

10

The Flames of Justice



“He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (Revelation 14:10).



An Amazing Fact: On September 2, 1666, a fire broke out in a bakery in London, England, and began to spread rapidly throughout the city. Known as the Great Fire of London, it destroyed more than 13,000 houses, 87 churches, and even St. Paul's Cathedral. Though disputed, some believe that the devastation actually resulted in deliverance, largely stopping a plague that had ravaged the city by incinerating the disease's carriers—rats and fleas.

Sodom and Gomorrah are the names of cities synonymous with hedonism and depravity. Scripture says, “The men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and

sinful against the LORD” (Genesis 13:13). It then records how two angels, appearing as humans, entered Sodom and were given hospitality by Lot (19:1-3), the only righteous man living in the city (2 Peter 2:7, 8).

The news of the strangers' visit spread fast, bringing a mob of men “from every quarter” to surround Lot's house (Genesis 19:4). They demanded that he hand over his two guests so they could “know them carnally” (v. 5). When Lot tried to dissuade the mob, they turned on him and tried to break into his house (vv. 6-9).

This is why “the outcry against [Sodom and Gomorrah grew] great before the face of the LORD” (v. 13). After intervening to save Lot and his family (vv. 10-22), God destroyed both cities with “brimstone and fire” (v. 24).

But that's not the only instance in which the Bible describes a fiery finish ...



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When you see a blank, look up the passage in your Bible and write in the missing word.

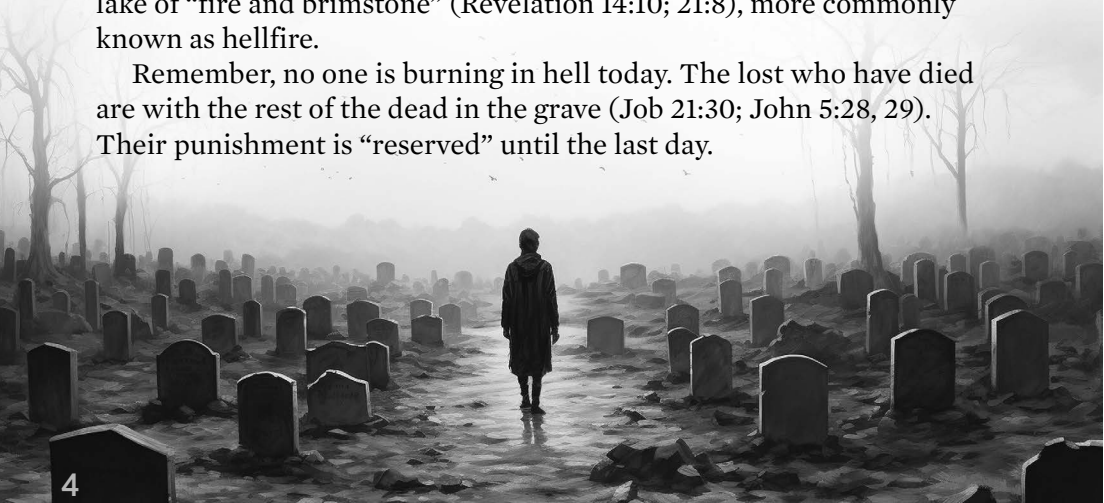
1. To what is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah compared in the Bible?

2 Peter 2:4, 6, 9. *If God ... turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an _____ to those who afterward would live ungodly; then [He] knows how ... to reserve the unjust under punishment for the _____ of _____.*

Jude 6, 7. *He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the _____ of the great _____; as Sodom and Gomorrah ... are set forth as an _____.*

ANSWER: The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is “an example” of the punishment the lost will receive in the final judgment at the end of time (Matthew 13:40–42; John 12:48). As God sent “brimstone and fire” upon those wicked cities (Genesis 19:24), so the lost will be cast into a lake of “fire and brimstone” (Revelation 14:10; 21:8), more commonly known as hellfire.

Remember, no one is burning in hell today. The lost who have died are with the rest of the dead in the grave (Job 21:30; John 5:28, 29). Their punishment is “reserved” until the last day.



2. What is the purpose of hellfire?

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

Nahum 1:9. *Affliction will not rise up a _____ time.*

ANSWER: Romans 6:23 tells us that “the wages of sin is death.” The purpose of hellfire is not to contain sin but to destroy it. Once all sin is removed from God’s universe, so are its wages—sorrow, pain, and death. God promises that the disease of sin will never again infect His creation. Isn’t that what a God of love would want (1 John 4:8)?

3. Who are the lost?

Matthew 13:41, 42. *The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice _____, and will cast them into the furnace of fire.*

Revelation 20:10. *The _____, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone.*

Matthew 25:41. *Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the _____ and his _____.*

ANSWER: The lost are all those who break the law of God. Remember, the Bible defines lawlessness as sin (1 John 3:4). The lost are sinners and, naturally, include the originator of sin, the devil (v. 8), along with his fallen angels. Revelation 21:8 contains a more specific list: “the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars.”

There are many people—Christians included—who believe that the lost will burn in hellfire for all eternity. In this lesson, we’ll look further



into whether this concept is a fact or a myth. Already, we can see that this view doesn't match up with Scripture: Eternal torture for the lost would forever perpetuate sin and suffering—the exact opposite of God's plan to eradicate evil!

4. What will happen to the lost in hellfire?

Psalm 37:20. *The wicked shall _____; and the enemies of the LORD, like the splendor of the meadows, shall _____. Into smoke they shall _____ away.*

Malachi 4:1, 3. *“Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be _____. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” says the LORD of hosts, “that will leave them neither root nor branch. ... You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be _____ under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this.”*

Ezekiel 28:18, 19. *Therefore I brought fire from your midst; it devoured you, and I turned you to _____ upon the earth. ... You ... shall be _____ forever.*

ANSWER: Remember, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Just like Sodom and Gomorrah burned to ashes, the lost, also known as the wicked, will likewise be burned to ashes. None will be left alive. “The wicked shall be no more” (Psalm 37:10).

Contrary to popular opinion, the devil is not in charge of hell. If he is numbered among the lost, how could he torment the lost in hellfire? No, the devil will die in hellfire. Again and again, the Bible reiterates its teaching of total annihilation in hellfire, not eternal torture.





5. But what about those verses describing the wicked being tormented “forever”?

Jonah 2:6. *I went down to the moorings of the mountains; the earth with its bars closed behind me _____.*

1 Samuel 1:22, 28. *Not until the child is weaned; then I will take him, that he may appear before the LORD and remain there _____. ... As long as he lives he shall be lent to the LORD.*

ANSWER: You may be questioning such verses as Revelation 20:10, which says that the wicked “will be tormented day and night forever and ever,” and Revelation 14:11, which says that the “smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever.”

Let’s look at how Scripture uses the term “forever.” The prophet Jonah described his three nights in the belly of a great fish as “forever” (Jonah 1:17; 2:6). Hannah used “forever” to mean the span of her child Samuel’s life (1 Samuel 1:22, 28). In the New Testament, “forever,” *aion* in the Greek, is used at least 50 times to refer to something that has ended.

Thus, the Bible does not limit its definition of “forever” to unending duration. In the case of hellfire, “forever” means a duration of time until the wicked are completely destroyed.



6. Is there purgatory?

Mark 10:45. *The Son of Man [came] ... to give His life a _____ for many.*

1 Corinthians 7:23. *You were bought at a _____.*

ANSWER: The Bible makes no mention of purgatory, a supposed place of temporary suffering after death where one is cleansed from sin before moving on to heaven. There is no limbo, no waiting zone, no salvation by works. Christ has already paid for everyone's sins. Through His sacrifice alone comes "the gift of ... eternal life" (Romans 6:23).

This is why the everlasting gospel matters. The Bible teaches only two options—"life and good" or "death and evil" (Deuteronomy 30:15). "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

All sinners who believe in Christ as their Savior will escape hellfire and receive eternal life instead. This choice is made *before*, not after, one dies. (See "The Rich Man and Lazarus" at the end of this lesson.)

7. Will the lost ever be resurrected after they are destroyed in hellfire?

Matthew 10:28: *Do not fear those who kill the _____ but cannot kill the _____. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both _____ and _____ in hell.*

ANSWER: No. After hellfire does its work, sin will never again exist (Nahum 1:9)—and neither will those who love and cling to sin. Matthew 10:28 distinguishes between what will happen to the saved versus the lost. The devil may have been permitted to take the temporal lives of the lost and the saved, but he "cannot kill the soul," a living creature, eternally. Only God can determine one's eternal life. Only He "is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

8. Will hellfire ever go out?

Isaiah 47:14. *They shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame; it shall _____ be a _____ to be warmed by, nor a _____ to sit before!*

ANSWER: Yes, hellfire will go out as any other fire would—when there is nothing left to burn. When it has finished its work of destroying all sin, hellfire will cease.

Phrases like “eternal fire” in Jude 7 and “unquenchable fire” in Matthew 3:12 may appear to contradict what we’ve learned, but let’s look at these verses carefully.

In Jude 7, the Bible says that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with “eternal fire.” Are those cities still burning today? No, they are not. However, the *effects* of that fire are indeed everlasting; they were not rebuilt. Likewise, hellfire will be eternal in its consequences, not in its process.

As for Matthew 3:12, “unquenchable fire” is simply a fire that cannot be put out. While it is a fire that goes out on its own after it has done its work, no one will be able to extinguish this fire.



9. Where will hellfire be located?

Revelation 20:9. They went up on the breadth of the _____ and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

2 Peter 3:10. The elements will melt with fervent heat; both the _____ and the works that are in it will be burned up.

ANSWER: Many people picture hell as some subterranean cavern, but the Bible teaches that hell will be on the earth's surface. Everyone on this planet still cursed by sin will be consumed in flames. As the passage goes on to say, "All these things ... will be dissolved, being on fire" (2 Peter 3:11, 12).



10. After hellfire finishes its work of destruction, what will Jesus do for His people?



Isaiah 65:17. Behold, I create new _____ and a new _____; and the former shall not be remembered or come into mind.

2 Peter 3:13. We, according to His promise, look for new _____ and a new _____ in which righteousness dwells.

Revelation 21:1. Now I saw a new _____ and a new _____, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

ANSWER: God will "make all things new" (Revelation 21:5). After the fire destroys everything on the earth, God will recreate it (v. 1), and this new earth will never be cursed with sin (22:3). Then, His promise to "dwell with ... His people" (21:3) will finally be realized. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered

into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

11. How does God feel about the destruction of the wicked?

Ezekiel 33:11. *I have no _____ in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die?*

2 Peter 3:9. *The Lord is ... not _____ that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*

ANSWER: If the thoughts of God toward sinners are “thoughts of peace and not evil” (Jeremiah 29:11), then His desire is for them to “choose life” that they “may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19). The everlasting gospel is all about saving lives, not destroying them. God has given each person the choice to be either among the saved or the lost, and He would have given His Son to save just one sinner who would believe (John 3:16). No wonder Isaiah calls hellfire God’s “unusual act” (Isaiah 28:21).

12. More than anything, Jesus wants you to dwell with Him in His glorious kingdom. Will you accept His offer?

Answer: _____





Lesson 10 Supplemental Material

The Rich Man and Lazarus

In Luke 16:19–31, Jesus told a parable about two men, one who went to heaven and the other who went to hell. Many people use this parable to support a concept that the rest of Scripture dispels as a myth. How can this be? Does the Bible contradict itself or give mixed messages?

No! The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus is a prime example of a story that is misinterpreted when taken literally. Parables are fictional short stories meant to teach various lessons. The Bible records many instances of Jesus teaching with parables that employ everyday items or common customs as symbols. This parable is no different.

Let's figure out its main symbols by asking the following questions:

- Do all the saved fit upon “Abraham’s bosom” (v. 22)?
- Would a drop or two of water provide relief to a person being burned alive (v. 24)?
- Will people being burned alive be able to have a conversation with the saved (vv. 24–31)?
- Would two people on opposite sides of “a great gulf fixed” (v. 26) even be able to hear each other?

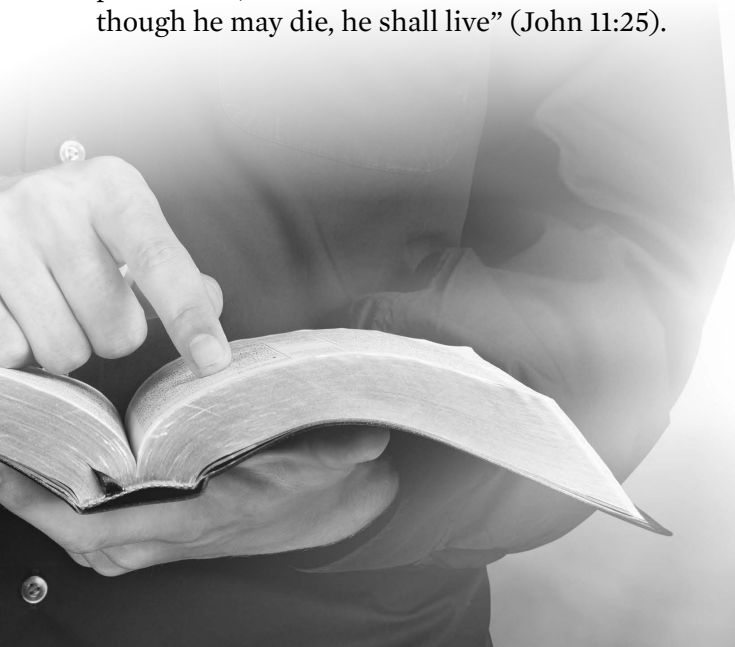
The answer to all these questions is “No!” The parable’s language is symbolic, not literal. Heaven and hell are not literally neighbors. The saved and the lost cannot literally talk to each other. Nor do people go to their reward immediately after they die.

Instead, the point of this parable is that a person’s eternal destiny is decided before he dies, not after. His judgment is based on whether he, in this life, accepted the gospel and loved his neighbor.

The rich man symbolizes the Jewish nation, feasting on the Scriptures, while the beggar at the gate represents the Gentiles, starving for God’s Word. Although the Jews had full access to “the oracles of God” (Romans 3:2), they, like the rich man withholding crumbs from Lazarus, withheld the message of salvation from other people groups.

Jesus aptly concluded His parable with this observation: “If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead” (v. 31). Shortly afterward, Jesus *did* raise a man named Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38–44). And just as He had prophesied in the parable, even this miracle did not soften the unbelief of the Jewish leaders. In fact, it spurred them to plot the murders of both Jesus (vv. 47–53) and Lazarus (12:10, 11).

But the Christian church would do what the Jewish nation failed to do—share the gospel with the world (Acts 13:44–48; Romans 15:15–19). Every person must have the opportunity to believe in the One who proclaimed, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25).



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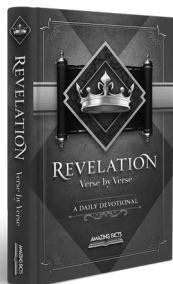
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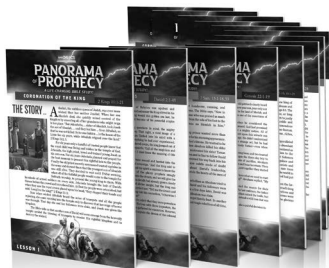


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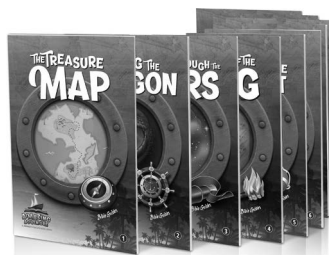
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Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.”

And another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.”

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 14:6–12

