

Biblically Dispelling the Myth of Eternal Torture

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Chapter Two

The Biblical Examples of Everlasting Destruction



In this chapter we will look at some of the more prominent biblical *examples* of literal everlasting destruction.

The Example of Gehenna: “Hell”

Let's start with the very word 'hell' itself. There is only one biblical word translated as “hell” which refers to the lake of fire and is thus relevant to the *final* disposition of ungodly people: *Gehenna* (*gheh'-en-nah*). *Gehenna* is the Greek form of the Hebrew *Ge-Hinnom* which literally means “the Valley of Hinnom.” The Hinnom Valley, also referred to as *Topheth* (*to'-feth*)⁹, borders Jerusalem to the south and can easily be located on close-up bible maps of Jerusalem. It is to this valley Jesus was referring to when He said, “...be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in **hell** (*Gehenna*).” Why would Jesus use this ravine located outside the walls of Jerusalem as an example of the lake of fire and the destruction that will take place there on Judgment day?

To answer this let me briefly inform you about *Gehenna*'s history: The worst of Judah's kings practiced pagan worship in the Hinnom Valley, with child sacrifice being a particularly offensive aspect of this “worship” ([2 Kings 16:3](#), [21:6](#)). The valley apparently became a fiery disposal dump for 185,000 Assyrian warriors slain by the LORD (see [2 Kings 19:35](#); [Isaiah 30:33](#) and [Isaiah 37:36](#)), and, later, it would overflow with Israelite corpses as well when God judged Judah for its sins. Consequently *Gehenna* became known as “the Valley of Slaughter” ([Jeremiah 7:30-34](#), [19:2-13](#)). Note incidentally that *Gehenna* was known as “the Valley of Slaughter” and not “the Valley of Eternal Conscious Suffering,” a very important difference.

Needless to say, long before Jesus' earthly ministry *Gehenna* had a negative image of sinful rebellion, fire and death.

After righteous King Josiah desecrated *Gehenna* as part of his godly reforms ([2 Kings 23:10](#)), the valley subsequently became the perpetually smoking trash dump of Jerusalem, which it was at the time of Christ. As a necessary hygienic incinerator, *Gehenna*'s fires were kept constantly burning in order to burn up the all manner of refuse thrown in—trash, garbage, animal carcasses, corpses of despised criminals and vanquished enemies. As would be natural in such a climate, worms or maggots bred freely and preyed upon the filth, so whatever was not burned up in the fires would be devoured by maggots (Hewitt 115).

James Tabor, a professor of religious studies, commented about *Gehenna* on A&E's *Mysteries of the Bible* segment "Heaven and Hell:"

"I've been to hell, many times I've been there and walked through it. It's a valley on the south side of Jerusalem that anciently was a despicable place of child sacrifice—it's mentioned in the Hebrew bible a number of times. In Jesus' day it was a garbage dump and so the fire was always burning and the maggots working and dead animals were thrown in there. Today you walk out the gate and look down in the Valley of Hinnom—that's hell."

It was this very garbage dump that Jesus referred to as an *example* of the lake of fire where God will "destroy both soul and body" ([Matthew 10:28](#)). Why did Jesus feel *Gehenna* would be a good example of the second death? *Because Gehenna was a very certain symbol of destruction which all of his hearers readily understood.* We saw in Chapter One how supporters of eternal torture argue that "destroy" only refers to a ruined condition but this does not fit Jesus' usage of *Gehenna* as an example of the second death. Every cell of every body thrown into *Gehenna* was either burned up in fire or digested by worms; a body could not be destroyed anymore completely.

The implication is clear: those who reject God's love in Christ will ultimately become God's garbage, and hence will be disposed of in God's incinerating "garbage dump," the lake of fire.

We cannot properly understand Christ's teaching about the lake of fire and eternal punishment without keeping in mind this picture of *Gehenna*. Refuse was thrown into *Gehenna* for the purpose of disposal and eradication; it was thus a perfect choice for Jesus to use as an example of the second death.

These facts make it obvious that it's not really a good practice to translate *Gehenna* as "hell" in English bibles. The reason being that the word 'hell' usually conjures up images based more on medieval mythology (e.g. Dante's *Inferno*) than on biblical fact. The common image 'hell' provokes is that of people eternally roasting in fire pits while devils poke them with pitchforks. By comparison, the biblical image of *Gehenna* is quite different: the Valley of Hinnom conjures up the image of ultimate disposal and utter eradication. It would therefore be more accurate and informative to translate *Gehenna* as "the Valley of Hinnom" in biblical texts, even though it is a symbolic reference to the lake of fire and the second death. For example, [Matthew 10:28](#) should

literally read: “ ‘Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in the Valley of Hinnom.’ ”

When this is done we get the proper impression of disposal and eradication rather than that of never-ending conscious torment. This is the impression Jesus endeavored to give.

The Examples of Weeds, Trees, Branches and Chaff—Burned Up in Fire

Jesus also used many examples of everlasting destruction in his parables to further back up his words and to clearly illustrate that God would indeed ultimately destroy the ungodly in the lake of fire.

We should take these parables seriously because the bible states that Jesus spoke in parables to reveal “things hidden since the creation of the world” ([Matthew 13:35](#)). Jesus used parables as an easy-to-understand way to reveal scriptural truths to the common people. In many of these parables natural things were used symbolically in order to explain principles of truth. For instance, the “ground” in *The Parable of the Sower* ([Luke 8:1-15](#)) represents a person’s heart and the “seed” represents the word of God.

Let’s observe a clear example of everlasting destruction contained in *The Parable of the Weeds* (or *Tares* in the KJV):

MATTHEW 13:24-30

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed seed in his field. (25) But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. (26) When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. (27) The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ (28) ‘An enemy did this,’ He replied. The servants asked him, ‘do you want us to go and pull them up?’ (29) ‘No,’ He answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’ ”

In verses 37-39 Jesus explains the symbolism of this parable: The owner of the field who sowed the good seed is Jesus, the “field” is the world, the “wheat” is the righteous, the “weeds” are ungodly people and the “enemy” who sowed them is the devil, the “harvest” is the end of the age, and the “harvesters” are angels. After explaining this symbolism, Jesus states:

MATTHEW 13:40

“As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so will it be at the end of the age.”

Jesus is saying here that *just as* weeds are burned in the fire in his parable, so it will be with ungodly people—God’s enemies—at the end of this age on judgment day.

When literal weeds are burned, they are *burned up*. Was Jesus using a wrong example here or did He mean what He said? The obvious answer is that Jesus meant *exactly* what He said. When the ungodly are thrown into the lake of fire, they—like the weeds—will be burned up.

The above example of weeds is backed up by three other similar examples used in the gospels. In [Matthew 7:19](#) Jesus likened the ungodly to trees: “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” In [John 15:6](#) He likened those who reject him to branches: “If anyone does not remain in me, He is *like* a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.” Similarly, in [Luke 3:17](#) John the Baptist likened evildoers to chaff: “His (Jesus’) winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but He will *burn up* the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

In all these cases, the “trees,” “branches” and “chaff” represent ungodly people—God’s enemies; and each of these combustible articles are to be “thrown (discarded) into the fire and burned.” [Luke 3:17](#) even specifies that they will be “*burned up*.”

As is the case with the Parable of the Weeds above, the “fire” in all these examples is, of course, a reference to the lake of fire. When the ungodly are thrown into the lake of fire, they—like the trees, branches and chaff—will be burned up.

“Like Green Plants They Will Soon Die Away”

Let’s look at some similar examples of everlasting destruction used elsewhere in scripture:

PSALM 37:1-2

Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong; (2) for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon *die away*.

Notice how evil people are likened to grass that will soon *wither* and to green plants that will soon *die away*.

Adherents of eternal torment would contend that this text is referring to physical death in the here in now (the first death), not to eternal death (the second death), but verses 9-13 refute this argument:

PSALM 37:9-13

For evil men *will be cut off*, but those who hope in the LORD *will inherit the land*. (10) A little while and *the wicked will be no more*; though you look for them, they will not be found. (11) But the meek *will inherit the land* and enjoy great peace. (12) The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; (13) but the LORD laughs at the wicked for He knows *their day is coming*.

These verses clearly show that this is an eschatological passage—a text dealing with the ultimate fate of humankind and the world. Note how verse 9 refers to a time when evil people will ultimately be *cut off*, but “those who hope in the LORD” will *inherit the land*. Verse 11 further emphasizes that the meek will inherit the land and verse 29 adds an important detail, stating that “the righteous will inherit the land *and dwell in it forever*.” These two verses coincide with Jesus’ statement in [Matthew 5:5](#) regarding how “the meek shall inherit the earth.” Jesus was of course referring to the *new earth* spoken of in [Revelation 21:1-4](#).

Biblically, we know that *all* evil people will not be cut off *until* “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” ([2 Peter 3:7](#); [Revelation 20:11-15](#)) and that the meek or righteous will not inherit the earth forever *until* the new earth, the home of righteousness, is revealed ([2 Peter 3:13](#)).

Furthermore, observe verses 10 and 13: “*A little while and the wicked will be no more... but the LORD laughs at the wicked for He knows their day is coming.*” Verse 10 refers to a time when *all* the wicked will be “*no more*,” the bible clearly reveals that the only time that this will become a reality is, once again, “*the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.*” That’s why, according to verse 13, the LORD laughs at the wicked, because “He knows their *day* coming.” What day? Why, the day of judgment, of course!

“They Will Vanish—Vanish Like Smoke”

With the understanding that Psalm 37 is essentially an eschatological passage, let’s observe verse 20:

PSALM 37:20

But the wicked *will perish*: The LORD’s enemies will be like the beauty of the fields, they will vanish—vanish like smoke.

First of all, note the explicit proclamation that “the wicked will *perish*.” It doesn’t say that the wicked will be consciously tormented in fire forever, but that they will perish. The rest of the text gives a natural illustration so that we may perfectly understand this perishment of the wicked: it likens God’s enemies to “the beauty of the fields” which will be burned up. Notice what it says will be the ultimate end of God’s enemies: *they will vanish—vanish like smoke*. Once again, I have to ask, how much clearer could the scriptures possibly be? The LORD’s enemies will not perpetually exist in fiery conscious torment, they’re going to be utterly consumed by fire and go up in smoke.

A similar illustration is used in the New Testament:

HEBREWS 6:7-8

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. (8) But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned.

The “land” in verse 8, which is worthless and produces nothing but thorns and thistles, is a figurative reference to worthless Christians who profess to know Christ but bear no fruit (see verses 4-6 for verification). The land that produces a useful crop in verse 7 is an obvious reference to fruit-bearing, faithful Christians; such productive “land” will receive the blessings of God. But notice clearly what will ultimately happen to the worthless land which produces thorns and thistles: *in the end it will be burned*.

This example perfectly coincides with Jesus’ two examples which we just looked at: every tree that *does not bear good fruit* will be cut down and thrown into the fire; every branch that *bears no fruit* is cut off the vine and thrown into the fire. Likewise, the worthless land which produces thorns and thistles will be burned in the end. The purpose for burning such a field is to destroy that which is useless, not to preserve it. In the same way, ungodly people who fail to bear good fruit will be destroyed, not preserved for eternal conscious misery.

“Bring Them Here and Kill Them in Front of Me”

Continuing with the examples of literal everlasting destruction which Jesus used in his parables, let’s look at *The Parable of the Ten Minas*:

Luke 19:11-14

While they were listening to this, He went on to tell them a parable, because He was near Jerusalem and the people thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear at once. (12) He said: “A man of noble birth went to a distant country to have himself appointed as king and then to return. (13) So He called ten of his servants and gave them ten minas.¹⁰ ‘Put this money to work,’ He said, ‘until I come back.’ (14) But his subjects hated him and sent a delegation after him to say, ‘We don’t want this man to be our king.’ ”

The symbolism in this parable is obvious: the “man of noble birth” is referring to Jesus, the Son of God; the “distant country” where the man of noble birth goes to have himself appointed as king and then return is referring to the world; the place He would return to is heaven; the subjects who hated this newly appointed king and rejected his kingship is referring to people in this world who love sin, hate Jesus and reject his Lordship.

Now let’s skip down to verse 27 and observe what the king in this parable—again, symbolically referring to Jesus—said should be done to these subjects who hated him and rejected his kingship:

LUKE 19:27

‘But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—*bring them here and kill them in front of me.*’

The king having his subjects who hated and rejected him brought before him is an obvious symbolic reference to the pre-millennial judgment of Christ ([Matthew 25:31-46](#))¹¹ or the white

throne judgment ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)); both cases in which those who reject Jesus as Lord will be thrown into the lake of fire to suffer the second death. Notice what the king in the parable ordered should be done with these subjects who utterly rejected him—*He said that they should be brought before him and **killed** in front of him!*

If the destiny of ungodly people who reject Christ is eternal life being consciously tormented in the lake of fire, then Jesus would have certainly reflected it in this parable because the secondary purpose of this story was to reveal the eternal fate of those who reject the Lordship of Christ. Surely Jesus, the Son of God, could've easily come up with a clear way to reflect the doctrine of eternal torture in this parable (as well as his other parables). He could have said something like, "But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and torture them in front of me, but be sure not to kill them, just torment them day and night, week after week, month after month, year after year. And all the while I'll just kick back and pay no mind to it." Yes, I realize how ridiculous this sounds, but I want to make it as plain as possible how absolutely absurd and unbiblical this doctrine is.

Let's face it if a king or ruler were to actually do this in the real world, no one in their right mind would hesitate to declare them unjust, wicked and perverse, no matter how evil the subjects might be. By contrast there's nothing wrong with a king or ruler justly, but mercifully, executing such wicked rebels.

Summing this parable up, let me emphasize that Jesus was teaching this parable in part to back up and reveal the scriptural truth of what will happen to those who reject him as Lord. What will happen to them? According to Jesus in this parable, they will be brought before the King of Kings and *killed* in front of him. This will be accomplished by simply casting them into the lake of fire wherein raging fire will consume them. Could Jesus be any clearer? His words naturally coincide with the numerous passages we've already looked at.

"They Will Be Thrown into the Fiery Furnace"

Jesus also likened the lake of fire to a "fiery furnace" in [Matthew 13:42](#) and [Matthew 13:50](#). Like *Gehenna*, "fiery furnace" is an excellent example of the lake of fire because it clearly indicates nothing other than complete incineration—total destruction of soul and body—as Jesus explicitly stated earlier in [Matthew 10:28](#).

Jesus most likely got this apt figure from the Old Testament scriptures, from which He studied and preached. In the Old Testament "furnace" or "fiery furnace" is used in reference to complete incineration or refinement (e.g. [Psalm 12:6](#)) but *never* to undying conscious torment. For instance, after the utter obliteration of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is a biblical example of the second death ([2 Peter 2:6](#)), [Genesis 19:28](#) states that there was only "dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace."

Notice how the figure of "fiery furnace" is used in this Psalm text:

PSALM 21:9

At the time of your appearing you will make them (God's enemies) **like a fiery furnace**. **In his wrath the LORD will swallow them up, and his fire will consume them.**

There's absolutely no mistaking here that "fiery furnace" refers to being utterly consumed by raging fire as God's enemies are shown to be swallowed up and consumed by his fire, not ludicrously existing in a perpetual state of conscious agony.

In Daniel chapter three, the fiery furnace was so hot that it *killed* Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers who simply went near it as they threw the three Israelites—Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—into it ([Daniel 3:22-23](#)). The only reason the three Israelites survived the fiery furnace was because of God's supernatural protection (verse 27).

"Furnace" was also used by the prophet Malachi in the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament to describe the day when God will judge evildoers: "That day will burn like a furnace" and "*not a root or branch will be left to them*" for "they will be *ashes*" ([Malachi 4:1-3](#)). We will examine this text in more detail shortly.

As you can see, "furnace" in the Old Testament consistently signifies complete incineration, destruction and death, but never perpetual conscious torment.

We can confidently conclude that, if God does not miraculously intervene as He did with Daniel's three friends who were not harmed in the fiery furnace ([Daniel 3:13-27](#)), the ungodly who will be thrown into the fiery furnace of *Gehenna* will suffer the precise fate of what the enemies of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego hoped for them: death by incineration (Fudge 104-105).

Raging Fire Will Consume the Enemies of God

Which brings us to another proof text:

HEBREWS 10:26-27

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, (27) but only a fearful expectation of judgment *and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.*

Notice clearly that, on judgment day, raging fire will utterly *consume* God's enemies, not sadistically torture them without end. The Greek word translated as "consume" here literally means "to eat" (Strong 33) and is translated as "devour" in the King James Version. We can soundly conclude that raging fire will literally *devour* God's enemies when they're cast into the lake of fire—*consuming them wholly*.

This brings to mind [James 5:1-5](#) which issues out a warning to rich oppressors. Verse 3 states: "Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will *testify* against you and *eat your flesh like fire*." The word "testify" indicates that James is referring to a time of judgment; this is made clearer in verse 5: "You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened

yourselves in *the day of slaughter*.” “The day of slaughter” is, of course, a reference to “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” ([2 Peter 3:7](#)). Notice that the day of judgment is referred to as “the day of slaughter,” not “the day of the beginning of everlasting conscious torment” (sounds absurd, doesn’t it?). That’s because the day of judgment *is* a day of slaughter wherein the sins of God’s enemies will testify against them and “eat their flesh like fire”—raging fire will utterly consume them just as Paul taught in [Hebrews 10:27](#) shown above.

It is fitting, incidentally, that James refers to the day of judgment as the day of slaughter, since *Gehenna*, the biblical example of the lake of fire often translated as “hell,” was otherwise known as “the Valley of Slaughter” (see [Jeremiah 7:30-34](#) and [Jeremiah 19:2-13](#)).

Examples of God Consuming His Enemies throughout History

The New Testament declaration that, at the second death, God will utterly destroy his human enemies—soul and body—by raging, consuming fire is in perfect harmony with the *many* Old Testament historical cases of how God dealt with his enemies then. Here’s one example:

LEVITICUS 10:1-2

Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and *they offered unauthorized fire* before the LORD, contrary to his command. (2) ***So fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.***

We see here that Nadab and Abihu ignored God’s commands and attempted to approach Him on their own terms. As a result “fire came out from the presence of the LORD and *consumed* them, and they *died* before the LORD.” Their disregard of the LORD’s will and attempt to approach Him on their own terms represents religion as opposed to Christianity. Religion is the human attempt to connect with God, whereas Christianity is God connecting with humanity through Christ. We can either do it *our* way or *God’s* way, it’s our choice.

The fiery consumption of Nadab and Abihu is a biblical *example* of what will happen on judgment day to people who disregard God’s Word and live their lives with little or no concern of their Creator; these proud rebels are only willing to approach God on their *own* terms. On judgment day such people can expect a fire to come out from the presence of the LORD and *consume* them. They will *die* before the LORD, just as assuredly as Nadab and Abihu did.

Here are a few more examples:

NUMBERS 16:35

And fire came out from the LORD and consumed the 210 men (Korah’s followers) who were offering the incense.

[2 Kings 1:10](#)

Elijah answered the captain, “If I am a man of God, may fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men!” *Then fire fell from heaven and consumed the captain and his men.*¹²

PSALM 97:2 b-3

... righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. (3) *Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side.*

PSALM 106:18

Fire blazed among their followers (Dathan’s rebellious followers); *a flame consumed the wicked.*

EZEKIEL 22:31

“So I will pour out my wrath on them (the sinful people of Judah) and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

Just as God dealt with his enemies in the past, so will He deal with his enemies in the future at the second advent of Christ when God’s consuming fire will strike the whole earth and “Babylon:”

ZEPHANIAH 1:18

Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the LORD’s wrath. *In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed for He will make a sudden end of all who live on the earth.*

REVELATION 18:8-9

Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her (“Babylon”): death, mourning and famine. *She will be consumed by fire*, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. (9) When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury *see the smoke of her burning*, they will weep and mourn over her.

As you can plainly see, the biblical fact that God is going to destroy his human enemies by a consuming fire at the second death perfectly coincides with how God has dealt with his human enemies throughout history. This is testimony to the unchanging, consistent character of God (see [Psalm 102:26-27](#); [James 1:17](#) and [Hebrews 13:8](#)). After all, would it not be strange and totally inconsistent with God’s just, merciful character as revealed throughout history if, on judgment day, He sentenced his human enemies to never-ending conscious torment—a sadistic, unjust, merciless sentence diametrically opposed to his consistent, unchanging character? Of course it would.

Notice clearly in all the above texts that God *does not* sadistically torture these people perpetually with fire. No, the fire *consumes* them. No doubt there's an amount of terror and conscious pain to this type of execution, but it's not sadistically never-ending—it mercifully results in death.

Is this unjust on God's part? Not at all. Notice [Psalm 97:2-3](#) above: before stating that God will judge and destroy his enemies with consuming fire, it assuredly states that “righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.” You see, we can always be absolutely confident of the fact that God's judgments are completely righteous and just; and God is not quick in making a judgment; He is “compassionate and gracious, *slow to anger* abounding in love” ([Psalm 103:8](#)); “He is patient... not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” ([2 Peter 3:9](#)). Yet, there's a limit to God's patience and mercy if a stubborn person continually chooses to resist and rebel against him; and when his patience and mercy end, his judgment begins. Yet even God's judgments are balanced by his mercy and justice.

“They Will Be Ashes under the Soles of Your Feet”

The very last chapter of the Old Testament also plainly reveals how God's enemies will be utterly consumed in a fiery “furnace:”

MALACHI 4:1-3,5

“Surely the day is coming; it will *burn like a furnace*. All the arrogant and *every evildoer will be stubble*, and that day that is coming will *set them on fire*,” says the LORD Almighty. “*Not a root or branch will be left to them*. (2) But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. (3) Then you will trample down the wicked; *they will be ashes under the soles of your feet* on the day when I do these things,” says the LORD Almighty.

(5) “See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”

So ends the Old Testament, followed by the period of 400-years silence between the testaments wherein God would not speak through scripture prophecy. Like the final chapters of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, the final chapter of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, contrasts the final destinies of both the righteous and the unrighteous: For those who revere God's name, “the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings.” They will experience warmth and healing in the light of His presence as He binds up their bruises, heals their wounds and wipes away every tear (see [Isaiah 30:26](#) and [Revelation 21:4](#)).

The righteous will “go out and leap like calves released from the stall.” In other words, just as a calf leaps for sheer joy when finally turned loose into the sunlight after being confined to a stall for extended periods of time, so it will be with those who revere God's name.

As for those who do *not* revere God's name, "all the arrogant" and "every evildoer," they will be like *stubble set on fire*; they will be burned up so completely that "*not a root or branch will be left to them*;" they will be like *ashes* under the soles of the feet of the righteous. These easy-to-understand figures eliminate any possibility of remnant or survivor. A clearer example of literal destruction could hardly be given.

Thus ends the Old Testament with the righteous ultimately rejoicing in God's salvation and eternal life, while evildoers are utterly destroyed—gone forever with no remnant or possibility of restoration.

Once again, there is no mention whatsoever of people existing forever in a perpetual state of fiery conscious torment. All we see is a clear picture of "every evildoer" being utterly and totally destroyed by raging, consuming fire.

Is Malachi 4:1-5 Applicable to Everlasting Destruction?

The above text is such a strong stumbling block to the view of eternal conscious torment that advocates of this view try to dismiss it altogether, suggesting that the text is referring to the battle of Armageddon on the day of Christ's second advent and thus is not applicable to the second death.

In light of this contention, let's look at all the scriptural facts and draw a sound conclusion:

First of all, the text is referring to "the day of the Lord" ([Mal. 4:1, 3, 5](#)). What is "the day of the LORD?" This phrase appears 19 times in the Old Testament and 4 times in the New Testament to express the time of God's extreme judgment and wrath.

These 23 texts do not all refer to the same specific judgment. For instance, in [Ezekiel 30:3](#) "the day of the LORD" refers to a near future (now historical) judgment of Egypt; in [Zechariah 14:1](#) and [2 Thessalonians 2:2](#) it refers to a far future judgment.

Two "day of the LORD" expressions yet remain to be fulfilled: **1.)** At the end of the 7-year tribulation period or Daniel's 70th week (see [Joel 3:14](#)), and **2.)** At the end of the millennium (see [2 Peter 3:10](#)). Both of these specific judgments result in condemned people being thrown into the lake of fire: The pre-millennial judgment of Christ will take place at the end of the 7-year tribulation period (see [Matthew 25:31-46](#)) otherwise known as the judgment of nations; and the great white throne judgment will take place at the end of the millennium (see [Revelation 20:11-15](#)).

[Malachi 4:1-5](#) is applicable to either of these judgments.

Secondly, [Malachi 4:1-5](#) coincides perfectly with a text we've already examined, [Matthew 13:40-43](#), which is an unquestionable reference to the second death. Observe how well these texts parallel each other:

"Surely the day is coming; it will *burn like a furnace*."—[Malachi 4:1](#) a

“They (the angels) will throw them into *the fiery furnace*,”—[Matthew 13:42](#)

“All the arrogant and every evildoer will be *stubble* and that day that is coming will *set them on fire*.”—[Malachi 4:1](#) b

“As *weeds* are pulled up and *burned in the fire*, so it will be at the end of the age.”—[Matthew 13:40](#)

“But for you who revere my name, *the sun of righteousness will arise* with healing in its wings.”—[Malachi 4:2](#)

“Then *the righteous will shine like the sun* in the kingdom of their Father.”—[Matthew 13:43](#)

As you can see, both texts liken the lake of fire to a blazing furnace; both texts liken “evildoers” to combustible matter that will be burned up (“stubble” and “weeds”); both texts reveal that, after all evildoers are destroyed, the righteous will shine like the sun; and both texts reveal that all that will be left of the ungodly will be ashes (Malachi 4 expressly states this in verse 3; whereas Matthew 13 implies this with the figure of “weeds... burned in the fire”). Since these are clearly coinciding texts *both* refer to the ultimate end of the ungodly in the lake of fire, the second death.

Thirdly, notice that [Malachi 4:1](#) refers to a time when “*all* the arrogant and *every* evildoer” will be destroyed. Biblically, we know that *all* evildoers will not be destroyed until “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” ([2 Peter 3:7](#)) when all “the wicked will be no more” ([Psalm 37:10](#)).

Fourthly, notice that [Malachi 4:1](#) states that “Not a root or branch will be left to them” and verse 3 states that all evildoers will be “ashes.” Both verses are figurative, but the picture they’re intended to portray is clear: there will be *nothing left* of the ungodly but ashes when God’s raging fire consumes them. They will be *totally* destroyed—both soul and body as Jesus solemnly declared.

No mention is made anywhere of their souls living *forever* in a state of fiery conscious torment. If this perverse religious belief were in fact true, why would the LORD leave out something of such importance? This is *way* too significant of a detail to leave out.

Lastly, it just makes good sense that the Old Testament would sign off with a clear declaration of the *final* destiny of the righteous and the unrighteous just as the New Testament does.

In light of all this support, we can confidently conclude that [Malachi 4:1-5](#) is indeed applicable to the subject of everlasting destruction.

The Example of Jesus’ Death

The very death of Jesus Christ on the cross is an example of everlasting destruction. Jesus suffered God’s wrath and died so that we don’t have to. Theologians refer to this as

“substitutionary death.” All this means is that Jesus suffered and died *in our place*; He was sacrificed for our sakes so that we don’t have to reap the wages of our sin. The bible states:

HEBREWS 2:9 b

...He *suffered death*, so that by the grace of God He might *taste death for everyone*.

We see here that Jesus suffered and tasted death for everyone. This is what God would have had to do to us on judgment day if Jesus hadn’t suffered and died in our place. In other words *Jesus suffered the very penalty that we were to suffer*, and that penalty is suffering that ends in death.

Jesus didn’t die for us so that we don’t have to experience earthly death, the first death; He died for us so that we don’t have to suffer *the second death*. So Christ’s death on the cross is a window for us of what the second death essentially is; and the only view we see through this window is that of suffering that ends in death, not never-ending conscious torture. Unlike the ungodly people cast into the lake of fire, who will suffer *everlasting* destruction, Jesus rose from the dead “because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him” ([Acts 2:24 b](#)) (Fudge/Peterson 204). God *had* to raise Jesus from the dead, otherwise we would not be justified and have the hope of eternal life (see [1 Corinthians 15:12-22](#) and [Romans 10:9-10](#)).

The bottom line is that Jesus “tasted *death* for everyone,” He did not taste eternal conscious torture for us, He tasted death. If Jesus’ substitutionary death had to consist of what supporters of eternal torture say the wages of sin is, then Jesus would have to *still* be suffering never-ending torment.

Jesus’ suffering and death in our place on this earth is a picture of what the second death will be on judgment day in the spiritual realm. And the simple fact is that Jesus suffered and died; this is what people witnessed when He was horribly crucified and this is what we see today when we picture it. *Death* is what we are saved from not eternal conscious torture, for “the wages of sin is death.”

Apollumi as “Lost” (the Lost Sheep and Prodigal Son)

In Chapter One we examined the Greek word *apollumi*. We saw how the usual definition of this word—“to destroy fully” (Strong 14)—is applicable to the second death of the ungodly because Jesus used *apollumi* to describe the utter incineration of Sodom and Gomorrah, which is an *example* of the second death.¹³ Like many words, *apollumi* has secondary definitions; one of its secondary definitions is “lost.” A good example of *apollumi* used in this manner would be [Luke 19:10](#) wherein Jesus states, “For the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost (*apollumi*).” In this text unredeemed people are said to be “lost”—but lost from what? And lost in what sense? Let’s look at two parables wherein Jesus answers these questions.

The first parable we’ll examine is *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*. As we read this passage notice how *apollumi* is translated as “lost” and “loses:”

LUKE 15:3-7

Then Jesus told them this parable: (4) “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses (*apollumi*) one of them. Does He not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost (*apollumi*) sheep until He finds it? (5) And when He finds it, He joyfully puts it on his shoulders (6) and goes home. Then He calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost (*apollumi*) sheep!’ (7) I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

As you can see, in this parable Jesus likens an unsaved person who is lost from God to a lost sheep that has strayed from its shepherd. Obviously *apollumi* means “lost” primarily in the sense that the sheep was lost from its shepherd. But what would have ultimately happened to the lost sheep if the shepherd had not gone forth to seek and save it? Jesus doesn’t say, but He doesn’t have to. Everyone knows that a lost sheep, separated from the protective care of its shepherd, would die—prey to predators or otherwise—if not found. So the sheep was not only lost in the sense that it was lost from its shepherd, but lost in the sense that it would ultimately perish if not saved as well.

In the same way, a sinner who is lost from God will most certainly perish if not saved; they will suffer everlasting destruction of soul and body in hell. This is the second death. That’s why sinners are biblically said to be “perishing” (e.g. [1 Corinthians 1:18](#)), they’re lost from God *and on their way to ultimate perishment*.

Apollumi is also translated as “lost” in *The Parable of the Lost Son*, perhaps better known as the *Prodigal Son* ([Luke 15:11-32](#)). This popular parable tells the story of a man who had two sons. The younger son demanded his monetary share of the estate and then left for a distant country to waste his wealth on wild living. After blowing all his money He resorted to getting a job feeding pigs. At this point the story tells us how He longed to fill his stomach with the pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. This is when He finally came to his senses:

LUKE 15:17-24

“When He finally came to his senses He said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and *here I am starving to death!* (18) I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. (19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ (20) So He got up and went to his father. But while He was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (21) The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ (22) But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. (23) Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. (24) For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; He was lost (*apollumi*) and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.”

As you can see, this parable is very similar to *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*. The main difference simply being that this parable is dealing with a lost *person* rather than a lost *animal*.

The Greek word *apollumi* in this parable means “lost” in the very same way it does in *The Parable of the Lost Sheep: 1.*) The wayward son was lost to his father in the sense that his relationship with him was dead—that is, they no longer had a relationship, it ceased to exist. His son was consequently as good as dead to him. That’s why He exclaimed when the son returned, “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again.” Once the father’s son returned, their relationship resumed and He consequently became “alive” to him again. **2.**) Like the lost sheep who would have perished apart from the protective care of its shepherd, the prodigal son was also lost in the sense that He would have perished if He hadn’t returned to his father. This conclusion is supported by verse 17 which clearly states that the lost son would have *starved to death* if He hadn’t “come to his senses” and returned to his father.

In the same way, lost sinners are dead to the Heavenly Father—they have no real relationship with him—and are on their way to “starving to death” apart from him. Unless they “come to their senses” and repent of their sin (accepting Jesus as Lord, of course) they will indeed perish in the absolute sense.

Apollumi as “Lose” As observed in our reading of *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*, the Greek word *apollumi* can also mean ‘lose.’ “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses (*apollumi*) one of them.’ ” As already determined, *apollumi* means “lose” here in the sense that the lone sheep was lost from its shepherd and would have certainly perished if not found.

Let’s look at a couple other examples of *apollumi* translated as “lose:”

MATTHEW 10:42

“And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because He is my disciple, I tell you the truth, He will certainly not lose (*apollumi*) his reward.”

Apollumi here obviously refers to suffering the loss of, or being deprived of, a reward.

In this next example Paul is encouraging the crew of a ship in a storm that none of them will lose their lives:

ACTS 27:34 b

“Not one of you will lose (*apollumi*) a single hair from your head.”

Paul assured the crew that none of them would suffer the loss of even a single hair.

As you can plainly see from these three examples, *apollumi* simply means “lose” in the sense of suffering the loss of something—a sheep, a reward, a hair.

The Ungodly Will Lose their Lives, their Souls, their Very Selves

With the above understanding, let’s observe how the exact same Greek word, *apollumi*, is used in reference to unredeemed people ultimately *losing* their very lives:

LUKE 9:23-25

Then He said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, He must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (24) **For whoever wants to save his life will lose (*apollumi*) it, but whoever loses (*apollumi*) his life for me will save it.** (25) **What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose (*apollumi*) or forfeit his very self.”**

Jesus states in the latter half of verse 24 that “whoever loses his life for me will save it.” What exactly does this mean? Well, when a person is born again—repenting of sin and confessing Christ as Lord ([Acts 26:20](#); [Romans 10:9-10](#))—they miraculously become “a new creation; the old is gone, the new has come!” ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)). The spiritual part of their being is born anew. That’s why Paul proclaimed, “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me*” ([Galatians 2:20](#) a). This is basically what Jesus meant by “losing your life for him.” So Jesus was simply saying that anyone who gets spiritually born-again will save his/her life. (See Appendix B for more details on this).

This is in contrast to anyone who tries to save his or her own life; for as Jesus declares in the first part of verse 24—such a person will lose his/her life! We have all been “bought” and saved by God at a great price—the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ. We are therefore “not our own” ([1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)). People who reject this sacrifice are essentially trying to keep or save their own lives. They know that if they truly acknowledge the Lordship of Christ, they’ll have to give up living for themselves and start living for God. This partially means that they’ll have to give up (repent of) sin; unfortunately, many people don’t want to do this because they love their sinful lifestyles and don’t want anyone telling them what they can or can’t do (see [John 3:19-20](#)). They don’t want Christianity, they want Selfianity. (I guess they don’t realize the obvious fact that God wants Lordship over our lives and instructs us to do, or not do, certain things *for our ultimate benefit and blessing*, not to deprive us). Jesus made it quite plain here that such people will end up losing their lives.

This fact is reinforced in verse 25: “What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose (*apollumi*) or forfeit his very self.” Notice how the word “gain” is used in contrast to “lose” and “forfeit;” we can therefore soundly conclude that lose and forfeit would be the exact opposite of gaining something. Now note what Jesus said a person who tries to “save his own life” will lose or forfeit: *He said that He would lose or forfeit his very self!*

The Greek word translated “self” here is *heautou* (*heh-ow-too’*) which simply refers to a person’s selfhood, that is, a person’s very being (and therefore is translated variously as “himself,” “herself,” “myself,” “yourself,” “ourselves,” etc.) In the matching gospel accounts of this text, [Matthew 16:26](#) and [Mark 8:36](#), the word “soul” is used instead of self. “Soul” in these texts is translated from the Greek word *psuche* which can also be translated “life” in proper contexts, as is the case in verse 24 where Jesus stated, “whoever wants to save his life (*psuche*) will lose it.”

The conclusion we must draw from all this information is simply this: a person who rejects giving up her life for Christ will end up losing her life, her soul, her very self.

This exact thought is similarly expressed by Jesus in this text:

LUKE 17:33

“Whoever tries to keep his life will **lose** (*apollumi*) it, and **whoever loses his life will preserve it.**”

How much clearer could Jesus possibly be? The only people who will preserve their lives for eternal life are people who are willing to give up their lives for Christ (once again, this merely means getting born-again and thus being “crucified with Christ”). People who refuse to do this will lose their lives.

Let’s look at one last similar expression from Jesus:

JOHN 12:25

“**The man who loves his life will lose** (*apollumi*) it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Jesus isn’t at all saying here that Christians can’t enjoy living while in this world (on the contrary, [1 Peter 1:8](#) states that believers will be “filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy”), He’s simply teaching in line with the biblical fact that true Christians are strangers in this world ([Hebrews 11:13](#); [1 Peter 1:1](#)) who “are looking forward to a new heaven and new earth, the home of righteousness” ([2 Peter 3:13](#)).

The reason Christians are said to be strangers in this world and “hate” ¹⁴ their lives on this earth is because the present condition of this world *is not the way God wants it to be*. Consider, for example, the pain, death, disease, injustice, poverty, atrocities, wars and crime evident all over this world. All these evils are evidence that the devil is “the god of this world;” in other words, the whole world is under his influence or control (see [2 Corinthians 4:4](#); [1 John 5:19](#)). [Revelation 21:1-4](#), on the other hand, reveals how our good, just, loving God wants life to be on earth, for when He creates a “new earth” there will be “no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (verse 4).

Getting back to our text, Jesus is simply stating that a person who hates his or her life in this world in the above manner “**will keep it for eternal life.**” By contrast, those who love their sinful, rebellious lifestyles in this wicked world and reject giving up their lives to Christ’s Lordship will ultimately end up losing their lives.

When exactly will these selfish people who reject God’s grace lose their lives, their souls, their very selves? Obviously on “the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” ([2 Peter 3:7](#)) where God will “destroy both soul and body in hell (*Gehenna*)” ([Matthew 10:28](#)).

Please notice in all these passages that Jesus repeatedly stresses that ungodly people will *lose* their lives if they don’t accept the gospel. He’s says absolutely nothing about people *keeping*

their lives and spending it in never-ending conscious agony. This perverse belief is a false, unbiblical doctrine and needs to be exposed for what it is. That's what this study is all about.

Examples of Everlasting Destruction—Not Eternal Conscious Torment

Let's briefly review the many examples of everlasting destruction that we've covered in this chapter. Take note of how the eternal torture position does not fit any of these examples:

- 1.) The very word "hell" itself is an unmistakable example of literal everlasting destruction as *Gehenna*, the biblical word translated as "hell" in reference to the lake of fire, was a very certain symbol of *destruction* which all of Jesus' listeners readily understood.
- 2.) Jesus and John the Baptist proclaimed that "at the end of the age" (i.e. judgment day) the unrighteous will be like weeds, trees, branches and chaff thrown into fire. It goes without saying that such combustible articles as these *burn up* in fire. We also viewed similar examples from the Old Testament and the book of Hebrews.
- 3.) In *The Parable of the Ten Minas* Jesus used the example of a king having his enemies brought before him and *executed*.
- 4.) Jesus twice spoke of the lake of fire as a "fiery furnace"—an unmistakable figure of complete incineration as revealed in the Old Testament. Articles thrown into a furnace are burned up, not perpetually preserved.
- 5.) We viewed many examples of how God consumed by fire his human enemies throughout history and saw that these examples perfectly coincide with the clear biblical passages which state that God's enemies will be *consumed* by raging fire at the second death (e.g. [Hebrews 10:27](#) and [Psalm 20:9](#)).
- 6.) At the very end of the Old Testament we viewed an unmistakable example of ungodly people being likened to stubble set ablaze; "not a root or branch will be left to them" as they will be "*ashes* under the soles of [the righteous'] feet."
- 7.) We discovered that the very crucifixion of Jesus Christ is an example of the second death. Jesus suffered God's wrath on the cross and died. He was sacrificed in our place. This is a window for us to view the essential nature of the second death, and the clear picture we see through this window is one of suffering that ends in death, not never-ending torture.
- 8.) We also observed the examples of the lost sheep, which would have perished if not saved by its shepherd, and "the prodigal (lost) son," who would have "starved to *death*" if He didn't make the wise decision to repent and return to his father.
- 9.) Lastly, we witnessed how these many clear examples are backed up by Jesus' declarations that those who reject God's sacrifice for their sins and try to "save their own lives" will end up *losing* their lives, their souls, their very selves.

As you can see from all these illustrations, not only does the bible repeatedly declare that people will be destroyed in the lake of fire at the second death, it also backs up these plain declarations with numerous easy-to-understand examples. Those who adamantly contend that the bible teaches eternal conscious torment for ungodly sinners are quite mistaken.

Footnotes

9. Meaning "a place to be spat on or abhorred."

10. One mina was equal to about three months wages.

11. Also known as "the judgment of living nations."

12. This exact same judgment came upon another captain and his fifty men as shown in verse 12.

13. As stated in a previous footnote, Jesus no doubt spoke in Hebrew or Aramaic during his earthly ministry, but biblical writers recorded his words in Greek under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

14. "Hate" here is translated from a Greek word which by extension means "to love less" (Strong 48).