

2015

Everlasting Punishment

by Bill Lockwood

A prominent NT topic which is seldom discussed is that of “eternal punishment” in hell. Multiple passages reveal everlasting damnation that is reserved for those who are outside of Jesus Christ.

“Gehenna” is the original word translated hell in the English translation and represents the Hebrew “Ge-Hinnom” (the valley of Hinnom) which geographical location is on the southern edge of Jerusalem. By etymology the word came to be used by Jews to refer, not to that literal valley, but to a place of eternal torment for the wicked after death. Twelve times “Gehenna” appears in the NT text.

For instance, Jesus warned that, “He who says to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of the *hell* of fire” (Matthew 5:22). So also, if “thine eye” causes stumbling, Jesus admonishes “Pluck it out,” for it is better to lose the eye than the “whole body be cast into *hell*” (v. 30). In Matthew 18:8, 9 the warnings are repeated, but this time, instead of “hell” our Lord mentions “eternal fire” as the doom. This comparison alone shows that “Gehenna” came to be used to refer to a place of eternal torment.

Revelation 14:9-13

One highly instructive passage which reveals the nature of eternal punishment is Revelation 14:9-13. Having announced the “Fall of Babylon” (v. 8), John opens the warning to “*any man that worships the beast and his image*” (9). This person will be “tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb” (10). An apt description of the “Gehenna” which our Lord mentioned.

The doctrinal significance of this passage should not be overlooked. *First, the smoke of “their torment” goes up forever and ever.* Hard it is to imagine a more descriptive phrase for unending pain and sorrow. The Greek text here reads “unto ages of ages.” This particular phrase occurs 12 times in Revelation and indicates “endless duration,” as, for instance, at 1:6 where God has “glory and dominion” “forever and ever.”

Second, the wicked have no rest “day and night.” No release from their lot. The exact phraseology is used in 4:8 of the four living creatures who cease not to give praise “day and night” to the Lord God Almighty. In 20:10 the “beast” and “the false prophet” are to be “tormented day and night forever and ever.” Contrast this threat with that of “rest” promised to the faithful who die in the Lord (14:13).

This accords with the teaching of our Lord in Matthew 25:46 in which “everlasting punishment” is set for those on His left hand. A fearful conception. Unfortunately, many today have been inflicted with modern-day Marcionism—a 2nd century heresy named for Marcion who taught a dichotomy between the God of the Old Testament, which he saw as “wrathful,” and the “God of love” of the NT. No such distinction exists. Jesus Christ taught us plainly that a healthy fear of Him who casts into hell is necessary to keep us from evil (Luke 12:5).