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The Fate Of The Wicked



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† One of the biggest traditions taught today is that the wicked are raised immortal so they can consciously suffer forever without dying. But scripture never says the unrighteous are given immortal life. Eternal life is a gift given only to those in Christ. The wicked are consistently described as perishing, being destroyed, consumed, burned up, and dying.

† Death in scripture means death. The Bible never teaches that death actually means endless living in torment. If someone remains alive forever in conscious torment, then they never truly died at all.

† The fulfilled perspective shows that judgment came upon the wicked generation of Israel in that age, and the language of destruction throughout scripture points to complete ruin and death, not immortal suffering without end.

The Wages Of Sin Is Death

Romans 6:23

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gracious gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

† Paul contrasted death with eternal life. He did not contrast eternal life in heaven with eternal life in torment.

† Eternal life is only found in Christ. The wicked are never promised immortality anywhere in this passage.

† If both the righteous and wicked live forever consciously, then both groups possess eternal life in some form, which destroys Paul's contrast.

† Scripture says sin brings death, not immortal existence in agony. (Genesis 2:17; Ezekiel 18:4)

The Wicked Perish

John 3:16

16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.

† Jesus contrasted perishing with eternal life, not eternal torment with eternal life.

† If the lost consciously live forever, then they did not perish.

† Eternal life is presented as the opposite of perishing.

Psalm 37:20

20 But the wicked will perish;
And the enemies of the LORD will be like the glory of the pastures,
They vanish-like smoke they vanish away.

† The wicked are said to perish and consume away like smoke. Smoke disappears, it does not remain forever alive.

† David used language of destruction and disappearance, not endless preservation.

† This matches Jesus' warnings that the wicked would be destroyed. (Matthew 10:28)

† Endless torment theology reverses the meaning of perish and turns destruction into eternal preservation.

God Can Destroy Both Soul And Body

Matthew 10:28

28 And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

† Jesus said God can destroy both soul and body. He did not say preserve both forever in torment.

† The word destroy means ruin, death, and complete loss. Christ warned of total destruction.

† If the soul remains endlessly alive and conscious, then it was never destroyed.

† Jesus was speaking about Gehenna judgment connected to covenant Israel and the destruction coming upon that generation. (Matthew 23:33-38)

The Soul That Sins Shall Die

Ezekiel 18:4

4 Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins will die.

† God said the soul that sins shall die.

† Scripture never says the soul that sins shall live forever in torment.

† Death is consistently the punishment for sin throughout scripture.

The Wicked Become Ashes

Malachi 4:1-3

1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of armies, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branches. 2 But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and frolic like calves from the stall. 3 And you will crush the wicked underfoot, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I am preparing," says the LORD of armies.

† Malachi said the wicked would be burned up and become ashes.

† Ashes are not living conscious beings screaming forever.

† God said the judgment would leave them neither root nor branch, meaning complete destruction.

† Jesus connected this coming judgment to His own generation through John the Baptist. (Matthew 11:13-14)

The Wicked Are Burned Up

Matthew 3:12

12 His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

† John the Baptist said the chaff would be burned up.

† Unquenchable fire means a fire that cannot be stopped until it completely consumes what it is judging.

† Jerusalem itself was burned with unquenchable fire language in the Old Testament, yet those fires are not still burning today. (Jeremiah 17:27)

† The wicked are compared to useless chaff consumed in fire, not immortal beings preserved eternally.

The Dead Know Nothing

Ecclesiastes 9:5

5 For the living know that they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor do they have a reward any longer, for their memory is forgotten.

† Scripture plainly says the dead know nothing.

† This directly contradicts the idea of billions of dead people consciously suffering forever.

† Solomon described death as the end of earthly consciousness and activity.

† The Bible consistently presents death as death, not another form of conscious living.

The Wicked Will Be No More

Psalm 37:10

10 Yet a little while and the wicked person will be no more;
And you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there.

† David said the wicked shall not be.

† Their place disappears because they are gone.

† This language cannot honestly be turned into eternal conscious survival.

† The same chapter repeatedly says the wicked are cut off, destroyed, and vanish away. (Psalm 37:9, 22, 28, 34, 38)

Eternal Destruction

2 Thessalonians 1:9

9 These people will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

† Paul called it eternal destruction.

† Destruction does not mean eternal preservation.

† The punishment is eternal because the destruction is permanent.

† Scripture never says eternal life in torment.

Only The Righteous Receive Immortality

1 Corinthians 15:53-54

53 For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 But when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written: "DEATH HAS BEEN SWALLOWED UP in victory.

† Paul only spoke of the righteous receiving immortality.

† The wicked are never said to receive immortal bodies.

† Immortality is something that must be put on, it is not naturally possessed by every human being.

† If the wicked live consciously forever, then they too must possess immortality, which contradicts Paul's teaching.

The Second Death Means Death

Revelation 20:14-15

14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

† John called it the second death, not the second life.

† Death never changes meaning into endless conscious existence.

† The lake of fire represented covenant judgment and complete destruction against the enemies of God.

† The same book says death itself was destroyed, showing victory and completion, not eternal preservation of evil.

Daniel Never Says The Wicked Live Forever

Daniel 12:2

2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.

† Daniel never says the wicked receive everlasting life.

† The contempt is everlasting, not the conscious experience of the wicked.

† Dead bodies being remembered in shame forever is common Old Testament judgment language. (Isaiah 66:24)

† Jesus quoted Isaiah's judgment language concerning Gehenna against Jerusalem in His generation. (Mark 9:47-49)

Historical References

† Ignatius spoke of believers receiving immortality through Christ, showing immortality was viewed as a gift, not something possessed naturally by all mankind.

† Irenaeus taught that life is continued only by God's granting of life, and those rejecting God deprive themselves of continuance forever.

† Arnobius wrote that the wicked would ultimately perish rather than remain forever alive in torment.

† Josephus described Gehenna in connection with judgment upon Jerusalem and the valley associated with destruction and death.

† The early Jewish understanding of Gehenna came from the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, a place associated with death, corpses, fire, and destruction, not immortal life in endless torture.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We shouldn't build doctrine from fear or church tradition. We must let scripture define death, destruction, and perishing.

† Eternal life is precious because only those in Christ receive it.

† God is just, righteous, and holy. His judgments are true and complete.

† The fulfilled perspective removes the confusion created by futurism and shows the covenant judgment language in its proper setting.

† Christ came to bring life to His people, not to endlessly preserve evil forever.

† Endless conscious torment would mean evil never truly ends, but scripture says death itself would be destroyed and God would become all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 21:4)

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does Daniel 12:2 teach eternal conscious torment?

A: No. The verse says some awaken to everlasting life, but it never says the wicked live forever. It says they awaken to shame and everlasting contempt. The contempt belongs to the memory and judgment against them. (Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 66:24)

Q: Doesn't Revelation say the smoke rises forever?

A: Old Testament judgment language used rising smoke to symbolize complete destruction and permanent judgment against nations. Edom's smoke was said to rise forever, yet Edom is not still burning today. (Isaiah 34:9-10; Revelation 19:3)

Q: Doesn't Jesus speak about eternal punishment?

A: Yes, but eternal punishment does not require eternal conscious torment. Eternal death is an eternal punishment because it is permanent and irreversible. (Matthew 25:46; Romans 6:23)

Q: Who receives immortality according to scripture?

A: The righteous receive immortality through Christ. Scripture never says the wicked are granted immortal life. (1 Corinthians 15:53-54; 1 Timothy 6:16)

Q: If the wicked suffer forever, doesn't that mean evil also lasts forever?

A: Yes. Endless conscious torment means sin, rebellion, death, and evil never truly end. But scripture says death itself would be destroyed and God would become all in all. (1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 21:4)

Q: Will the wicked/unrighteous be raised in a future judgment?

A: Scripture never says the wicked are raised immortal to live forever in torment. The Bible consistently describes the fate of the wicked as death, destruction, perishing, being burned up, and becoming ashes. Even Daniel 12:2 never says the wicked receive everlasting life. It says some awaken to shame and everlasting contempt. The contempt is everlasting, not their conscious life. Jesus also said God can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna. (Daniel 12:2; Matthew 10:28; Malachi 4:1-3)

Q: If a person gets eternal punishment or eternal torment, don't they have to be raised to life?

A: Yes. Eternal conscious torment would require the wicked to receive immortality so they could consciously live forever. But scripture says immortality is given only to the righteous in Christ. The Bible never says the wicked receive immortal bodies or eternal life. If someone remains alive forever, then death has not truly happened. (Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54; 1 Timothy 6:16)

Q: Does eternal punishment just mean you're dead?

A: Eternal punishment means the punishment is permanent and irreversible. Eternal death is everlasting because there is no return from it. Just as eternal redemption does not mean Jesus is forever redeeming, eternal punishment does not require endless conscious suffering. The result lasts forever. Scripture defines the wages of sin as death. (Romans 6:23; Matthew 25:46; Hebrews 9:12)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Romans 6:23; John 3:16; Psalm 37:20; Matthew 10:28; Ezekiel 18:4; Malachi 4:1-3; Matthew 3:12; Ecclesiastes 9:5; Psalm 37:10; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54; Revelation 20:14-15; Daniel 12:2

† Ignatius, Epistle to the Ephesians; Irenaeus, Against Heresies Book 2; Arnobius, Against the Heathen Book 2; Josephus, Wars of the Jews Book 6

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