



PROPHECY ODYSSEY

The Fate of the Lost

AN AMAZING FACT:

The residents of Pompeii and Herculaneum had plenty of warning. Around AD 62, these Italian resort towns, popular among Roman soldiers for their wealth and depraved entertainments, were severely shaken by an earthquake. For the next 17 years, there were additional tremors around the volcano—and some springs even dried up. Then, in AD 79, a massive eruption buried both cities in ash and pumice. Thousands were killed, and Pompeii and Herculaneum were frozen in time for the next 1,600 years. Excavations began in 1748, which vividly revealed life in Rome during a time of severe Christian persecution. Strange cavities in the cities' ash layers were injected with plaster; when excavated, they revealed the grizzly, twisted forms of the bodies that had been entombed in the hardened ash.

Bible prophecy tells us that another explosive day of judgment is looming in which God "will rain coals" upon all lost sinners: "Fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup" (Psalm 11:6). "Anyone not found written in the Book of Life [will be] cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15).

Many today are deeply confused about what the Bible really teaches regarding the punishment of the wicked. Misunderstanding



this subject can grossly distort your concept of God. So, let's turn to the Word of God to discover the truth regarding the subject of hellfire ...



When you see a blank, use your Bible to look up the missing word and fill it in.



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

2 PETER 2:6

And turning the cities of _____ and _____ into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly.

JUDE 1:7

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

NOTE: God destroyed those two evil cities with "eternal fire"—the same kind of fire that will destroy the wicked in hell. We know that the literal cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, which were located by the Dead Sea, are not still burning today.



When will the wicked be destroyed in hellfire?

2 PETER 2:9

The Lord knows how to ... reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of _____.

JOHN 12:48

The word that I have spoken will judge him in the _____.

MATTHEW 13:40–42 So it will be at the _____ of this _____.

The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather ... those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire.

NOTE: In the above texts, the Bible states that the wicked will be cast into the fire when they are judged at the end of time—not when they die. This means that no one is in hell now. It is only fair that no one should be punished until his case has been decided in the judgment. Why else would Jesus say He's coming to "reward ... every one according to his work"? (Revelation 22:12).



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

JOHN 5:28, 29 The hour is coming in which all who are _____ the _____ will hear his voice and come forth— ... those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

JOB 21:30, 32 The wicked are reserved for the day of doom; ... yet he shall be brought to the _____, and a vigil kept over the _____.

NOTE: The Bible states that the wicked who have died are reserved in the grave until resurrected at the end of the millennium (Revelation 20:5). They will hear Jesus' voice calling them and will come forth from the grave, not from hellfire.



What are the only two choices for all men?

JOHN 3:16 Whoever believes in Him should not _____ but have everlasting _____.

ROMANS 6:23 The wages of sin is _____, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

NOTE: The punishment for sin is not everlasting life in hellfire but the exact opposite—everlasting death *by* hellfire. We all die the first death (Hebrews 9:27), but the Bible says that the wicked will die “the second death” in “the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14). From the first death, all are raised for reward or punishment; but there is no resurrection from the second death. It is final.

In addition, the concepts of limbo and purgatory are not found in Scripture. The Bible teaches only two choices, two possible destinies—eternal life or eternal death (Deuteronomy 30:15).



What will happen to the wicked in hellfire?

PSALM 37:10, 20

Yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; ... the wicked shall _____; ... into smoke they shall _____ away.

MALACHI 4:1, 3

The day is coming, burning like an oven, and ... all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall _____ them _____. ... You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet.

NOTE: The wicked in hellfire will be utterly consumed. Only ashes will remain.



Where will hellfire be located?

2 PETER 3:10

The elements will melt with fervent heat; both the _____ and the works that are in it will be burned up.

REVELATION 20:9

They went up on the breadth of the _____ and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And _____ came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

NOTE: Hell will be here on the earth. A lake of fire will engulf our planet.



Will the devil be in charge of hellfire?

REVELATION 20:10 *The devil, who deceived them, _____
_____ into the lake of fire and brimstone.*

NOTE: No! Far from being in charge of hellfire, the devil will be cast into it. The flames will finally turn him into “ashes upon the earth,” and after suffering “day and night” for the leading role in the rebellion he instigated, he will ultimately be “consumed” and “shall be no more forever” (Psalm 104:35; Ezekiel 28:18, 19).



Will the fires of hell ever go out?

ISAIAH 47:14 *It shall _____ be a _____ to be warmed by, nor
a fire to sit before!*

NOTE: After sin and sinners are destroyed, the fire will eventually go out. Hellfire will not burn throughout the ages. Obviously, the fire will eventually be spent, for the Lord says, “You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet” (Malachi 4:3). An eternal hell of torment would make it impossible to ever get rid of sin. God’s plan is to isolate sin and destroy it, not perpetuate it! Revelation 21:5 says, “Behold, I make all things new.”



Doesn't the biblical phrase “unquenchable fire” indicate that hellfire never goes out?

MATTHEW 3:12 *He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and
gather His wheat into the barn; but He will _____ the
chaff with unquenchable fire.*

NOTE: No! Unquenchable fire cannot be *put out*, but it does *go out* once it burns up everything. For example, Jeremiah 17:27 warns that if God's people were not faithful, He would kindle a fire in Jerusalem that "shall not be quenched." And the Scriptures declare that this prophecy has already been fulfilled! The Babylonians "broke down the wall of Jerusalem [and] burned all its palaces with fire ... to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah" (2 Chronicles 36:19, 21). That fire could not be put out until it had consumed everything; then it went out. It is not burning today, even though the Bible calls it "unquenchable."



Doesn't the phrase "eternal fire" mean unending?

JUDE 1:7 *Sodom and Gomorrah ... are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of _____.*

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



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

JONAH 2:6 *The earth with its bars closed behind me _____.*

NOTE: No. Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17), yet he said "forever." It probably felt like forever! The Greek word translated as "forever" in Revelation 20:10 is *aion*, from which we get the word "eon." It often represents an unspecified period of time, limited or unlimited. The word "forever" is used at least 50 times in the Bible in reference to something that has ended. In one instance, "forever" describes the life of a faithful slave (Exodus 21:6), and in another place, "forever" means ten generations (Deuteronomy 23:3). In regard to a person, "forever" often means "as long as he lives" (1 Samuel 1:22, 28).



Are both soul and body destroyed in hell?

MATTHEW 10:28

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both _____ and _____ in hell.

NOTE: Many believe that the soul never dies, but God says twice, "The soul who sins shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). So, according to the words of Jesus, the wicked will be utterly destroyed in hellfire—both soul and body.



For whom will hellfire be kindled?

MATTHEW 25:41

Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the _____ and his angels.

NOTE: The purpose of the fire is to destroy Satan, his evil angels, and sin. If we refuse to turn away from the plague of sin, we will have to be destroyed by it—because if sin is not destroyed, it would again contaminate the universe.



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

ISAIAH 28:21

For the LORD ... will be angry ... that He may do His work, His awesome work, and bring to pass His act, His _____.

NOTE: God can't stand the thought of destroying those He loves! "The Lord is not ... willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). He is constantly saying to them, "Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?" (Ezekiel 33:11). Destroying people is so foreign to God's ways that hellfire is called His "unusual act." Even the lost will admit that God's only desire was to save them (Romans 14:11).



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

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

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

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



Will the sin problem ever rise again?

NAHUM 1:9 Affliction will not _____ up a second time.

ISAIAH 65:17 I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be _____.

NOTE: No! The promise is specific. Sin will never rise again.



What penetrating question does Job ask about man compared to his Maker?

JOB 4:17 Can a mortal be more _____ than God?

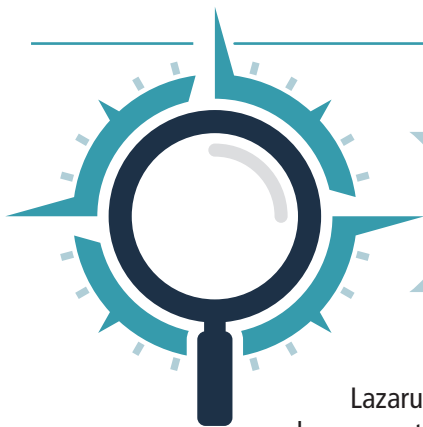
NOTE: If your son became a hardened murderer, would you feel that he should be punished? You probably would. But would you want him to stay alive in a fire, in terrible agony, for even one day? Of course not. You could not stand that. Neither could the loving Lord stand to see His children so tortured. That would be worse than the worst of all war atrocities.

Is God like that? No indeed! An eternal hell of torment, being diametrically against His character of love and justice, would be unbearable for Him.

» YOUR RESPONSE

More than anything, Jesus wants you to dwell in His glorious new kingdom. He longs for you to occupy the mansion He has prepared for you. Will you decide now to accept His offer?

ANSWER: _____



FURTHER STUDY

The Rich Man and Lazarus

.....

Many use the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to try to prove that people go right to heaven or to hell at death. However, this was not Jesus' intention for this story. The word that He used for "hell" was "Hades," a place of torment in Greek mythology. All of the Jews listening understood that Jesus was using a well-known myth to illustrate a point. If we take a closer look at Luke 16:19–31, we will quickly see that this parable is filled with symbols that were never meant to be taken literally.

For example ...

- Do all the saved go to Abraham's bosom? No.
- Will the people in heaven and in hell talk to each other? No.
- Would a drop of water cool the tongue of a person burning in hell? No.
- Does Abraham decide who is saved and who is lost? No.

Thus, Jesus never intended that this parable be used to teach that people go directly to heaven or to hell when they die—how could they if the great judgment day is still in the future? John 12:48 declares, "The word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day."

So, what does this parable really mean?

The rich man was a symbol of the Jewish nation, feasting on the Scriptures, while the beggar at the gate—the Gentiles—was starving for the Word of God. Jesus concluded the parable with the observation that "if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Indeed, Jesus did later raise a man named Lazarus from the dead, and most of the Jewish leaders still did not believe (John 12:9–11).

SUMMARY SHEET



Please read this lesson before completing this Summary Sheet. All answers can be found in the study guide. Fill in the boxes for the correct answers. **Numbers in parentheses (1) indicate the number of correct answers.**

1. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is an example of (1)

- ☐ A terrible lightning storm
- ☐ The destruction of the wicked
- ☐ How God is cruel
- ☐ A bad dream

2. The wicked are judged and sentenced the moment they die. (1)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

3. The wicked who have died are currently in (1)

- ☐ Abraham's bosom
- ☐ Purgatory
- ☐ The grave
- ☐ Hell

4. According to John 3:16, we all face one of these two fates: (2)

- ☐ Sitting on a cloud forever
- ☐ Perishing
- ☐ Being banished to a distant planet
- ☐ Everlasting life

5. What will hellfire do to the wicked? (1)

- ☐ Torment them without end
- ☐ Consume them
- ☐ Encourage them to repent
- ☐ Burn away their sin so they can go to heaven

6. Hellfire will be located on the earth. (1)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

7. The devil is not in charge of hellfire. (1)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

8. The fires of hell will not burn forever. (1)

- ☐ True
- ☐ False

9. "Unquenchable fire" will go out when (1)

- ☐ It has consumed what it is burning
- ☐ A fierce wind extinguishes it
- ☐ Ice-cold water is poured on it

10. Is the "eternal fire" that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah still burning? (1)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11. Both of these will be destroyed in hell: (2)

- ☐ Body
- ☐ Our pets
- ☐ Soul
- ☐ The angels' worn-out sandals

Continued on back ►►

12. Hellfire is prepared for (2)

- ☐ God to display His power
- ☐ The devil
- ☐ The devil's angels
- ☐ Winning souls

13. Does God want the wicked to die? (1)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

14. After the destruction of the wicked (1)

- ☐ The earth will lay in ruins forever
- ☐ There will never be another sinner
- ☐ The saints will live in the homes of the wicked

15. God wants you to live forever in paradise. Will you accept His offer of eternal life now?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Be sure to answer all the questions above and on the reverse side!



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