forest of the south to be burned up
Ezek. 21:28-32	Ammon will be delivered into the fire of brutish men
Ezek. 22:17-22	Israel's dross will be burned away by fire
Ezek. 23:25	The residue of Samaria and Jerusalem will be destroyed by fire

Ezek. 24:9-14	Jerusalem to be judged by fire (Babylon)
Ezek. 28:18-19	Tyre forever overthrown by fire
Ezek. 30:6-9,14,16	Egypt and all her cities to be judged by fire
Ezek. 36:5-7	Edom and the residue to be burned with the fire of God's jealousy
Ezek. 38:17-23	God from the land of Magog to be judged by fire, brimstone, & smoke
Ezek. 39:6	Magog and the isles will be burned by fire
Daniel 7:9-12	A fiery stream issues from God's throne and judges the fourth beast
Hosea 8:14	God will send a fire upon Judah and Samaria
Joel 1:19-20	Fire has devoured the pastures (locusts)
Joel 2:3,5	Locust likened unto the fire of judgment
Joel 2:30	Fire and pillars of smoke present in the day of judgment
Amos 1:2-5	God kindled a fire on Hazael, Gaza, Tyre, Teman, Rabbah, Moab, Judah
Amos 5:6	The unquenchable fire will destroy Joseph at Bethel
Obadiah 18	Judah and Israel will burn among the stubble of Edom and none remain
Micah 1:2-7	God will melt Israel and Judah
Nahum 1:5-6	God poured out his wrath like fire upon Nineveh
Nahum 3:13-15	God's fire devoured Nineveh's bars and people
Habakkuk 2:13	For Babylon's labor they will receive the fire of judgment
Zeph. 1:14-18	Judah will be brought to a terrible end by fire of God's judgment
Zeph. 3:8	All nations will be devoured with the fire of God's jealousy
Zech. 2:5-13	The fire of God's jealousy will protect his people

Zech. 3:2	Judah is a brand plucked out of the fire
Zech. 13:9	God will purify the nation by fire
Malachi 3:1-6	Messiah will cleanse dross and purify the silver with fire
Mal. 4:1-6	Messiah will judge the proud and wicked by fire and save the righteous

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