



CONSUMING
FIRE

Fragrance of Life Or Fiery Torment?

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Fire Came Down from God

For many people the description of the fiery judgment after the Millennium is the final irrefutable proof that God directly kills people:

*“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. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” (Revelation 20:7-10)*

The superficial reading of Scripture, in combination with such a difficult text, not only could easily drive someone to the idea that God kills, but also that hell will last forever, because earlier in Revelation we find the following statement concerning the same event:

“And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.” (Revelation 14:11)

Only when all the scriptures on a certain subject agree, can we be sure that our theory is truth. The greatest contradiction in an interpretation which presents God as the direct executor of the wicked in the lake of fire is the life of Jesus Christ. Christ came to fully reveal the character of His Father and when we look at His life on the earth, we can surely know what God is like:

*“Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? **he that hath seen me hath seen the Father**; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?” (John 14:9)*

“I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do... I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.” (John 17:4, 6)

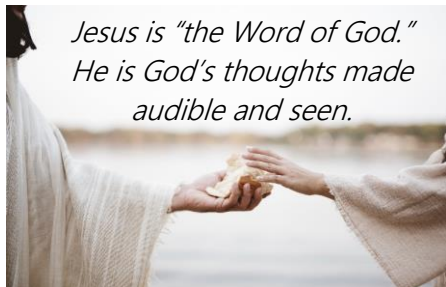
When Christ was here on the earth, He killed no one. Whatever event is described in Revelation 20, it cannot be in contradiction to the revelation which the Son of God gave of His Father while He was on the earth. Having this in mind we will examine the factors that contribute to the events in Revelation 20:7-10, as they are explained throughout the Bible.

The Word and the Mirror of Nature

The Scriptures tell us that God (1) created the world by His Word, (2) He continues to sustain it by that same Word, and that (3) this Word is His only begotten Son:

*“By **the word of the Lord** were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.... For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” (Psalm 33:6, 9)*

*“In the beginning was **the Word**, and **the Word** was with God, and **the Word** was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made **by him**; and without **him** was not*



*Jesus is “the Word of God.”
He is God’s thoughts made
audible and seen.*

*any thing made that was made. ... and **the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us**, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:1-3, 14)*

*“Who (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For **by him were all things created**, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and **by him all things consist.**” (Colossians 1:15-17)*

Since all things “consist” by the Son of God, it means that without the constant working of His power there would be a total chaos. Everything in the world is sustained by the power of God in His Word – our Lord Jesus Christ. But there is one thing that can unsettle the order sustained by this power, and that thing is sin:

*“And he said, What hast thou (Cain) done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, **it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength**; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.” (Genesis 4:10-12)*

*“The earth mourneth and fadeth away, the world languisheth and fadeth away, the haughty people of the earth do languish. **The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof**; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath **the curse devoured the earth**, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left.” (Isaiah 24:4-6)*

The Relationship between Man and the Earth

Notice that the curse which came from Cain's murdering of his brother included inanimate nature. The reason for this was because Adam, as the head (having dominion) of the earthly creation, was in a divine pattern relation with nature:

*“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let **them have dominion over** the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and **over all the earth**, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth... And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and **have dominion over** the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:26, 28)*

After Adam had fallen, the earth and everything in it started reflecting his rebellion against God. This explains the phenomena of animal rapacity and poisonous weed vegetation:

*“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: **cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field.**” (Genesis 3:17, 18)*

In the divine pattern the earth and everything upon it is a mirror of man. God did this so that man would be able to look at occurrences in nature and recognize that something was wrong in his relationship with God and righteousness due to sin. Chaos in nature was a manifestation of chaos in the psyche of man, done so that man would have a visual aid to help him recognize there was a problem, and then repent (similar to pain in our body, when we hurt we know something is wrong). If man was in harmony with God, the Earth would also reflect that in bringing forth good fruit. This is why, when the nations surrounding Israel insisted on remaining in their idolatry, they received the following reflection of their own rebellion back from the earth they were living upon:



*“And **the land is defiled**: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and **the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants**... That **the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations** that were before you.” (Leviticus 18:25, 28)*

The earth also reveals what was sown on it by the enemy of God:

*“So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, **didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares?** He said unto them, **An enemy hath done this.**” (Matthew 13:27, 28)*

The enemy in the Lord’s field was Satan, who after the fall of our first parents claimed ownership over our world:

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.” (Job 1:6, 7)

*“And the devil, taking him (Jesus) up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, **All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.**” (Luke 4:5-7)*

*“Hereafter I (Jesus) will not talk much with you: for **the prince of this world (Satan)** cometh, and hath nothing in me.” (John 14:30)*

Therefore, from the days of Adam’s fall the earth reflects Adam’s character of rebellion toward God through the influence of his new master, Satan.

The Flood Operates on the Same Principle

If it hadn't been for God's grace through Christ, Satan would have destroyed all his subjects. Satan takes advantage of people only when they become agents of his philosophy — sin. Thus during the time before the flood, he delighted that humanity reflected his character. People so much fused and confirmed themselves in their sins, that this would lead to withdrawal of God's sustaining power in Christ throughout the world:

“And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.” (Genesis 6:3)

The people before the flood were rejecting God's merciful invitation through Noah and were rebutting the pleading Spirit of Christ. God foretold that, at this pace of going deeper into wickedness, after 120 years the people would completely crucify Christ in themselves and thus the sustaining power of God in Christ would be removed/crucified and the earth would be allowed to fully manifest the character of their fall:



*“For this they willingly are ignorant of, that **by the word of God** the heavens were of old, and the earth **standing out of the water and in the water**: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, **by the same word** are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.” (2 Peter 3:5-7)*

The people before the flood did not recognize that the power of Christ was that which rallied the elements of the world. They thought that the processes of nature were sustained by an inherent power contained in nature itself and therefore Noah's warning for the coming flood seemed irrational to them. However, the Scripture tells us that the power which sustains everything is Christ – the living Word of God. Here Peter shows that *the same process that led to a flood of water will also lead to the fiery flood after the Millennium, and as the former was caused by the crucifixion of the living Word of God, so the latter will be caused by a similar process.* The hearts of men were completely hardened in their total rejection of the pleading of Christ; their final response to His Spirit was to lash out to kill it. The eviction (drowning out) of the Spirit of God through the people's sins that lived before the flood, was the reason for that flood:

*“Hast thou marked the old way which wicked men have trodden? Which were cut down out of time, whose foundation was overflown with a flood: Which said unto God, **Depart from us**: and what can the Almighty do for them?” (Job 22:15-17)*

This becomes clear by a careful reading of Genesis 6:

*“And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will **destroy** them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.” (Genesis 6:13, 14)*

If we examine the word “destroy” in Hebrew from *Strong's Concordance*, we will see that it means:

H 7843: A primitive root; to decay, i.e. (causatively) ruin (literally or figuratively) -- batter, cast off, **corrupt**(-er, thing), destroy(-er, -uction), lose, mar, perish, spill, spoiler, X utterly, waste(-r).

This same word is used in the verses just before thirteen:

*“The earth also was **corrupt** [H7843] before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was **corrupt** [H7843]; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.” (Genesis 6:11-12)*

If we apply the word destroy, which the translators used for the same Hebrew word in Genesis 6:13, then the text will be as follows:

“The earth was ruined in the sight of God; the earth was filled with violence.” (Genesis 6:11, New English Translation)

*“The earth also was **destroyed** before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was **destroyed**; for all flesh had destroyed his way upon the earth.” (Genesis 6:11-12)*

Here is verse 11 in the International Standard Version (ISV):

“By this time, the earth had become ruined in God’s opinion and filled with violence.”

The earth itself was already ruined (destroyed) and stained with the immorality and violence of men, and therefore God saw that in its final phase the earth would express man’s rebellion. The earth reacted no differently than its sinful inhabitants by retaliating against its enemies, as it naturally “vomiteth out her inhabitants” and destroyed them (see again, Leviticus 18:25-28).

This is why Jesus in the days of His earthly life said to the multitude:

*“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, **I judge him not**: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: **the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.**” (John 12:47, 48)*

Here Jesus separates Himself from the work of judgment that operates in His Word to show that His Word, which “upholds all things” (Hebrews 1:3), is an independent and impartial arbiter which reflects back men’s wickedness and punishes them when they refuse to repent. Because of this, when Christ returns the second time He is represented in the following manner:

*“And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness **he doth judge and make war**. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and **his name is called The Word of God**. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And **out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations**: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God...” (Revelation 19:11-15)*

The Mirror of the Law

Jesus returns as the representative of His Father’s character. As the living Word of God, He embodies the principles of God’s Law of love. But this same love which works in saving all penitent sinners, at the same time turns out to be a “deadly savour” or “fragrance” in the wicked:

*“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest **the savour of his knowledge** by us in every place. For we are unto God **a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish**: To the one we are **the savour (fragrance) of death unto death**; and to the other the savour (fragrance) of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:14-16)*

The same love of God which is life giving for the righteous is deadly for the wicked. Love does not change its qualities; it is the same savour for the two classes of people, but its impact depends on what kind of a person it is revealed to. This process is explained in the fact that when the wicked see God as He is – absolute unselfish love – in the light of this presence their sins show themselves in their real enormity; their self-deception is swept away by the pure light of truth, and thus the deadly results of sin fall on them, confirming that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). If God was the source of that death, then the verse would have to say the wages of God for sin is death. But God is not the source of death. Therefore, by allowing sin to burn up the wicked, death itself ceases to exist:

“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.” (Revelation 20:14)

If God is the direct executioner of this judgment then death would be immortalized in God. Yet we know that in our heavenly Father there is no darkness whatsoever:

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17)

*“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is **no darkness at all.**” (1 John 1:5)*

Why is it so difficult for humans to understand the manner in which creation responds/reacts to sin, therefore misunderstanding God as a destroyer? It is because we ourselves are, without the mind of Christ, little destroyers, made in the image of our carnal father Satan, who is THE destroyer (John 8:44, Revelation 9:11). We look at the Law and the Law-upholder and see our own face as in a mirror:

“For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass [mirror]...” (James 1:23)

Concerning the reflective property of the Law there are many examples provided in Scripture. Jesus allowed for the development of such a process, when His disciples held in themselves the national sin of racial intolerance:

*“Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. **But he answered her not a word.** And his disciples came and besought him, saying, **Send her away; for she crieth after us.** But he answered and said, **I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.** Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, **It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.** And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, **O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt.** And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.” (Matthew 15:21-28)*

In this situation, in His capacity as the living Law of God/Word of God, Jesus reflected His disciples' racial intolerance back to them so that He might help them see their sin, and also to test the faith of the woman from Sidon who needed to overcome her own prejudices against a Jewish Messiah. We can see how in this case the Law did not reflect the true character of God, but rather the disciples' sinful thoughts, because the disciples were hearing and not doing the Law:

*“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. **For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror.**” (James 1:22, 23)*

Another similar example we can find in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus:

“And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” (Luke 16:22-24)

In this parable Christ was meeting the people on their own ground. Most believed the error of a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection which Scripture denies: “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing ...” (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

“For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.” (Isaiah 38:18)

Therefore, due to their lack of understanding, Jesus framed His parable to instill important truths through their preconceived opinions by holding up a mirror. The aim of this process, where the Law reflects the sinner's thinking, is to help the sinner see his unveiled condition – a diagnosis of his true relation to God – to lead him to repentance so that he might be enabled to receive God's abundant saving grace:

“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” (Romans 5:20)

However, when sinners reject every opportunity that God had given them and they had completely identify themselves with their sins, then the same reflecting function of the Law will allow their destruction by their sins:

*“For they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD: They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. **Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.**” (Proverbs 1:29-31)*

The Revelation of the Cross

On the cross it is seen that sin is indeed death. God stated this from the very beginning:

“But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:17)

The reason why Adam and Eve did not die immediately was because Christ had started dying in their stead as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Revelation 13:8). In fact, Christ has been carrying His cross and suffering the cross-like death daily since the beginning of sin:



“In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.” (Isaiah 63:9)

*“And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross **daily**, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23)*

Adam embraced the philosophy of Satan, and that was outwardly manifested through eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. According to this false philosophy, God was not truly concerned about man’s wellbeing, and His gifts were only the means through which He put everyone in His kingdom under His submission:

“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Genesis 3:4, 5)

The Hiding of God's Face

With this thinking Adam and his wife started believing that it is not sin that leads to death but rather that God murders the transgressor of His Law. This explains their reaction after their fall:

*“And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and **Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.**”*
(Genesis 3:8)

This thinking stuck deeply in the minds of all of Adam's descendants. Now we can more easily understand why the natural man sees in the death on Calvary a direct act of God:

*“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: **yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.**”* (Isaiah 53:4)

It was not God but sin that killed Jesus on the cross, hiding His Father's merciful face:

*“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, **Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?** that is to say, **My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**”* (Matthew 27:46)

Here Jesus speaks from the first words of Psalm 22, which foretold 1,000 years earlier His experience on the cross. Further in this Psalm we see the truth of whether the Father hid His face from His Son:

*“For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; **neither hath he hid his face from him;** but when he cried unto him, he heard.”* (Psalm 22:24)

The Father was there and suffered with His Son, yet Jesus could not feel that because the guilt for the sin of the world surrounded Him in darkness which was represented by the literal darkness while on the cross (Luke 23:44).

*“For he (the Father) hath made him (Jesus) **to be sin** for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)*

*“Who his own self **bare our sins in his own body** on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye are healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)*

*“But we see Jesus ... that he by the grace of God should **taste death for every man.**” (Hebrews 2:9)*

The face of God appears to be hidden from His dear Son, because at that precise moment Christ was the Sin-Bearer:

*“But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and **your sins have hid (clouded) his face from you**, that he will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:2)*

God did not cease from loving His Son. God is love and He does not change His person nor His character:

“...for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Hebrews 13:5)

*“For the LORD is good; **his mercy is everlasting**; and his truth endureth to all generations.” (Psalm 100:5)*

*“How long, LORD?
wilt thou hide thyself
for ever? shall thy
wrath burn like fire?”
(Psalm 89:46)*

It is only from the sin-bearer’s point of view that the merciful attributes of our heavenly Father are not seen, because the philosophy of sin hides them from him. This state of being disconnected from God and left to the results of sin is God’s wrath. This is not any kind of

character change on the part of God, where He ceases from showing mercy because His patience has ended. This is the way the sinner sees God. We see how Cain expresses this thinking after he had slain his brother:

“And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. (margin: My iniquity is greater than that it may be forgiven).” (Genesis 4:13)

The translator’s margin notes show how the Hebrew includes the idea that Cain thought his guilt was unforgivable. This thought is also translated in the Douay-Rheims (DRA) 1899 American Edition as well as Wycliffe’s translation:

“And Cain said to the Lord: My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon.” (Genesis 4:13, DRA)

“And Cain said to the Lord, My wickedness is more than that I deserve forgiveness (for).” (Genesis 4:13, Wycliffe)

Adam Clarke says this in his commentary about Genesis 4:13:

*“The original words may be translated, **“Is my crime too great to be forgiven?”** – words which we may presume he uttered on the verge of black despair. It is most probable that [the Hebrew word] *avon* signifies rather the *crime* than the *punishment*; in this sense it is used in Lev 26:41; Lev 26:43; 1 Sam 28:10; 2 Kings 7:9; and [the Hebrew word] *nasa* signifies to remit or forgive. **The marginal reading is, therefore, to be preferred to that in the text.**”*

This is the thinking of sin. It is by such deceit that sin murders man, using the Law of God:

*“And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, **deceived me, and by it slew me.**” (Romans 7:10, 11)*

*“Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee, which **frameth mischief by a law?**” (Psalms 94:20)*

All of sin’s weight, with the terribly errant thinking and understanding that goes with it, pressed down upon Jesus and smashed His soul, hiding His dear Father’s face:

“O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent ... But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn:¹ they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted in the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him² ... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd [piece of pottery]; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;³ and thou has brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet ... they part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.⁴” (Psalms 22:2, 6-8, 14-16, 18)

It was not until this happened that it became apparent that the fruit of sin is “you will surely die” (Genesis 2:17). No man had ever fell into the complete blackness of the final death caused by sin before Jesus did, and no man has since Jesus died. For men who reject His sacrifice, they will understand the feeling Jesus felt at the end of the 1,000 years after the 2nd resurrection.

No one ever died such a death as that which Jesus died, and therefore Scripture calls Him “the first begotten of the dead” or “the firstborn from the dead”, despite the fact He was not chronologically the first who was resurrected from the grave:

*“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and **the first begotten of the dead...**” (Revelation 1:5)*

*“And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead;** that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18)*

¹ See Matthew 27:28-31

² See Matthew 27:43

³ See John 19:28

⁴ See Matthew 27:35

Scripture shows that God does not count as absolute the death wherewith all people of human history have died – it is only unconscious sleep:

*“And many of them that **sleep in the dust** of the earth shall awake, **some** to everlasting life, and **some** to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Daniel 12:2)*

Even the unrighteous are presented as sleeping, because this is not the ultimate death. Jesus’ statements concerning the sleeping righteous are even stronger:

*“But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? **God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.**” (Matthew 22:31, 32)*

*“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And **whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.** Believest thou this?” (John 11:25, 26)*

The Judgment

Our loving Father gave His precious Son to a death which comes from our sins – a death from which His Son would never have been resurrected, had He committed even one sin. He did this so that we might be treated the way His Son deserves, and that is to live forever. However, because God does not force anyone to accept His Son’s death in our place, there will be a second death:

*“And I saw **a great white throne, and him that sat on it**, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I **saw the dead**, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and **the dead** were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their*

*works. And the sea gave up **the dead** which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged **every man according to their works**. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."*
(Revelation 20:11-15)

This text is found just after the description of the fire that consumes the wicked, which is the topic of our study. It appears as an explanation of those verses, because it repeats the event in another way. It shows that the judgment comes from the manifestation of the character of the One sitting on the great white throne. It is also important to note that those who receive the judgment are called dead (even after they are resurrected), and this is so because they are "dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1, 2, 5). Therefore their judgment is just a manifestation of what had already happened spiritually to them.

Death and hell are also thrown into the lake of fire, which means that the judgment could not be executed directly by God, otherwise in His person death would be immortalized instead of being thrown into the lake of fire. At the end, the judgment over these people is the result of their refusal to accept Christ's death on their behalf. It means that Christ's death on the cross is very similar to the death of these people, because they die consumed by their sins:

*"And he (the priest) shall carry forth the bullock **without the camp**, and **burn him** as he burned the first bullock: **it is a sin offering** for the congregation." (Leviticus 4:21)*

*"For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are **burned without the camp**. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered **without the gate**." (Hebrews 13:11, 12)*

Without, or outside the camp means the place where the sin-bearer cannot see our Father's merciful face:

*“All the days wherein **the plague** shall be in him **he shall be defiled; he is unclean:** he shall dwell alone; **without the camp** shall his habitation be.” (Leviticus 13:46)*

*“**Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp**; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him.” (Leviticus 24:14)*

Jesus speaks about this place in the following manner:

*“And his lord was wroth, and **delivered him to the tormentors**, till he should pay all that was due unto him. **So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you**, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.” (Matthew 18:34, 35)*

And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:42)

*“Then said the king to the servants, **Bind him hand and foot, and take him away**, and cast him into **outer darkness**; there shall be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**.” (Matthew 22:13)*

Spiritual darkness is the state in which sinners become so much one with the philosophy of sin that they are no longer able to behold and perceive the light from the character of God. In every case where Jesus speaks about this place/condition, the judgment is mediated through someone else: the “tormentors” or “servants”, “will bind them” and “throw them”, which confirms the idea that God is not the direct executioner of the death sentence; this is done **by their own sins** before the face of His glorious and loving presence:

*“**Evil shall slay the wicked:** and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.” (Psalms 34:21)*

*“The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way: but **the wicked fall by his own wickedness**. The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but **transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness**.” (Proverbs 11:5, 6)*

*“Behold, he (the wicked) travaileth (is pregnant) with iniquity, and hath conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood. He made a pit, and digged it, and **is fallen into the ditch which he made.** His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealings shall come down upon his own pate (head).” (Psalms 7:14-16)*

*“The heathen are sunk down in the pit **that they made:** in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The LORD is known*

*by the judgment which he executeth: **the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.**” (Psalms 9:15, 16)*

*“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap. **For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption;** but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.” (Galatians 6:7, 8)*

“Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath: [how did He do this?] their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD.” (Ezekiel 22:31)



In the light of the cross we can understand that God’s wrath is very different from what many people think:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD.” (Isaiah 55:8)

“For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.” (James 1:20)

Here is one biblical definition of God's anger:

*“And he saith unto them, Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they held their peace. And when he had looked round about on them with **anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts**, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.” (Mark 3:4, 5)*

Jesus' anger comes from His grieving because of the hardening of human hearts. It was not an anger which could make Him destroy people, for that would break the 6th Commandment and go against His character. His anger was a sorrow coming from the fact that His children allowed sin to separate them from Him and hence to deprive them from His blessings – ultimately leading to their death, as they cut themselves off from the source of life. The very next act of Jesus was not a murder, but the merciful healing of the man with the withered hand.

So, what does the mystery of the cross reveal to us concerning the way the wicked will die after the Millennium? The thing that killed Christ was not His physical suffering from the nails and the beating. His soul anguish that came from the guilt of the world was so much greater than his physical pain:

*“Surely **he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows** ... All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him **the iniquity of us all**. He was **oppressed, and he was afflicted**, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.” (Isaiah 53:4, 6, 7)*

*“And he (Jesus) took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, **My soul (heart) is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.**” (Matthew 26:37, 38)*

The death of the wicked will be very similar:

*“For they have made ready their **heart like an oven**, whiles they lie in wait: their baker sleepeth all the night; in the morning **it burneth as a flaming fire.**” (Hosea 7:6)*

*“And their shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the wind roaring; **Men’s hearts failing them for fear**, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.” (Luke 21:25, 26)*

“From above hath he sent fire into my bones, and it prevaiileth against them: he hath spread a net for my feet, he hath turned me back: he hath made me desolate and faint all the day.” (Lamentations 1:13)

We also know the physical suffering of Christ was inspired by Satan and not God by the fact that it was Satan that entered into the heart of Judas to betray Christ. (Luke 22:3-4; John 13:21-27). It is Satan who “**has** the power of death” (Hebrews 2:14⁵); for he is its originator.

Actually, in terms of them being killed by their sins before the light of God’s holy Law, their death is absolutely identical to that of Christ, who was the first to die by this type of death so that no one would need to die by it – no more mystery, the result of sin was there for all to see. The only difference between Christ’s death and those of the wicked is that Christ is able to hold on in faith to the mercy of His Father, believing Psalm 16:10-11, and therefore sin doesn’t separate Him from His Father:

⁵ The Greek word for “has” here in Hebrews 2:14 is ἔχω (echo) which is present active participle. It means “to have”, “posses”, or “holds.” Satan alone “has” (holds) the power of death. God does not possess death. Death comes from sin, not God.

“Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.”
(Acts 2:27-28)

It is this faith in God’s mercy, when all our sins are bearing upon us and we are in darkness, that Jesus offers to us. It is here that Jesus overcame the world’s hardness of heart. The sinner, on the other hand, believes the separation is complete and that God *will* leave his soul in hell.

The Divine Pattern of the Fire

The physical and spiritual suffering of Jesus follows the divine model of source and channel:

*“That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and **of the Father (source), and of Christ (channel); In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**”* (Colossians 2:2, 3)

*“But to us there is but **one God, the Father (source), of whom** are all things, and we in him; and one **Lord Jesus Christ (channel), by whom** are all things, and we by him.”* (1 Corinthians 8:6)

*“God (source), who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son (channel), whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; **Who (Jesus) being the brightness of his (God’s) glory, and the express image of his person ...**”* (Hebrews 1:1-3)

The invisible God was manifested through His Son – our Lord Jesus Christ. As begotten by God, Christ manifests and exalts His Father’s glory. Through this

pattern of relationship, we can understand better the relation between Christ's physical (visible) and spiritual (invisible) suffering on the cross. The conclusion from this pattern is that the source of Christ's sufferings was sin rather than His physical ill-treatment. Christ died from the guilt of sin that crushed His soul, not from His physical crucifixion on the cross. That is why Pilate was surprised He died so fast, for physically it should have taken much longer (see Mark 15:44); the two criminals next to Jesus were still alive when Jesus died and needed their legs broken to die quicker (John 19:31-33).

The physical suffering was only an expression of His soul anguish. Thus, with those who die in the second death, the source of suffering is spiritual – the fiery consuming of their sins before the face of their loving Father and His Son. Therefore, the spiritual suffering comes through the sense of guilt and the physical suffering is a manifestation of satanic fury.

We see this also demonstrated in the sacrifices of the Old Testament. The sinner slew the animal and then it was consumed by fire at the altar. By this symbol it was shown that the source of suffering and death is not the physical fire that consumed the sacrifice, but the experience of the guilt for sins. Through the confession of sins over the innocent sacrifice and the slaying by hand, the sinner should realize that his sin was what killed Christ. We also know that God told Elijah that He was not in the fire:

*“And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake **a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire:** and after the fire a still small voice.” (1 Kings 19:11, 12)*

Yet when the Israelites came to Sinai they perceived the glory of the Lord as devouring fire:

*“And the sight of the glory of the LORD **was like devouring fire** on the top of the mount **in the eyes of the children of Israel.**” (Exodus 24:17)*

Their false perception of God deceived them, and being deceived this false perception struck fear into their hearts and eventually slew them in the wilderness (Numbers 14:20-29). Thus the devouring fire is a response to the sinner’s perception of judgment. God is not in the fire, but the presence of God causes the fury in the sinner to manifest as fire. Sin takes occasion by the commandment and slays the sinner:

*“For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived (was exposed), and I died. **And the commandment, which was ordained to (bring) life, I found to be unto death.** For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.” (Romans 7:11)*

On the cross Christ died by the sword of the Word which reflected the guilt for the sins of the whole world, which Jesus bore on Himself.

*“For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, **piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**” (Hebrews 4:12)*

*“And if any man hear my words, and believe not, **I judge him not:** for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: **the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.**” (John 12:47, 48)*

Likewise the wicked after the Millennium perish from the suffering of the soul in the full realization of the nature of their sins before the face of God’s wonderful character, and the consuming of their bodies in the physical fire is but the outward expression of this. Internal guilt and fire in the soul will

manifest in literal fire. This teaches us the divine pattern. It confirms the fact that the direct source of the physical fire is not God but rather the guilty reaction to the loving character of God.

The purpose of the Word of God presenting God's judgments of the wicked in a way that allows for the carnal man to see God as a murderer is to expose our sinful imagination concerning our Father and to lead us to repentance.

At the close of the thousand years, Christ descends in terrific majesty to call forth the wicked dead from their graves (Revelation 20:5) "unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:29). As the wicked went into their graves, so they come forth with the same enmity toward Christ and the same spirit of rebellion. We know that the next time we see Christ He "shall come **in the glory of his Father** with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (Matthew 16:27). In the beginning the wicked see only the outward expression of this glory, and this makes them acknowledge the righteousness of God in the same way the Israelites acknowledged the glory of God at Mt Sinai. This glory wrest from their lips words, which they would never utter at other circumstances:

"For as it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." (Romans 14:11)

This is not repentance though. Mercy ceased to plead for them not because God cannot or is not willing to forgive them, but because they constantly prefer their sins instead of God until they become unable to experience genuine repentance. If they were given a second probation it would be occupied as was the first in evading the Law of God, with its Statutes and Judgments, and exciting rebellion against Him.

In Revelation 20:7-9 Satan persuades the wicked to invade the golden city – the New Jerusalem, where the redeemed are, and inspires them with his own spirit of hatred toward Christ. The countless soldiers of that army prepare themselves to conquer the city, ignoring the open gates. Their behavior gives full evidence that they would never repent.

It is by a life of rebellion that Satan and all who unite with him place themselves so far out of harmony with God and His true character that His very presence is to them a consuming fire. As Paul, quoting Deuteronomy 4:24, wrote: “For our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29). It is the **glory** of Him who is love that will destroy them. But what is the glory of God?

*“And he (Moses) said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. And he (God) said, I will make all my **goodness** pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name (character) of the LORD before thee; and will be **gracious** to whom I will be gracious, and will shew **mercy** on whom I will shew mercy.” (Exodus 33:18)*

*“And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name (character) of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, **merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.**” (Exodus 34:5-6)*

God’s glory is His character of love. God’s nature of perfect love, His **goodness**, is what consumes the wicked. The manifestation of God’s holy and merciful character reveals the real nature of sin and exposes fully its destroying characteristic: Read, Romans 12:19, 20:

*“Dearly beloved, **avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.**”*

How do we read this sentence? Does God here teach us not to do evil to our enemies because by doing it we take away *His* opportunity to do it? If something we do is evil, and God does exactly the same thing, does the evil thing suddenly become good? Such a reading reflects rather our own human thinking. “God’s ways our higher than our ways.” (Isaiah 55:8, 9). Will God’s vengeance and His wrath manifest in a way which is different from the counsel that has been given to us to follow in similar situations – to do good

to those who treat us badly? If this was so, then God requires from us things which He Himself does not do. We must control our anger, but God is allowed to release His anger when He pleases? Jesus tells us that God requires from us to treat with love those who hate us, because by doing so we show that we are God's children, doing His will and character:

*“Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away. Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, **love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.** For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? **Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.**”*
(Matthew 5:42-48)

The perfection of our heavenly Father goes far beyond the practice of loving only those who treat you well. Luke expresses this perfection as follows:

*“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. **Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.**”*
(Luke 6:35, 36)

In His requirement to treat our enemies well, our Father in heaven simply wishes us to follow His example. So, carefully setting aside our carnal views of God, let us again be reminded of what the “coals of fire” are which comes down over the wicked: “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for **in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.**” (Romans 2:19, 20).

The fire that we heap on the head of one who has enmity against us, and unto whom we show kindness and love, is not a physical fire. It is a fire which is kindled from the consciousness of the terrible nature of sin in the context of God's love and kindness. When we are loving to our enemies, we heap the fire of the Holy Spirit upon him to convict him of his wrong course. Jesus speaks about this fire in the following way:

"I've come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already ablaze!" (Luke 12:49, ISV)

God's Love—Fragrance of Life or Fiery Torment?

Jesus lived a life of perfect sacrifice and selflessness, giving us a picture of how the Law is to be written on our hearts and leaving us without excuse for our own sinful selfishness. Through the manifestation of the truth about His Father's loving character while on the earth, Jesus really kindled a fire – a spiritual fire which burns through all the self-deceptions of man that he creates to live a life of depravity without feeling guilty. This fire would either consume sin from the hearts of the people who repent, or would consume them in the last day when they see the gracious face of the One who has always worked for their salvation yet they have rejected Him:

The reaction of those who reject:

*"And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, **hid themselves** in the dens and in the rocks of the*



*mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, **Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?***" (Revelation 6:14-17)

The reaction of those who accept:

*"And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and **the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces**; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, **Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.**" (Isaiah 25:7-9)*



These two reactions that come at the second coming are echoed by Paul. He taught that before "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him" (2 Thessalonians 2:1), a falling away from Scriptural truth will take place as "the man of sin" (the Antichrist) rises into power whom "the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." (Verse 8). The same brightness that God's people experience at the second coming is no different than the



brightness that the wicked will experience. The difference is how each group *reacts* to that brightness of His loving character. God is not directly destroying those who reject. As we will see, the destruction comes as a natural result of

their self-condemnation and guilt because they refused to give all of it over to Jesus. Their reaction will be even more severe than the Roman Soldiers at Christ's resurrection:



“And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His

*countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: **And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.**”*
(Matthew 28:2-4)

Notice a similar response found in Daniel chapter 3:

The results of those who reject:

*“Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do ye not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? ... if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a **burning fiery furnace** ... Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, **the flame of fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego** ...”* (Daniel 3:14-22)

The results of those who accept:

*“Then Nebuchadnezzar was astonished ... and said, Lo, **I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God** ... then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire ... whose bodies **the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.**”* (Daniel 3:24-27)

Notice the opposite responses between Daniel and his men in Daniel 10:5-7:

*“Then I (Daniel) lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a certain man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with fine gold of Uphaz: His body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as lamps of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass, and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude. And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for **the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves.**”*

And again in the book of John; some heard thunder, others an angel:

*“Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it **thundered**: others said, **An angel spake to him.**” (John 12:28, 29)*

In Matthew 21:12-16 and John 2:13-17 both Matthew and John record that, after brandishing a whip, Jesus entered the temple and drove out all the corrupt religious leaders and their conspiring money changers who were

*“With the purified
you show yourself
pure; and with the
crooked you make
yourself seem
tortuous.” (Psalm
18:26, ESV)*

profaning God’s true character by deceiving the people making God to appear to be just like them (Psalm 50:16-21). Even here there was no display of violence on the part of Jesus; for “he had done no violence” declared the prophet of old (Isaiah 53:9). Jesus never struck anyone and only those with a self-condemning conscience were afraid and ran away. However, the dear little children who

had witnessed the event were not afraid and began to sing praises to God while the blind and lame stayed by and were healed.

For the redeemed, the manifestation of God's agape (loving) character is a fragrance of life, but for the rest these scenes are consuming fire which will torment their souls just as deep as they have allowed sin to penetrate them, and just as closely as they had known this glory yet chose to turn their backs on it. Here is shown the source of the suffering of the wicked. When God spoke about the fall of Lucifer, He showed where this spiritual fire comes from:

*"Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; **therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee.**" (Ezekiel 28:18)*

In the beginning this fire was kindled in Lucifer's heart through his iniquity, but after the Millennium the presence of the One who is love and light will manifest it completely:

"Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned (scorned)." (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7)

The fiery love that comes from our Father's presence will bring out all the wicked lusts as well as that terrible fire from within the fallen cherub. The blaze of mental anguish will consume him and those who have attached themselves to him, turning them into **ashes**:



*“And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be **ashes** under the soles of your feet in the day that I do this, saith the LORD of hosts.” (Malachi 4:3)*

*We remember
the source of the
fire comes from
the midst of
Satan and not
the midst of God.*

The wicked now see what they have forfeited by their life of rebellion. The witness of their own lifestyle declared they would not have the Son of God reign over them. As those unbelieving Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, the wicked judge and condemn **themselves** unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). In the light of this all-exposing love, the wicked set themselves

against Satan as they see that he was not their benefactor but rather had led them all along to share in his destruction. It is exactly here where the spiritual fire becomes manifested as a physical fire. Erupting from the midst of their own soul their rage is kindled against Satan.

“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God ... I will be like the most High. Yet **thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; That made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners? All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house.”** (Isaiah 14:12-18)

*“Because thou [Satan] hast set thine heart as the heart of God; behold, therefore I will bring **strangers** upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and **they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit ... I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from***

*the midst of the stones of fire.... I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee.... I will bring thee to **ashes** upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee.... Thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more.” (Ezekiel 28:6-8, 16-19)*

*“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, **shall be stubble**: and **the day that cometh shall burn them up**, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” (Malachi 4:1)*

*“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.**” (2 Peter 3:10)*

We remind the reader that Jesus taught that He would not be the One to judge at the end, but the Word which He had spoken (John 12:47, 48). God does not use lethal power in His judgments. This truth is confirmed also through one of the 14 books of the Apocrypha, which were all included in Bibles such as: Coverdale’s Bible, Matthew-Tyndale Bible, The Great Bible, The Geneva Bible, The Bishop’s Bible, and the first edition of the King James Bible printed in 1611. The book we will read from is 2 Esdras 13:37, 38:

*“And this my Son shall rebuke the wicked inventions of those nations, **which for their wicked life are fallen into the tempest; And shall lay before them their evil thoughts, and the torments wherewith they shall begin to be tormented, which are like unto a flame**: and **he shall destroy them without labour by the law which is like unto me.**”*

Here is confirmed the idea that the wicked will be punished through the reflecting function of the Law as also seen in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who “went down alive into the pit” (Numbers 16:28-33). Here God was revealing that they themselves, like all those who “crucify to themselves

the Son of God afresh” (Hebrews 6:6), had stepped out from within God’s protective hedge. They had “made a pit, and digged it” and had “fallen into the ditch which (they) had made” (Psalm 7:15). Thus Paul, referring to the sinful attitudes of those recorded in the book of Numbers, counsels us:

*“Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and **that Rock was Christ**. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. **Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were **destroyed of the destroyer****. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples (examples): and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” (1 Corinthians 10:10-12)*

The Greek word Paul used for the word “destroyer” here is *ὄλοθρευτής* (*olothreutés*) which literally means “venomous serpent.” Who is this destroying serpent?

*“And the great dragon was cast out, that old **serpent**, called the **Devil, and Satan**, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” (Revelation 12:9)*

*“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because **your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.**” (1 Peter 5:6-8)*

Clearly Satan is the destroyer, but God is the Restorer! Thus the following Scripture concerning the death of the firstborn of Egypt begins to become clear:

*“For **I will pass through** the land of Egypt this night, **and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt**, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.” (Exodus 12:12)*

From what we have just learned are we to believe it was God Himself who killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt? Or is it that the Egyptians left themselves vulnerable to Satan—the destroyer—by rejecting God? Let’s continue reading just a few verses down:

*“For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he seeth the blood upon the lintel, and on the two side posts, the LORD will pass over the door, and will not suffer **the destroyer** to come in unto your houses to smite you.” (Exodus 12:23)*

Rejecting God brings about destruction because He will not interfere with your freedom of choice. He will tearfully allow you to wander beyond His protective grace. But the destruction comes from your own wickedness and death’s originator — Satan.

*“He (God) cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending **evil angels** among them.” (Psalms 78:49)*

The Hebrew word used for “sending” here is more accurately translated as “releasing” or “letting loose.” Christ and the evil angels are not working

together. Under His protection Christ and His angels hold back Satan and his evil angels. Apart from His protection you are choosing the releasing of these evil angels.

The Glorious Character of God

The way we read the Scriptures is crucial for the way we will be judged, because the Word of God is like a hammer to break the flinty heart in pieces, and a fire to consume the dross and tin (Ezekiel 22:19-22):

*“And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: **from his right hand went a fiery law for them.**” (Deuteronomy 33:2)*

*“Is not my word **like as a fire**? Saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29)*

“For our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29)

The Law of God is fiery, because it is a transcript of His character as we previously learned in 2 Esdras 13:38 where God said: “the law which is like unto me.” As we have seen, this fire comes from the very substance of God, which is pure and lofty love: “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” (1 John 4:8). Notice that it does not say that God is loving, or, that God has love, but it says, He **is** love. Therefore, when the name of God was presented, which is His character, mercy stands always on the top of the list:

*“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise **lovingkindness**, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.” (Jeremiah 9:23, 24)*

As love is the very substance of God, it means that all of His other qualities are only love's manifestation, or channels for that love. This means that everything God does is moved by love. The justice of our Father is not one that is severe and deprived of mercy. Satan is the one who wants to present God as if with Him mercy and justice are incompatible. In contrast with that, God always acts in love to His children. Scripture represents this love as a fire:

*“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for **love** is strong as death, **jealousy** is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are **flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord.**” (Song of Solomon 8:6, 7, English Standard Version, ESV)*

How is it possible for love to be fierce? Our heavenly Father's love mercifully reveals the true nature of sin – its destroying quality. This is the flame which will torment the wicked:

*“The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and 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)*

The Greek word used here for brimstone has the following definitions:

Θειον: (theion, related to theios – dealing with divinity) Strong's definition: 1. Brimstone a. **divine incense**.....

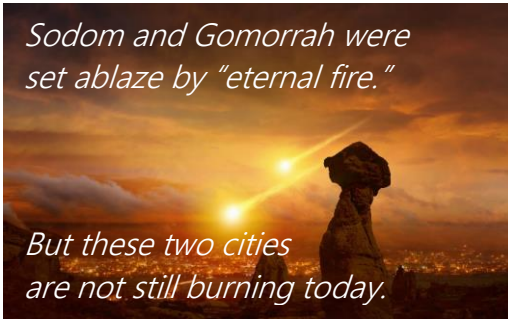
This fire cannot burn the wicked for the whole of eternity, because that would be in contradiction to God's just character. But does not Revelation 14 continue saying ...

*“And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up **for ever and ever**: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.”*

But notice it's the “smoke” that ascends up “for ever and ever.” Smoke is what remains *after* something is consumed to ashes. This smoke symbolizes the memory of sin and its destructive nature. It will never be forgotten.

But what about the “eternal fire” mentioned in Jude 7:

*“Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of **eternal fire.**”*



Sodom and Gomorrah were set ablaze by “eternal fire.”

But these two cities are not still burning today.

Are these two cities still burning today? No. Jude also says that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was “set forth for an example.” What example is he speaking of?

2 Peter 2:6 answers this:

*“And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, **making them an ensample (example) unto those that after should live ungodly.**”*

Peter states that these two cities were reduced to “ashes” and this was to be an example of the end of the wicked. So, we must conclude that the same “eternal fire” will destroy Satan and his followers and burn (reduce) them to ashes! Remember, Malachi 4:3 states, “And ye shall tread down the wicked; for **they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet.**” It’s the *destruction* that is eternal. Jesus taught that only those who “believe” will receive “eternal life” and not “perish” as the unbelievers (John 3:16) and Paul says the wicked will receive eternal death (Romans 6:23). By continuous rejection of God’s selfless love, the heart will remain a self-centered/self-pleasing heart that is like dry straw easily kindled.

*“Ye shall conceive chaff (straw), ye shall bring forth stubble: **your breath (spirit), as fire, shall devour you.** And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire.” (Isaiah 33:11, 12)*

Again, it all depends on how you treat God's love. If you reject it, the guilt of self-judgment and condemnation will consume you to ashes. If you receive it, God's fiery love will purge sinfulness from your lives and it becomes everlasting life unto you. Notice the question Isaiah puts forth as to whom will dwell in the devouring fire:

"... Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" (Isaiah 33:14)

Most of the Christian world would answer that it's the wicked who dwell in "everlasting burnings." But let's allow Isaiah to continue as he answers his own question in the very next verse:

*"He that **walketh righteously**, and speaketh **uprightly**; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and **shutteth his eyes from seeing evil.**" (Isaiah 33:15)*

It's those who have accepted Jesus and His righteousness who will dwell in the everlasting fire of God's love; for they have been baptized (totally immersed) "with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11).

Scripture teaches that it is the righteous who will live eternally in the everlasting fire!

It is true that this fire is unquenchable:

*"And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into **the fire that never shall be quenched**: Where their worm dieth not, and **the fire is not quenched.**" (Mark 9:43, 44)*

The word quench means "to extinguish" or "put out." No one will be able to put the fire out. Jeremiah prophesied that Jerusalem would be destroyed by fire that would not be quenched:

*“But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle **a fire** in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and **it shall not be quenched.**” (Jeremiah 17:27)*

First of all, notice that this unquenchable fire “will devour (or, consume) the palaces of Jerusalem.” In fact, because of this fire, Jerusalem was left “desolate”, but only for 70 years (2 Chronicles 36:19-21). Jerusalem was burned with unquenchable fire, but Jerusalem is not burning today. The fire is referred to as being that which cannot be quenched because no one was able to put the fire out. But it did burn out on its own. The fire did not burn out until it had completed its job of making Jerusalem desolate. When we read what Isaiah has to say about the lake of fire the whole picture becomes crystal clear:

*“Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; **they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame:** there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.” (Isaiah 47:14)*

Isaiah also prophesied that “the people shall be as the fuel of the fire: no man shall spare his brother.” (Isaiah 9:19).

Many assume that the “worm” Jesus speaks of in Mark 9:44 is referring to a person’s soul that will never die in hellfire. However, Jesus clearly says that both body and soul will be destroyed in hell (Matthew 10:28) and not live for an endless amount of time in endless torture. God has tearfully warned: “the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:4). The truth is, Jesus is referring to a literal worm or maggot that feeds off dead bodies. When Jesus says these words, He’s quoting from Isaiah 66:24 which says:

“And they (the redeemed) shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses (corpses) of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.”

Notice that the wording is clear to mean that the worm is preying on “the carcasses (corpses)” — Dead bodies!

Isaiah also says:

*“Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols: **the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.**” (Isaiah 14:11)*

*“For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and **the worm shall eat them like wool:** but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation.” (Isaiah 51:8)*

Further proof of this is revealed when we consider that the Greek word for hell in Mark 9:43, 44 is γέενναν (*Gehenna or Valley of Hinnom*). Gehenna was an actual place of burning just outside the walls of Jerusalem. Gehenna was a place known as a refuse pit where all types of trash, animal carcasses, and corpses of wicked criminals, whom the Jews felt didn’t deserve to be buried, were burned. Note this next quote from R.F. Weymouth:

*“Gehenna of fire or ‘Hell’ - The severest punishment inflicted by the Jews upon any criminal. The corpse (after the man had been stoned to death) was thrown into the Valley of Hinnom [Gehenna] and was devoured by the worm or the flame” (R.F. Weymouth, *New Testament in Modern Speech*, 1902).*

Please note here that both the worm and the physical fire that turns the corpses into ashes come *after* the person has died. The physical fire is not meant for torture, but only to cleanse (purify) the earth.

Jesus said: “And these shall go away into **everlasting punishment:** but the righteous into life eternal.” (Matthew 25:46). What is the “punishment” for the wicked? “The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). God does not pay (punish/reward) them with death. They serve a life of sin, so SIN pays them their wages of death (cause and effect/consequence) and this death will be “everlasting.” They will never come back to life because they have chosen to

be unplugged from God—the ONLY source of life! The Greek word for “punishment” here is κόλασις (*kolasis*) which carries the meaning of “deprivation.” They will be deprived of life! They will “go away into everlasting *deprivation of life*”! This is why they never receive true “rest” (Revelation 14:11) because they have rejected the loving/merciful presence of God (Exodus 33:14; Matthew 11:28-29).

When we teach that the wicked will burn for an endless amount of time, we are teaching that they have everlasting life. It will be a painful eternal life, but it’s still everlasting life. However, take a close look at what Jesus says; while the wicked will go into “everlasting punishment (deprivation of life)”, the righteous will go into “life eternal.” Only those who are in Christ receive everlasting or, never-ending life:

*“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.** For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” (John 3:16, 17)*

*Those who do not
have Jesus will
receive death—an
eternal (endless)
death—not
everlasting torture!*

Only those who are in Christ receive “everlasting life” because He IS “the Life” (John 14:6), and the only life that’s everlasting is the life of righteousness (Deuteronomy 30:15-20). John says:

“He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.” (1 John 5:12)

Notice how Paul equates the term “everlasting punishment” with “everlasting destruction:

*“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In **flaming fire** taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall **be punished with everlasting destruction** from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)*

It's the destruction (death) that's eternal. And please remember, the vengeance that Paul speaks of here is the same vengeance he speaks of in Romans 12:19, 20 and Song of Solomon 8:6, 7 where God's love for those who reject His mercy is like "coals of fire" igniting their guilty and self-condemning conscience. The guilt of their own choice not to trust Him and His everlasting mercy will consume them. Just as God's anger is not expressed like fallen man's, God never seeks vengeance the way sinful man does:

*“But I say unto you which hear, **Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Bless them that curse you, and pray for them** which despitefully use you ... But **love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.** Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” (Luke 6:27-28, 35-36)*

*“When they heaped abuse on Him (Christ), **He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats, but entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly.**” (1 Peter 2:23, Berean Study Bible, BSB)*

Today we are invited to walk out the next step in the narrow path of this truth concerning the character of God, to see that our heavenly Father is not the source of this suffering, but that His loving presence reveals sin in its destroying nature, and this process accomplishes the judgment.

Fire from God?

The worm that does not die, the chains of darkness and the fire that is not quenched are all symbols which represent the experience of all who permitted themselves to be grafted into the stock of Satan. This state of the sinner places him beyond opportunity to exercise genuine repentance for his sins and hence beyond the chance to take advantage of our Father's forgiveness. Here is how hardening the effect of sin is.

Of course, there will also be a physical fire, which is to cleanse the earth preparing it for its renewed state. We can think of the parallel of healthy forest fires that give new life to the forest. Since God does not use lethal force, then where does the physical fire come from? In a number of translations, the phrase "from God" is placed in brackets, and in some it is even absent:

"And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city: and fire came down [from God] out of the heaven and devoured them." (Revelation 20:9, DARBY)

"And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down out of heaven, and devoured them." (Revelation 20:9, American Standard Version, ASV)

"They came up across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the encampment of the saints, the beloved city. Then fire came down from heaven and consumed them." (Revelation 20:9, Christian Standard Bible, CSB)

"And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them." (Revelation 20:9, ESV).

Did the translators, when rendering the passage with the phrase “from God”, also translate the sinful thinking of man concerning God? Man in his fallen nature will always worship the power of God over His character, because man himself desires God’s power more than His character, especially because that character is one of self-sacrifice (Matthew 16:24). Thus he will translate verses in a manner that emphasize the power he wants God to have, rather than the character that he values less. This makes us Old Covenant hearers of the Law rather than doers (James 1:23), making God work according to our own plans rather than knowing and thereby trusting Him. The reflection of that Old Covenant thinking by the Law of God indeed makes the glory of God’s character appear as a consuming fire:

*“And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like **devouring fire** on the top of the mount **in the eyes of the children of Israel.**” (Exodus 24:17)*

Satan has always wanted people to believe that since fire comes down from heaven, then it means that God caused it DIRECTLY. Yet in these following cases it was Satan who brought down this fire from heaven:

*“And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he (Job) hath is **in thy power**; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD ... While he (Job) was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, **The fire of God is fallen from heaven**, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.” (Job 1:16)*

“And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.” (Revelation 13:12, 13)

Jesus rebuked this thinking when it appeared even with His disciples:

*“And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, **even as Elias (Elijah) did?** But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, **Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.**” (Luke 9:54, 55, KJV)*

Here Jesus alludes to the fact that not only His disciples but Elijah himself had problems with understanding God’s character, and thought that God would have to destroy their mutual enemies with fire. Yet God and His Son were patient with their prophets, teaching them the nature of Their holy character and the principles of Their kingdom. Again we read:

*“And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: And after the earthquake **a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.**” (1 Kings 19:11, 12)*

The Lord was not in the physical fire because His power is always submitted to His loving character, and therefore His kingdom is not a kingdom of force and compelling power. In John 18:36 Jesus taught that His kingdom was not of this world (does not function like this fallen world) but if it were (if it did function like this world) then His servants would fight His adversaries (because that’s how this world operates). Therefore, since His kingdom is not of this world (not a kingdom of force and compelling power) He humbly gave Himself up to His enemies, without retaliation or threats, and while being tortured He prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34).

Then why did Elijah call down fire from heaven to destroy those who had been sent by the king to capture him? And where did this fire come from if it was not from God?

*“And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, **if** I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there **came down fire from heaven**, and consumed him and his fifty.” (2 Kings 1:10)*

This is the case that the disciples referred to. Here Elijah has not yet shaken off his erroneous views concerning the kingdom of God, and he succumbed to the temptation to defend his identity as the prophet of God through power, signs from heaven and violence. The key is in the word “if”, an expression of doubt. With similar temptations Satan also came to Jesus:

*“And when the tempter came to him, he said, **if** thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.” (Matthew 4:3)*

*“And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. **if** thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.” (Matthew 27:40)*

With all this in mind, what then will be the cause of the physical fire falling down from heaven and erupting from the earth after the thousand years? When we looked at the factor of God’s Word and the environment, we have seen that the Laws which were implemented by God into nature had been designed to mirror the character of man in his state of bliss and obedience to God – as man grew more knowledgeable of God, the Garden of Eden would spread all over the world. Yet when in the place of Christ’s Spirit was instilled the spirit of rebellion, the spirit of Satan, the earth commenced manifesting the strife and discord that exists in Satan’s spirit. The Flood was a culmination for that age, when a whole generation crucified Christ in themselves, using His power (which sustains all life) for their base and selfish designs. When they completely rejected His Spirit, which contains everything (“by Him all things consist”, Colossians 1:17; and “in whom we live, and move, and have our being”, Acts 17:28) the earth was allowed to fully reveal the spirit of its master – fallen man. We are informed that the same principle will operate in the end, where the flaming lusts of men fill the earth and break out as physical fire:

*“And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, **burned in their lust** one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (they reaped what they sowed).” (Romans 1:27)*



*“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, **walking after their own lusts**, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. **For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.**” (2 Peter 3:3-7)*

We could wonder about those living before the Flood and why they did not believe this principle. Yet the situation today is not different. When all the wicked from the whole of history of mankind cover the surface of the earth and together with Satan manifest completely their rebellion, the earth and heaven will be once again allowed to reflect the burning nature of their wickedness.

*“And **the land is defiled**: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and **the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants...** That **the land spue not you out also**, when ye defile it, **as it spued out the nations that were before you.**” (Leviticus 18:25, 28)*

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” (Romans 8:22)

At last earth and heaven, having spewed out the stored-up wickedness in the form of fire, will rest in peace. Sin dealt with, nature will once again be enabled to reflect the dweller’s beauty of holiness – the children of God in whose hearts dwell Christ’s Spirit of obedience and loving gratitude towards His Father. Accepting Christ’s character, we will be enabled to live forever in the presence of the fiery love of our wonderful God and His Son.

“And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.



And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt. And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I. And he said, Draw not nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.” (Exodus 3:2-6)

“And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.” (Mark 12:26, 27)

Jesus connects the Burning Bush to God being a God of the living. That is the symbolism of the bush being burned with fire, yet not being consumed. Both sinners and righteous will be in the presence of that fiery love, but it is up to us how we react to it. The righteous can “dwell with the devouring fire”; but the thoughts, words, and actions of a sinful life, finally uncovered on meeting an exalted God, will be turned in on itself upon the man who judges God unmerciful – and the sinner’s “breath, as fire, shall devour” him. While God is to the wicked a consuming fire, He is to His people both a sun and a shield.

Like the three young Hebrew men who stood in the fire of Babylon unburned (Daniel 3), the holy inhabitants of the heavenly city are not affected by the spirit of fury that bursts forth from the wicked. They are filled with the Spirit of the Prince of peace and therefore all nature is at peace with them. God is a shield to them in the sense that they are filled with His Spirit because He will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee (Isaiah 26:3).

Degrees of Punishment

What about the idea that the amount the wicked suffer is in proportion to their sinfulness? Jesus spoke the following:

“And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.” (Luke 12:47-48)

We remember that the Bible says that the Law is spiritual (Rom 7:12). As the wicked are judged according to the Law, their suffering is firstly spiritual as we have indicated previously. The more knowledge that a person had of Christ and His will, the greater his suffering will be. When a person attends a funeral of a person they don't know that well, the suffering is not that great;

but when you have an intimate knowledge of a person the suffering is immense. No one has known God and His Son more than Satan. He walked up and down on God's holy stones of fire (Ezekiel 28:14) – the symbol of His character which is the Law (Deuteronomy 33:2). This is why his suffering is the greatest; this is why he is made to suffer longer than anyone else. The Bible does not say who makes Satan to suffer longer, that is left for the reader to decide who makes Satan suffer. We know from how Jesus conducts judgment that the sinner himself brings sentence upon himself:

*“And they which heard it, **being convicted by their own conscience**, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.”*
(John 8:9)

The story of Haman also shows us why Satan must suffer as long as he does:

*“And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. **So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai.** Then was the king's wrath pacified.”* (Esther 7:9, 10)

Haman and Mordecai represent Satan and Christ. The punishment that Satan desired for Christ, he himself will suffer. For we read:

“Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.” (Matthew 7:1, 2)

And again we read:

*“See the one who is pregnant with wickedness, who conceives destructive plans, and gives birth to harmful lies – he digs a pit and then falls into the hole he has made. **He becomes the victim of his own destructive plans and the violence he intended for others falls on his own head.**”* (Psalms 7:14-16, New English Translation, NET)

Every person will experience the justice they thought God should exercise on others. The more hatred and vindictiveness they have manifested to others the more this will be reflected back to them in the mirror of God's Law of love that causes them to see the full depravity of their natures. Those who desire others to rot in hell will most certainly end up rotting in hell with exactly the same intensity that they demanded for others. Therefore forgive and you will be forgiven. Release every man the debt that he owes you. Settle yourself in your mind with your adversary and make peace with them in your heart, lest you be delivered to the same judge that judged others and condemned them – yourself.

“Therefore, you have no excuse—every one of you who judges. For when you pass judgment on another person, you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, practice the very same things.” (Romans 2:1, ISV)

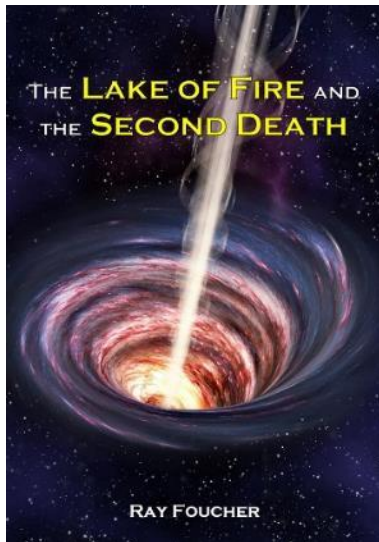
Conclusion

In this booklet it is clearly proved that: “Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.” (Psalm 34:21). It is the evil within the heart of the sinner that will come forth and destroy him. This fire is created through the guilt generated in the heart of the sinner in the presence of God. In summary we are reminded of some simple facts:

1. The way to righteousness is narrow and the majority of the world will reject the loving grace of God. Jesus said the way to eternal life is strait and narrow and few there be that find it. Matthew 7:14.
2. The wicked will die and be lost forever, crushed in agony by the guilt of their own rebellion.
3. It is through the laws of nature that have the capacity to reflect the sinfulness of man that the wicked will be consumed, while at the same time feeling overwhelmed and abandoned under the weight of their shameful life.
4. There is no act of aggression or force or desire to end the life of the wicked on the part of God. The wicked are snared in the work of their own hands; they fall into the pit that they have dug. (Psalm 7:15; 9:16).

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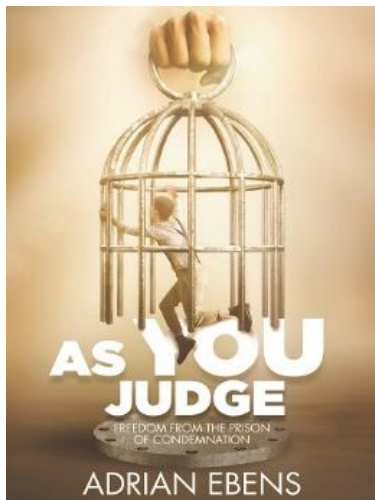
The Lake of Fire and the Second Death



To Bible readers concerned about Revelation's Lake of Fire, this study will come as a relief. Why? Because, contrary to popular belief, that final judgment scene is not about a physical fire burning forever.

However, it will be a painful experience - mentally and emotionally. Billions of people will face their own wrong choices and the ultimate choice to not trust in God. With the realization of eternity lost, the degree of regret will be beyond measure. Along with guilt and shame as figurative coals of fire on their heads coming from within themselves, it will literally be enough to crush out their lives in the Second Death.

As You Judge: Freedom From the Prison of Condemnation



"Judge not, that you be not judged." Matthew 7:1

Where can we turn to find the perfect example of someone who does not judge so that we can follow this example?

"You judge by human standards; I (Jesus) pass judgment on no one." John 8:15

How can it be possible that Jesus does not judge anyone? How can justice be done if He does not judge anyone? Consider what Jesus says about His Father also:

"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son." John 5:22

Doesn't the Bible speak of the judgment of God where everyone gets their just deserts? How does this match with the words of Jesus? Learn the secrets of overcoming the condemnation we feel when we fail and the scorn we can feel for others when they fail us.

Consuming Fire

Fragrance of Life or Fiery Torment?

For those who believe in God, it is almost universally reasoned that the only way to end sin is to stop the wicked dead in their tracks by bringing down a fiery stream of fury from the heart of God to burn up the wicked and bring them to an end. It is often thought that the wicked are not simply going to destroy themselves, and that if God is a God of justice, He will punish transgressors and reward them for their evil according to their deeds by directly putting them into flames and burning them alive Himself. Would a loving God do this to His children?

Would you burn your wayward children alive in flames and watch them scream in agony? Some people say that the only way to eradicate a cancer is to cut it out. The problem with this analogy is that when you cut out cancer the object is to save life, not to destroy it. Some people say the wicked are like a dog with Rabies that needs to be put to sleep. Do you then take the dog and slowly burn it on a fire for several days while it screams and howls in agony while the righteous cry – “just a little more, you deserve it because of your wickedness”?

Is this really what is going to take place at the end?