

Hell – Part #1

By Joe Crews

Matthew 13:41

I would like to make a preliminary statement today about the method I use in studying Bible doctrines. You have doubtless noticed that I use many, many texts in presenting subjects from the Word of God. There's a special reason for this. All the truth can never be found in one text, or even in one book of the Bible. We have to search the Scriptures in order to discover its secrets. That's why I bring together from many parts of the Bible the texts showing what each writer has said in order to get the full picture. Comparison of these assembled texts makes the subject clear. Occasionally it may seem that two or three texts are out of harmony with all the others and that they actually disagree with the others, but by carefully studying those texts in their context, we soon learn that the contradiction is really in our own minds rather than in the Word of God.

These principles must be followed especially in studying the subject that we are introducing today. The subject of hell has been so theologically confused and distorted that it has become a byword for many people. Millions are actually wondering if a God of love will torment the wicked for all eternity or if the fires of hell will ever burn the "badness" out of people.

Now let's consider the dealings of God with sinners. First, we should understand that there is a heaven to win and a hell to shun. Notice Jesus' words in Matthew 13:41-43: "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

There it is friends. Finally, there must be only two classes—the saved and the lost. Everyone will be cast into the furnace or saved in the kingdom. How earnestly we should be seeking to find the right way. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." John 14:6. If we take what He said on this subject of hell, we certainly will be on the right road. We could certainly not be wrong. Many people have claimed that Christ taught about some disembodied soul leaving the body at death and flying away to either heaven or hell. That just isn't true, friends. Jesus must not be blamed for such a teaching as that. Let us turn to Matthew 5:30 for a sample of what He taught about the doctrine of hell: "And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell." Jesus taught that it is the body that suffers in the fire of hell and not the soul. These are the words of the master Teacher. There is no

vague, mystical soul to leave the body at death and find its way to some place of torment or punishment.

Now the question arises as to when this punishment of the wicked takes place. Again the words of Jesus present a clear answer in Matthew 13:38-42. There He gives the parable of the tares and the wheat. He tells about a man who went out and sowed wheat, good wheat; and then an enemy came in the dead of night and sowed weeds in it, or tares, among the wheat. After it began to grow, the servant came in and told the master about it and asked if he should pull up the weeds. The master said, "No, let them grow together until the harvest and then we can cut them down together, separate them, burn up the weeds, and put the wheat into the garner or into the granary."

Notice that when Jesus explained the meaning of the terms in that parable He said, "... the harvest is the end of the world." That's when the separation is going to take place. That's when the wicked are thrown into the fire. That's when the tares are to be burned up. There's no room for argument or quibbling here. Nobody is going into that furnace of fire until the end of the world. How unfair it would be for God to punish the wicked before they even came to the time of their judgment. Even an earthly court would not send a man to prison for many years before considering his case and pronouncing sentence on him. In 2 Peter 2:9 we find it even more plainly given. Notice these words, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

There it is. Now we know that the wicked are not going to be dealt with at all until after the day of judgment. Then they will be punished. Now we are prepared to answer the question, "How many people are in hell right now today?" My friends, not one single person is there now. They are all being reserved until the day of judgment. But where are they being reserved? Jesus said: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John 5:28, 29.

This agrees with what Job wrote hundreds of years before: "Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens, That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb." Job 21:29, 30, 32. Friends, the whole teaching of the Scriptures is in perfect harmony on this subject. The unsaved remain in their graves sleeping the sleep of death until the resurrection day. Then they are brought forth to be punished.

This brings us to the question as to the place of punishment and the time of

punishment. Where will this lake of fire be located? Revelation 21:8 throws some light on this subject: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Please remember that this punishment in the fires of hell is called the second death.

What does that mean? It means that it must take place after the resurrection of the wicked at the end of the millennium. There can be no second death without a second life, of course. Every sinner must be brought out of the grave in the second resurrection and then be cast into the lake of fire to die again, and that's called the second death.

Does the Bible tell us how these things are going to be accomplished? Yes it does in Revelation 20:7-9: "And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them." Here we have a picture of the last chapter in the history of sin and sinners. Under the great archdeceiver all the numberless hosts of the resurrected wicked ones are led up to fight against the holy city which has come down from God out of heaven. You will find that account in Revelation 21:2, "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

We studied that even more closely in the broadcast on the millennium. But the result of that unholy attempt to take the city of God is graphically told in these words, "And fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them." A consuming flame will envelop the great armies of Satan and destroy them from the face of the earth. This is a strange fire in many respects because it not only devours the wicked, but it burns and purifies the earth at the same time. Every trace of the curse of sin will be purged away by the intense heat of that flame. In 2 Peter 3:10 we have the record of elements melting in that fire from fervent heat: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." But then Peter hastens on to add this in verse 13, "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." Yes, God will reconstruct this world into a perfect, beautiful garden even as it was before the entrance of sin.

Today, however, we are mainly concerned with the effects of that fire upon the

wicked. After all, this is the Bible picture of hell. It's not to be located in some subterranean place of darkness. It will be this old world turned into a lake of fire at the end of the millennium. Isaiah 34:9 says that the streams will become pitch and the dust will turn into brimstone. Now we can be sure about the size of hell. It's just as long and wide as this earth itself—25,000 miles in circumference.

How long will the wicked ones suffer in that lake of fire here upon this earth? I can't tell you the exact length of time, but I can give you this assurance with confidence: It will not be throughout all eternity. This earth is going to be recreated and will be the eternal home of the saints. Sin will never be crowned with immortality. Since the soul of man is not naturally immortal, there can be no such thing as eternal torment. Only the righteous will be given eternal life, and that will be given at the coming of Jesus. You read about it in 1 Corinthians 15:51-54. It says, "... this mortal must put on immortality ... in the twinkling of an eye."

The wicked are never given eternal life. Nowhere do we find that they are given this gift of immortality. On the contrary, we read in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." There you have it, the two opposite fates of mankind are life and death; and both of them are of eternal duration. God will never bestow His priceless gift that the wicked might be tormented endlessly in that fire. He will not give them eternal life so that they can suffer in the flame of that torment of hell fire. Only those possessing Christ can possess endless life. Notice this verse in 1 John 5:12, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life."

Isn't that clear and simple? The wicked people burning in that fire have no connection whatsoever with the Son of God. They have denied Him. They have rejected Him. They have cut themselves off from eternal life. Therefore there can be no connection at all with Jesus Christ. When they are in the fires of hell they are simply burning up there, being punished for their sins. The Bible says they are going to be tormented and punished according to their works. That means that some will burn longer than others. Some will be tormented longer than others; but finally, the end result must be death. The wages of sin is death. They cannot keep on living. It is an incongruous thought, that they would just remain there in existence, being punished, being tormented, marring God's great universe. He's going to lift the curse of sin. All the effects of sin will be wiped out. This earth will then be restored to its Edenic beauty once more and to its glory as it was before sin ever came into the garden home.