



The Destruction of the Wicked

One of the traditional practices of the Eskimo people which is still carried on today is the use of sauna, or “makie” sweatbath houses. The makie serves a practical purpose. In the wintertime when hot showers or baths are not always available, the hot sauna not only cleanses, but it gives relaxation after a hard day. It also provides a time for socializing when the men of the neighborhood get together to visit and bathe in the makie. Later, after the men finish, the women of the village often gather for the same purpose. The makie is also good for healing winter colds and other sicknesses.

Often a game or sport is made of seeing who can stand the hottest temperatures, which sometimes can reach more than 200 degrees. Frequently it becomes a contest between the old-timers and the young men, with the old-timers generally winning. The reason they

give for their success is that they have been doing it for years and have gotten used to the hotter temperatures.

The story is told of a preacher who came into a village to preach the gospel. Night after night he strongly preached about the fear a person should have who decided not to follow the Lord. He talked a great deal about hellfire, how terrible it will be, and how the hot fires will burn forever and ever and bring endless torment and anguish. He then appealed to every person in the audience to come forward to repent of their sins.

It was then, according to the story, that one old-timer in the audience leaned over and whispered to a friend concerning the fires of hell, "It's probably just a matter of getting used to it." Almost laughingly, his friend nodded in agreement.

What does the Bible really say about the fires of hell? Like many people, maybe you have questions about this subject.

Key Thought. The Scriptures record that when Jesus comes again the wicked will be struck down by the brightness of His coming (2 Thessalonians 2:8). Quick death will come to all of the wicked as the righteous are taken to heaven (Luke 17:24-30). After 1,000 years the wicked will be resurrected (Revelation 20:4-6). The righteous will descend from heaven in the Holy City,

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There are many impressions and misconceptions about hellfire. The end result of sin is always waste and destruction.

New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:10, 24). The wicked who are then resurrected, led by Satan, will march on the city in an attempt to take over the city of God (Revelation 20:7-10). At that point Jesus will intervene. Each wicked person will see his past history and why God had to pass judgment upon him. The wicked will clearly see why they cannot be permitted to live eternally. They will admit that Jesus has been more than fair in His judgments. Then God will rain down fire from heaven and perform what is called “His strange work,” in which all of the wicked will be destroyed. (Revelation 20:11-15; 21:8).

In the destruction of the wicked and all wickedness, the Lord will also cleanse the earth with the same fire. Then He will create out of the ashes a beautiful new earth where the saved will live throughout eternity (2 Peter 3:10-13).

The earth will then become the center of righteousness and freedom for the universe. It will be a country

where there are no fences in which the righteous will find a permanent home. In the new earth God's people will live in perfect security with Jesus (Revelation 21:3, 7).

BIBLE ANSWERS

1. What is God's plan for sin in the future? Psalm 37:9-11. "For evildoers shall be cut off; But those who wait on the LORD, They shall inherit _____ . . . and the wicked shall be _____; . . . But the meek shall inherit _____." *(All quotations from the Bible in these lessons are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.)*

Note. Like a loving parent, God doesn't want His people to ever again live with heartache and destruction. He wants sin to be destroyed forever and never to occur again. His plan is for us to live forever in a land without sin.

2. When will the wicked receive their punishment? 2 Peter 3:7. *(Circle one.)* (1) Before the judgment. (2) After the judgment.

Note. Only after the wicked are judged—and have the opportunity to see the foolishness of their ways and that God is fair in destroying wickedness—will God do His "strange work" (Revelation 5:13).

3. Does God enjoy or relish the destruction of the wicked? Ezekiel 33:11. *(Circle one.)* (1) Yes. (2) No.

Note. It is not God's pleasure to destroy anyone. His desire is that the cancer of wickedness, which ruins the happiness of the righteous, be done away with forever.

He wants His people to always enjoy life and know its utmost fulfillment. Because of His great love for all mankind, He dislikes destroying even the wicked. This is why the Bible calls this punishment God's "unusual act" (Isaiah 28:21, NKJV), His "strange work" (KJV).



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God doesn't want
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4. How complete are the results of the destruction of the wicked and wickedness? Malachi 4:3. "You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be _____ under the soles of your feet." (Read also verses 1 and 2.)

Note. The Bible clearly states that the wicked and all wickedness will be completely destroyed, burned up totally, and become ashes on the ground under our feet. Out of these ashes God will create a new earth (Revelation 21:1). (See "Answers to questions most often asked" on Answer Sheet 14.)


5. Will Satan also be completely destroyed? Revelation 20:7-10. *Circle one:* (1) Yes. (2) No.

Note. If anyone should be forced to burn in anguish for a long period of time, it certainly should be the Devil and his angels. The Bible, however, says they will be

burned up! They will become ashes. The coals will die out, so we won't even be able to warm our hands over the coals.

6. What does the Bible mean when it describes the fire that God uses to destroy the wicked and the results of wickedness as “eternal”? Revelation 20:9. “They [the wicked led by Satan] . . . surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and _____ them.”

Note. The fire that purifies the earth will “devour” the wicked. If a hungry man sees a freshly baked blueberry pie, what will happen to that pie? It will be “devoured” by the hungry man. Will there be any pie left? No! To devour means to do away with it completely.

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If you were to strike a match to a string of paper dolls you have cut out, what would happen to these paper dolls? They would be devoured, or destroyed, by the fire. How long would they be destroyed? The answer is *forever*. Destroyed forever, never to be paper dolls again. In the same way, when the Bible speaks of “forever and ever,” it means to be burned up eternally. It doesn't mean the wicked will live eternally in flames, but that they will be destroyed forever. The Bible says in Jude 7 that Sodom and Gomorrah were burned with



“eternal fire.” But are Sodom and Gomorrah burning today? No. When these two cities were destroyed, they were destroyed forever. And 2 Peter 2:6 cites their total “destruction” as “an example” of what will happen to the “ungodly.”

The question is often asked, “Is there a burning hellfire today?” The answer is absolutely “No.” The Bible

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tells us that the wicked are reserved unto the day of judgment to be punished (2 Peter 3:7). Hell is not burning now, as some have mistakenly taught. God in His fairness, even to the wicked, reserves this destructive cleansing fire until after the wicked have had opportunity to see for themselves that by their own decisions they turned against God. They have only themselves to blame. When they see this bitter reality for themselves in the judgment, they will also see that God has been upright, fair, and just in all of His dealings. They see that they deserve the destruction they have brought on themselves.

God is reserving the destruction of the wicked until after the judgment, so all the universe can see that He has been just and fair. As a result all will feel toward God like the apostle Paul when he exclaimed, “Oh, the

depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33).

7. Will we need to fear these eternal destructive fires of hell? Psalm 91:8-11. (Circle one.) (1) Yes. (2) No.

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Note. God's attitude and mission to man is not one of destruction. It is one of protection and salvation. Today as we look about us we see so much trouble and heartache, not only in the world, but also within our own families. Someday sin's trouble and heartache will all be over. God's wish is that we live in a land where there is no more sin, wickedness, or death. He wants us to live in peace and freedom throughout eternity. In order for this to happen, He must destroy sin and wickedness forever. God's plans are always complete and perfect.

Next Lesson. The next lesson will be on the wonderful promises of heaven to each of us—a new city and a new land which we will call “home.” What will be given to us in this new land that will make it so wonderful throughout eternity?



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Read through the lesson, then fill in this Answer Sheet. You should refer back to the lesson to find the correct answers. Referring to the lesson helps fix the answers in your mind.

Place an X before each TRUE statement.

1. God's future plan for us includes:

- living in a land where there is no sin and where it will never be allowed to exist again.
- keeping sin to a minimum in our life so we won't be bothered by it too much.

2. The wicked will experience punishment for their sin:

- before they are judged.
- after they are judged.

3. Why is the destruction of the wicked called a "strange work," and an "unusual act" of God?

- Because He takes pleasure in destroying the wicked.
- Because He dislikes destroying even the wicked since He is a God of love.

4. What will be the final result of the destruction of the wicked?

- Sin and sinners will experience a total destruction. The wicked will be burned to ashes.

- There will really be no "end," because the wicked will burn forever and ever, never being "completely" burned up.

5. Satan and his angels:

- will be reduced to ashes.
- will burn throughout eternity.

6. The Bible says that the final fires that destroy sin and sinners:

- will not stop burning until the wicked and the results of sin are totally destroyed, never to exist again.
- will keep burning forever throughout eternity.

7. According to Psalm 91:8-11 how can we keep from being burned up in hellfire?

- By trusting in God and making Him our refuge.
- By rejecting God and His commandments.

Answers to questions most often asked about how the wicked are destroyed.

Have the wicked who have died received their punishment?

- No. The wicked don't receive their punishment until the end of the world, after Jesus comes (Matthew 25:31-41, 2 Peter 3:7, 9, 10). The lake of fire will not exist for rebellious sinners until 1,000 years after the second coming of Christ

when the Devil and his angels will also be destroyed (Revelation 20:7). It is just and fair that the wicked receive their punishment only after the judgment. The wicked dead remain in their graves until then. There is no hellfire in existence now.

What is meant when the Bible uses the words “forever” and “eternal” to describe the fire that destroys wickedness?

- The result of the fire that burns up wickedness will be “forever and ever,” or “eternal”, not the fire itself. The wicked will be destroyed, burned up. They will become ashes and remain ashes (Malachi 4:1, 3). A little girl sadly reported to her mother that her brother had thrown her paper dolls into the burning fire-place. “They are nothing but ashes now,” she said. “How long will they be ashes, mother?” “I’m so sorry to say, dear, that they will be ashes forever.” In the same way the wicked will be destroyed forever.

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