



STUDY 16

The Lake of Fire

It wasn't a job for the feeble or the faint hearted. When Saddam Hussein withdrew from Kuwait, Iraqi engineers began igniting Kuwait's vast oil fields. Almost 90 percent of that country's producing wells were turned into roaring blowtorches. Sixty million barrels of crude a day was going up in smoke! Hundreds of blazing oilwells in the desert of Kuwait had to be somehow extinguished. Men had to be found who could brave the searing heat and hoist a barrel of dynamite over the blazing oil.

Each blaze thundered like a freight train; workers could feel the intense heat through the soles of their boots. The problem was getting close enough to work on the well with long booms—without becoming incinerated. Everyone had to drink three gallons of ice water during a shift, or they could die from dehydration in the fiery heat. They had to wear metal hard hats; the plastic kind melted on your head. Finally the crew positioned a 55-gallon steel drum, loaded with dynamite sticks, above the wellhead. The dynamite

was touched off and the explosion created a huge vacuum. Sheets of tin flew into the vortex. But the explosion sucked up oxygen and suffocated the fire. That well had ceased to be an inferno.

Kuwait's burning oil fields give us a stunning preview of earth's final fire. Those brave men who fight oil fires know one thing about an inferno: It causes total destruction. They'd seen the remains of those who perished in intense fires—there wasn't much left, just a few bone fragments fused to metal. To get too close to an intense inferno is to be consumed. So what will happen to those thrown into a lake of fire? How long will they survive? Isn't it true that, the bigger the fire, the quicker the death? If you want to torture someone for a long time you need a very small flame, not a great conflagration. Could the Bible be trying to tell us something in **Revelation 21:8** by calling this lake of fire "the second death"?

The fire storm in Kuwait awakened vivid images that had long rested in the back of our minds. Those images

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come from the book of Revelation, the book that shows us last day events. At the end of the millennium, the thousand-year period, **Revelation 20:7-9** tells us Satan leads the wicked of all ages to surround the holy city. Then fire comes down from heaven and devours them right here on this earth.

The next chapter, **Revelation 21**, speaks of the earth made new. **Revelation 21:4** promises: God "will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying... no more pain," for the old order of things has passed away. These words of hope refer to life on the New Earth. No more crying or pain—the old order passed away. But the previous chapter described a lake of fire—on the earth. Think about

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it. This presents a big problem. If hell fire burns forever and ever, there'll still be a great deal of mourning and crying and pain. The old order will not have passed away. Will God's promise be fulfilled?

To put it simply, you can't have hell and heaven in the same place. The burning must come to an end!

Hell Hasn't Happened Yet: Hell is not a hot spot burning in the center of the earth now. The wicked will be burned in the future. According to verses like **2 Peter 2:4, 9; Job 21:30; Jude 6; and Matthew 8:29** the wicked—and even evil angels—are "reserved unto judgment."

The Fate of the Wicked Is Death and Destruction:

The Bible declares the utter destruction of the wicked: "Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up [not just "burn them" but "burn them up"]. . . . They shall be ashes."

Malachi 4:1-3. This is consistent teaching of the Bible: "But the wicked shall perish; and the enemies of the Lord . . . shall vanish. Into smoke shall they vanish away." **Psalms 37:20.** Speaking of the wicked, **Philippians 3:19** says their end or destiny "is destruction." And scholars tell us that the Greek word translated as "destruction" is the strongest

word that could be used meaning utter loss of existence. The Bible gives just one dominant picture of the destiny of the wicked—death

and destruction. Prophets and apostles unite in making the picture forceful. Note the words used to describe their fate: The wicked will die - **Romans 6:23.** The wicked will perish - **Luke 13:3.** The wicked will be burnt up - **Malachi 4:1.** The wicked will be utterly consumed - **Psalms 37:20.** The wicked will be turned to ashes - **Malachi 4:3.** The wicked will be as though they had not been - **Obadiah 16.** Satan himself will be turned to ashes and never exist anymore - **Ezekiel 28:18-19.** Scripture is clear. The wages of sin is death, not eternal life in hell. It's no good assuming the body is destroyed in hell but the soul goes on suffering. Jesus, in **Matthew 10:28**, warned of "Him who is able to destroy both soul

and body in hell." And some metaphors used to describe hell really mean the opposite of what many Christians think. **Mark 9:43-44** describes hell as the place "where 'their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'" Many believers think this pictures an eternally burning hell. But here Jesus is quoting a passage in the Old Testament, **Isaiah 66:24**, where the prophet speaks of the fate of the wicked and uses those phrases: "their worm does not die" and "their fire is not quenched." But do you know what he's referring to there? Here is what precedes those phrases: "the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me." Isaiah is talking about corpses, about dead people. "Their worm does not die" is a picture of worms, of maggots consuming a dead body. It pictures a corpse being totally consumed, totally destroyed. Now think about "their fire is not quenched." If the fire were quenched, there might be a possibility of someone living, with the person only partially burned. But no, here the fire is not quenched, it burns and destroys completely. The people are burned up. This is a picture of corpses.

The Words Eternal, Everlasting, and Forever: All three words are virtual synonyms and usually come from the same Greek word, *aiōnios*. **Hebrews 9:12** states that Jesus obtained "eternal redemption" for us. **Hebrews 6:2** speaks of "eternal judgment." Christ's great act of redemption took place at one specific time.

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And the final judgment takes place at one specific time—that is, it won't go on forever. But still they're referred to as "eternal" because the results of redemption and judgment will be everlasting. It's the same with "eternal punishment." The thing that's eternal about the fire and torment is not the process but the consequences—the end result is eternal death, the second death. The same is true in Jude 7:

The author describes the wicked who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah and states that they "are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Note that phrase: "eternal fire." But Sodom and Gomorrah are not still burning. That "eternal fire" went out long ago. **2 Peter 2:6** speaks of God "turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes. . . ." The effects of that all-consuming fire were eternal, turning these wicked cities to ashes. Forever in the Bible is often a limited time, a lifetime. **Exodus 21:6** says that if a slave wishes, "he shall serve him [his master] forever." This simply means as long as he lives. In **Jonah 2:6** Jonah describes his experience in the whale's belly: "The earth with its bars closed behind me forever." Again, forever is a limited time—as long as Jonah could exist in that environment. **1 Samuel 1:22** tells us Hannah dedicated her son to the Lord and brought him to the Temple that he may "remain there forever." How can that be? Verse 28 explains: "As long as he lives."

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QUIZ 16

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Our heavenly Father has so much He longs to teach us! Think of each seminar session as one in a series of steps leading upward—a series of “lessons from heaven.” May we learn our lessons well, so we in turn can teach others. God’s Word, the Bible—our Textbook for this seminar—offers **Learning Unlimited!**

1. We know that hell is not burning now, for the Bible teaches that the evil angels and all the wicked are “_____” for punishment until “the day of judgment”. (2 PETER 2:4 & 9, JOB 21:30, JUDE 6, MATTHEW 8:29)

2. T F “The soul that sinneth” shall be eternally tormented by the flames of hell’s inferno, beginning at the moment of death. (EZEKIEL 18:4 & 20, ROMANS 6:23)

3. Regarding the punishment of the wicked, the day is coming that shall “_____” them _____ . . . They shall be _____,” denoting utter and complete destruction. (MALACHI 4:1-3)

4. T F In the Bible the meaning of the word “forever” is always relative to the thing it describes—when used of God or the redeemed made immortal, it means unending; but when used of ordinary men or the lost, it means “as long as he lives.” (EXODUS 21:6, 1 SAMUEL 1:22 & 28, PHILEMON 15, 1 JOHN 3:15)

5. The Word of God says, “The wicked shall _____ . . . Into _____ they shall _____ away.” (PSALM 37:20)

6. Sodom and Gomorrah, despite “suffering the vengeance of _____ fire,” were turned “into _____” and are not burning today! (JUDE 7 AND 2 PETER 2:6)

7. T F Jesus, our divine Substitute, did “taste death for everyone” and paid the full penalty for sin. But He did not taste eternal torment and burn forever—or His Redemption would never, ever be complete! (HEBREWS 2:9, ROMANS 6:23, AND JOHN 3:14-16)

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

Jeremiah 31:3	God’s character is one of infinite love. (See also 1 John 4:8, 16.)
2 Peter 3:9	The Lord is not willing that any should perish.
Hebrews 12:29	Yet to sin, wherever found, God is a consuming fire.
2 Peter 2:4, 9	Hell is not burning now; evil angels and the wicked are “reserved for judgment.”
Malachi 4:1-3	Sinners will ultimately be burned up and turned to ashes.
Psalms 37:10	The wicked “shall not be”—they shall ultimately cease to exist.
Psalms 37:20	The wicked shall perish and consume; into smoke they shall consume away.
Psalms 37:36	The wicked shall not be found.
Romans 6:23	“The wages of sin is death”—not burning forever!
Rev. 21:8	Being cast into the Lake of Fire, the Bible says, “is the second death.”
Jude 7	Sodom and Gomorrah are set forth as an example of “eternal fire.”
2 Peter 2:6	But the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah are not burning today! They were turned into “ashes” thousands of years ago.
Matthew 3:12	“Unquenchable fire” is not one that shall never go out but one that cannot be put out. Hell-fire must be unquenchable, or the wicked would put it out.
Jer. 17:19-27	God predicted that Jerusalem would be destroyed by fire that “shall not be quenched”—yet that city is not burning today. (2 Kings 25:1-9)
Isaiah 47:14	The fire burns itself out so completely, there’ll not be even a warm coal.
Matthew 25:46	The “punishment” will be “everlasting.” The text does not say “everlasting punishing.” It’s not the process but the effect or result that lasts forever.
Exodus 21:6	If he chooses, a slave shall serve his master forever—or, as long as he lives.
1 Sam. 1:22, 28	Hannah brought her son Samuel to the Temple so “that he may . . . remain there forever”—which means “as long as he lives.”
Rev. 20:9	Fire comes down from God out of heaven and “devours” the wicked.
Eze. 28:17-18	Fire will consume and “devour” even Satan himself to “ashes.”
Obadiah 16	The wicked “shall be as though they had never been.”
2 Peter 3:10-13	“All these things shall be dissolved” when “the elements shall melt with fervent heat”—but God shall create “new heavens and a new earth.”