

## 5. OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

In several English Bibles, most notably the King James Version, the Hebrew word *sheol* and the Greek words *hades*, *tartarus* and *gehenna* are most often translated with the English word *hell*, which, to most people, immediately conjures up visions of the lost being eternally tormented in flames of fire that will never, ever go out. However, it has been shown that *sheol* and *hades* have the exact same meaning and refer to the *unseen*, and *tartarus* refers to something similar, the *imperceptible*. The *unseen* refers to the dead who know nothing whatsoever (Ecclesiastes 9.5-6) and has nothing whatsoever to do with man's *hell* created in the image of a god of man's own making. *Tartarus* refers to messengers who are kept in imperceptible bonds for the judging of the great day, that is, the chastening judging (2 Peter 2.4; Jude 6). Although *tartarus* has something to do with judgment, it is not presented in any sense as an eternal (forever and ever) dungeon of torment.

The Greek word *gehenna* is used in reference to judgment and is most often associated with fire, *the gehenna of fire*. *The gehenna of fire* and *the lake of fire* are similar in that they both involve fire and both are for the purpose of judgment. However, as shown latter, neither represents an eternal torture chamber that man has created and called *hell*.

Now, before looking at the whole matter of judgment by fire and the meaning of *the gehenna of fire* and *the lake of fire*, there are eight foundational truths that must be stressed if we are to properly understand these terms as presented in Scripture.

### ***First the soulish, then the spiritual.***

First, Paul reinforces the principle that the spiritual does not come first.

Thus also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is roused in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is roused in glory. It is sown in infirmity; it is roused in power. It is sown a soulish body; it is roused a spiritual body. If there is a soulish body, there is a spiritual also. Thus it is written also, The first man, Adam, "became a living soul:" the last Adam a vivifying Spirit. **But not first the spiritual, but the soulish** [natural, physical], **thereupon the spiritual**. The first man was out of the earth, soilish; the second Man is the Lord out of heaven. (1 Corinthians 15.42-47 cv [ALT, ASV, KJV, LITV (natural); GW, ISV (physical)])

God's order in relation to mankind is first the soulish and then the spiritual. The Greek word *psuchikos* is translated *soulish*, *natural* or *physical*, depending on the translation. Given the root of the word, *soulish* is probably the better translation. In any case, it conveys the natural side of mankind as a living soul, which relates

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

best to the physical or material world. The soul apparently refers to the consciousness, feelings and desires of man as he lives in a physical world.

In Scripture, fire can be seen in the same way. We see fire first in the natural or physical realm and then in the spiritual realm. Since we live in a material world, all of us know what fire is in the physical sense. Fire consumes material objects and reduces them to ashes and vapors. Throughout what follows, this kind of fire is referred to as *physical* fire.

The first mention of fire in Scripture is in reference to the judgment of God of two morally corrupt cities.

Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah **brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven**; and he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. (Genesis 19.24-25 KJV)

We can only assume that the fire that reigned down out of heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah was a literal physical fire that utterly destroyed everything in its path, including the inhabitants of the city. To this day, archaeologists have not been able to unearth any physical evidence of their existence.

However, in Scripture, we must look beyond the physical fire and discern its spiritual meaning. For example, Jude tells us that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is a symbol or example of moral corruption and God's righteous judgment by fire of such corruption.

As Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them in like manner to these **committing ultra-prostitution**, and coming away after other flesh, are lying before us, a specimen [example], experiencing **the justice of fire eonian**. (Jude 7 CV [most translations])

It is obvious in reading Scripture that fire does not always represent a physical fire, for it is often used in a figurative or symbolic way to explain or point to a spiritual principle. As with most of Scripture, we should not focus on the outward, physical manifestations of things (i.e., a physical fire), but rather on the symbolic or spiritual meaning of things. We need to see the meaning of what could be called *spiritual fire*. Some examples will serve to make the point.

In his announcement of the arrival of the Messiah of Israel, John the baptist declared: *He will be baptizing you in holy spirit and fire* (Matthew 3.11 CV), which refers to burning up the chaff or all that is corrupt. We see another reference to spiritual fire in Acts when *the tongues as if of fire* descended on the infant ecclesia, and they were *filled with holy spirit*, and they all began to speak in different known languages, as given to each by the spirit (Acts 2.1-4 CV). We can experience a *fiery trial*, which refers to a very difficult situation designed to try or test our faith by fire (James 1.2; 1 Peter 1.6-7; 2 Peter 4.12). In his Patmos vision, John saw the

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

Son of Man whose eyes were like flames of fire (Revelation 1.14). John did not see Jesus with flames shooting out of His eyes. The flames actually speak of the spiritual discernment or judgment of Christ. Later in the Revelation, John saw the two witnesses who had fire flowing out of their mouths to devour their enemies (Revelation 11.5). Some people actually take this literally as a physical fire, as if they are like fire-eating dragons; but it means nothing of the sort. They speak forth the word of the Lord. As David declared: *The voice of the Lord hews out flames of fire* (Psalm 29.7 NASB). We could say that their fire signifies or symbolizes the authority of God on the earth through His word (law), which He sends forth.

The fact of the matter is that the most prevalent use of the word *fire* in Scripture is in reference to the judgment of God, based on His divine law of righteousness and justice. After all, the foundation of His kingdom is righteousness and justice (Psalm 33.5; 89.14; 97.2). This is taken up later as we look at the lake of fire, which is the last mention of fire in Scripture. This fire will not consume human flesh; it will only consume acts or works based on their quality or character as judged according to God's law. We could say that it will be fire that will emanate from the spiritual realm, for *God is spirit*.

(The rest of the dead do not live until the thousand years should be finished.) This is the former [first] resurrection. ... And death and the unseen were cast into **the lake of fire**. This is the second death—**the lake of fire**. And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life, he was cast into **the lake of fire**. (Revelation 20.5, 14-15 CV [most translations])

The heaven-hell preaching of our day holds that this fire is a physical fire that somehow torments but does not consume human bodies. However, as stressed throughout what follows, *God is spirit*, and this fire is of the spiritual realm, not the physical, as we know it. In similar fashion, *the lake of fire* must be seen as a unique type of fire emanating in the spirit realm based on God's law, with the purpose of consuming all moral corruption and dead works.

In other words, whenever we read of fire in Scripture, we need to see beyond the obvious into the spiritual to see what the fire symbolizes or signifies. Even the physical fire that killed the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah points to a future judgment by spiritual fire (Matthew 10.15; 11.24; Luke 10.12). In the day of judgment, the inhabitants of these ancient cities will stand before the great white throne, and experience *the lake of fire* to purge and refine them.

***Jesus' words are spirit and life.***

Second, Jesus told His disciples that the words that He spoke were spirit and life.

The Spirit is that which is vivifying. The flesh is not benefiting anything. **The declarations which I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.** (John 6.63 CV)

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

“The Spirit is the One giving life; the flesh does not accomplish [or, benefit] anything. The words which I have spoken to you are **spirit and are life!**”  
(John 6.63 ALT)

Jesus’ words or declarations are not to be taken lightly as simply words, as if He were a great philosopher, scholar, teacher, or even a theologian; and they are not to be interpreted as pertaining to the physical or natural, as man sees it. All that Jesus spoke and that is recorded in Scripture must be viewed as spiritual words that are intended to give life to the hearer, not death. The flesh, which refers to the soulish man, does not benefit anything and, as such, cannot lead one to true life. It is only that which is spiritual that truly matters. Thus, if we are to understand Jesus’ words, then we must discern or know them *in spirit*.

Paul explained this to the Corinthians who were exercising spiritual gifts and, yet, were walking according to the flesh. Even with the gifts, they were unspiritual. Instead of growing up in Christ as spiritual people, they were remaining as babes or children not able to ingest solid food, that is, spiritual food that gives life.

But we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit, the [One] from God, so that we should know the [things] having been graciously given to us by God; which [things] also we speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in [words] taught by the Holy Spirit, interpreting spiritual [things] by spiritual [words] [or, **combining spiritual [ideas] with spiritual [words]**]. But a natural [or, unspiritual] person does not receive the [things] of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he is not able to know [them], because they are spiritually examined. (1 Corinthians 2.12-14 ALT)

So, to understand Jesus’ words, which are spirit and life, we must be able to combine spiritual *ideas* with spiritual *words*, or ***spiritual with spiritual***. This may seem to be an obvious point, but given the gross distortion of Jesus’ words about *gehenna* and other passages about God’s judgment of all mankind, it appears that some, perhaps many, who preach and teach Scripture, have failed to combine *spiritual* with *spiritual*; but rather, they have remained in the physical realm in the interpretation of Scripture. Case in point: an eternal dungeon of fire and worms that continually tortures billions upon billions of *living* people, whom God created with the intention of them being in His image, is seen by many as a physical judgment that torments both body and soul. That this eternal hell is not to be found in Scripture adds to the horror of such teaching. But more importantly, if Jesus’ words are spirit and life, then how can we take His words about *gehenna*, in particular, and make them into something strictly physical, which ultimately leads to eternal torture? As shown later, there is a component of the physical in His words because the physical comes first, but His words pertain to spirit and life.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

### ***God is spirit.***

Third, it makes perfect sense that Jesus spoke words that are spirit because His Father is spirit, and all that He spoke and did came forth from His heavenly Father, who sent Him to this earth to die for our sin. In speaking to the Samaritan woman, Jesus clearly declared this truth in relation to worship.

“But coming is the hour, and now is, when the true worshipers will be worshipping the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father also is seeking such to be worshipping Him. **God is spirit**, and those who are worshipping Him must be worshipping in spirit and truth.” (John 4.23-24 cv)

Since God is spirit, it only follows that all things pertaining to God and His dealing with mankind must be seen and understood *in* spirit. If we want to know life, then we must know the spirit because the spirit gives life (John 6.63). If we want to know truth, then we must receive it from the spirit of truth, which leads to the next point.

### ***The spirit of truth.***

Fourth, it is only through the spirit of truth that we will come into the truth of God’s word.

“And I shall be asking the Father, and He will be giving you another consoler, that it, indeed, may be with you for **the con—the spirit of truth**, which the world can not get, for it is not beholding it, neither is knowing it. Yet you know it, for it is remaining with you and will be in you.” (John 14.16-17 cv)

“Now, whenever the consoler which I shall be sending you from the Father may be coming, **the spirit of truth which is going out from the Father**, that will be testifying concerning Me.” (John 15.26 cv)

Yet whenever that may be coming—**the spirit of truth—it will be guiding you into all the truth**, for it will not be speaking from itself, but whatsoever it should be hearing will it be speaking, and of what is coming will it be informing you. (John 16.13 cv)

When Jesus ascended back to His Father’s throne, as proof of His glorification (John 7.39), the spirit of truth was sent to the earth to teach the ecclesia that was breathed upon on the day of Pentecost. Thank God, the spirit of truth has remained with God’s people since that day, and this spirit is available to all of us to lead us into all spiritual truth through God’s completed word known as the sacred Scriptures, both of the Hebrew and the Greek. If we want to know the truth that sets us free, then we must know it *in* spirit, for truth is joined with spirit. It is spirit *and* truth. Simply, in our understanding the truth, we must move beyond the mindset of the physical realm and into the mind of Christ that is spiritual.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

### ***The truth sets you free.***

Fifth, spiritual truth is what sets us free. There are many types of so-called truths in the world today and even throughout Christendom, but none of these truths have the capacity to free us from bondage and death. Only one type of truth will truly set us free, and that is God's word, which Jesus declared is truth (John 17:17).

At His speaking these things, many believe in Him. Jesus, then, said to the Jews who have believed Him, **"If ever you should be remaining in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will be making you free."** They answered Him, "The seed of Abraham are we, and we have never been slaves of anyone. How are you saying that 'You shall be becoming free'?" Jesus answered them, "Verily, verily, I am saying to you that everyone who is doing sin, is a slave of sin. Now the slave is not **remaining in the house for the eon. The son is remaining for the eon. If ever, then, the Son should be making you free, you will be really free.**" (John 8:30-36 cv)

Some of the Jews that were listening to Jesus believed His word, but many did not believe. They were in bondage to sin, even though they were of the commonwealth of Israel. Their ties to the ancient nation of Israel and the old covenant did not lead them to life but into a false sense of security and a wrong assessment of their condition in the eyes of God. They were in unbelief. Their righteousness was as filthy rags. Their hearts were uncircumcised (Jeremiah 4:4). None were truly seeking God. All had sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. They were in slavery to sin. There is only one way to become free from such bondage and become a true son in the house of God for the oncoming eons, and that is to remain in Jesus' words, which are truth. The truth will make one free and transform one into a son of God, and the very foundation of this truth is the Son of God, who makes us free in every sense of its meaning.

Dear brethren, this matter of the truth setting us free may seem out of place in a discussion of *the gehenna of fire* and *the lake of fire*, but it is just the opposite; it is of the utmost importance. Truth sets people free; it does not place them in further bondage and fear. Most of all, it does not place billions of people in an endless state of torture and torment while a relatively small number of people enjoy an endless state of bliss. **Man's hell might strike fear in the hearts of people and scare some into accepting Christ in some measure, but it is not the truth that sets people free and leads them into spirit and life. Fear never sets anyone free; it only leads to greater bondage.**

### ***God is love.***

Sixth, the truth that sets one free is that *God is love*.

The one who does not love does not know God, for **God is love.** (1 John 4:8 NASB)

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. **God is love**, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (1 John 4.16 NASB)

The good news is not about being saved out of some demented place of fire and worms, but about the God who *loves* the world and gave His only-begotten Son (John 3.16) to free us from death and give us life. He is the Resurrection and the Life. Consider the following verses, and may the spirit of truth reveal to your heart that God is love and that His love extends to all mankind.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; **Who will have all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2.3-4 KJV)

For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, especially of those that believe. (1 Timothy 4.10 KJV)

Yet all is of God, Who conciliates us to Himself through Christ, and is giving us the dispensation of the conciliation, how that **God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them**, and placing in us the word of the conciliation. (2 Corinthians 5.18-19 cv)

For in Him the entire complement delights to dwell, and **through Him to reconcile all to Him (making peace through the blood of His cross)**, through Him, **whether those on the earth or those in the heavens**. (Colossians 1.19-20 cv)

### ***Love your enemies.***

These verses, and many more, speak volumes of *God is love*. Our Father tells us to love our enemies and pray for them (Matthew 5.44). And yet, theologians have created a hell in which God will supposedly torment His enemies forever and ever without any chance of reprieve. Think about it! How can God tell us to love our enemies, and yet He hates His enemies, which by the count of some theologians is on the order of 55 billion people that have existed on this planet since day six of the restoration. God is love means God loves His enemies, and He will eventually bring them into reconciliation with Himself because Calvary was, is and forever will be an absolute success in saving all mankind. He cannot demand us to love our enemies and He not do likewise. Do you get it? May the spirit of truth open your spiritual eye!

He will judge His enemies, but He will not destroy or exterminate them forever. The fact of the matter is that He will judge all mankind, including us who believe, which leads to the next point.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

### ***The God of love is a consuming fire.***

Wherefore, accepting **an unshakable kingdom**, we may have grace through which we may be offering divine service in a way well pleasing to God, with piety and dread, **for our God is also a consuming fire.** (Hebrews 12.28-29 cv)

*Seventh, God is a consuming fire.* The Greek word for consuming is *katanalisko*, which means “to utterly consume.” Of note is the fact that this is an intensified form of its root word *analisko*, which is used only once in Greek Scripture, as recorded in this verse. In other words, God alone is a consuming fire, and He alone will utterly consume all that needs to be consumed to bring all mankind into the glory of His kingdom.

Now, some might think that *God is love* is a contradiction to *God is a consuming fire*. After all, most people view fire in a negative way because of its destructive power. To make matters worse, the whole unscriptural notion of an eternal hell of fire that torments human flesh without any relief adds to the apparent contradiction.

I have heard it stated many times over the airwaves that Scripture has more to say about God’s justice (i.e., His need for a hell to burn, toast and torment people) than it does about *God is love*. In other words, according to the heaven-hell preaching, God’s righteous indignation with His enemies trumps His very essence, which is love. As the thinking goes, God must mete out justice in an eternal hell; otherwise, He is not a just God. I have even heard some declare that God’s love demands that there be a hell. Never mind, that the god created by those who hold such views is worse than the terrorists of our day who know nothing of love.

I believe with my whole heart that we have lost the true meaning of the good news of Jesus Christ. Peace, love and reconciliation have been replaced with war, hate and punishment. I wish I could shout from every pulpit in Christendom that there is absolutely no contradiction in *God is love*, *God is spirit* and *God is a consuming fire*. Fire is not a bad thing, and in fact, it is quite good and essential in bringing about the purpose of the eons, especially for the eventual salvation of all mankind.

Physical fire is the process of combustion or burning, which entirely consumes or dissolves matter into ash or vapor. In Scripture, *fire* is associated with God’s judgment or cleansing, both in a physical and spiritual sense, or a literal and figurative or symbolic sense. Fire is quick and decisive, and so is God’s judgment, especially when the kingdom is in view. For example, Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with physical fire and reduced to cinders, and our current heavens and earth will be dissolved or cleansed by combustion (2 Peter 2.6; 3.10).

Since God is spirit, and God is a consuming fire, it follows that God works in the realm of spirit and that His consuming fire is one of spirit. Again, we could call it His *spiritual* fire or fire *in* spirit.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

God's fire *in spirit* will consume all the dross, all the dead works of the flesh that cannot enter the coming eons. However, God's fire will not consume all the good or, we could say, all that has been formed of Christ in the individual. The purpose of God's consuming fire is to conform us into the image (character) of His Son, not to destroy us. If we saw how vital God's *spiritual* fire is to our destiny in Christ, we would embrace it as something good, even though it might be great anguish or torment for some of us when we enter into it. Notice that it is a *spiritual* fire; it is not physical fire as we know in our world today. God is spirit and is love, and His fire must be spiritual in nature, driven by His love for all.

### ***Chastening in the day of judging.***

*Eighth*, God must judge all mankind, but it is not for destruction; it is for restoration and restitution of all the wrongs. On what basis must He judge? What standard will He use? It must be based upon His divine law. Sin is lawlessness, so the only way to judge sin is by the law, for without the law we would never know what sin is in the first place. We are not justified by the work of the law, but our faith will be judged by our works done by faith (James 2.14-26).

God judges by His law, which is His word, the entire Bible and what He speaks to our hearts by His spirit for us to obey. This is taken up in more detail in the discussion of the lake of fire, but it is important to keep this principle in mind as we go forward.

### ***The end from the beginning.***

God has revealed the end from the beginning, and He is working all things toward His end (Isaiah 46.10). Nothing that has happened, is happening and will happen in this world is outside the purpose and plan of God, and everything that happens is driving toward God's end for mankind and His entire creation. In a world full of evil, I realize that this is almost beyond our capacity to grasp. How could everything, even the evil we see and experience all around us and in our lives, be part of God's plan to bring about His purpose? As much as it might not set well with the doctrines of men, Scripture tells us that God is the creator of evil (Isaiah 45.7), and since this is so, we must conclude that all evil has a purpose in the working out of God's plan.

However, if God created evil, then why does it seem to us that He is so harsh in judging? When we study the history of Israel and the nations in Scripture, we read of thousands of people and many nations brought into death and destruction through the judgment of God. Even during our present wicked eon the fury of God has been brought to bear on the world. Why? When we look around us today and consider our own lives, we see evil and wickedness abound. Why does God allow so much evil to befall even His own people who love Him?

Obviously, God's ways are not our ways. His wisdom and judgments are not our wisdom and judgments. Nevertheless, God has told us the end from the beginning.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

So what is the end? It is explained in one word: Glory! God's purpose for all mankind is glory, starting with the many sons who will be led into glory (Hebrews 2.10; Colossians 1.27) and consummating with the heavenly city that will come down out of heaven having the glory from God (Revelation 21.10).

### ***Life and glory.***

What is glory? Glory is when everything in God's creation is as He intended it to be from before the beginning of the eons. It is God's purpose to transform all mankind from Adam to the last human born on earth into the image of His Beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, so that His God and Father may be *All* in all.

For me, this explains everything. As painful as evil and death are, and as painful as judgment might be to many, even the fury of God, these are merely momentary light afflictions compared to the glory to come when there is no more evil, no more death, no more mourning, no more clamor, no more misery. In that day, the former things will pass away, and the One sitting on the throne will be making all new (see Revelation 21.4-5).

God allows every human to go through some form of suffering, fiery trial, discipline and evil because these, and many more hardships, are needed to bring us all through to His end. Even the ones who seem to be filled with evil and who are brought into severe judgment, even unto death, are in the purpose of God to be saved in the end. From our perspective, death is a great enemy, and even though God hates death, as we do, He nevertheless sees the end and knows that it is all leading to life. Death is a means to His end and He sees beyond death to life. After all, what is death to the God of the living (Matthew 22.32)? What is death to God who has brought forth victory over sin and death through His Son, who is the Resurrection and the Life?

So, when mankind experiences judgment and death, God sees the life that will ultimately come forth for all mankind, even if it comes forth for many at the consummation of the eons. We may not understand why God has chosen to do it this way; but He is God and who of us can question His wisdom?

It is unfortunate that the doctrines of men have created such havoc in understanding the judgment of God, as if He is an angry God who is determined to punish mankind with an eternal hell, because we are unable to do what we were never capable of doing in the first place, that is, save ourselves. God is the Savior of *all* mankind, and He wills that all mankind be saved, even though His judging may seem severe at times. His judging is for chastening, not for an eternal hell.

The Lord is acquainted with the rescue of the devout out of trial, yet is keeping **the unjust for chastening in the day of judging**, yet specially those going after the flesh in defiling lust and despising lordship. (2 Peter 2.9-10 cv)

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

Most translations use the word *punishment* and others use the word *tormented*, but this is unfortunate, for this makes judgment penal in nature rather than corrective. This is interpretative bias to bolster man's doctrine of a never-ending punishment in a physical fire. Penal judgment is designed to mete out punishment on the perpetrator but not to correct or restore the person.

In the Greek, the word *kolasis* is concordantly translated as ***chastening***, which means **“to chasten with a view to amendment, in contrast to punishment which is penal”** (also used in Matthew 25.46; Acts 4.21; 2 Peter 2.4; 1 John 4.18). In other words, *chastening* has a purpose, and that purpose is to correct and to purify the one who is suffering through the chastening. However, *punishment* aims to satisfy the one who is inflicting the punishment. For example, before he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, Saul was seeking to destroy the Way. He testified: *I went into Damascus, to be leading also those being there, bound, to Jerusalem, that they may be punished* (Acts 22.5 cv). Saul had no intention of correcting those of the Way; he sought to inflict punishment on them, to the point of death if necessary, to satisfy his own rage against them, on account of which he later considered himself the least of the apostles.

Let it be indelibly written on our hearts that God's judgment is to settle accounts to bring forth the highest and most pure form of righteousness and justice. It is not to penalize or to destroy but to restore. This is the fruit of love.

Oh, how different is the heart of God and His love toward mankind! The unjust are kept for chastening, not for destruction or for an eternal hell. May your eyes be opened to this truth!

These eight truths are not the only ones; six others are taken up later. However, with eight of fourteen truths in mind, we can consider the various forms of judgment by fire found in Scripture, starting with *the gehenna of fire* from the perspective of the apostate nation of Israel [the Jew first (Romans 1.16)].

### ***The gehenna of fire.***

According to many preachers today, the word *gehenna* is simply the expression used for the eternal punishment of the lost; it is man's hell. This theme is reinforced in the book *Paradise Lost* (1667), in which the author Milton wrote: “The pleasant Valy of Hinnom, Tophet thence and black Gehenna call'd, the Type of hell.” Of course, this is not Scripture, but it should not surprise anyone that some of what is believed in various circles of Christendom has come from other sources.

As if to prove the point, as I was editing this particular chapter, I turned on the television to watch a well-known, national pastor preach. His message was on hope, but he started by discussing the hopelessness of many in the world today. It was not long before he proceeded to talk about hell. Someone had asked him if hell existed because the questioner had heard very little preached on hell lately. The pastor answered that there most assuredly is a hell, and then he proceeded to

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

quote from Dante's *Inferno* and to describe a cartoon he had seen about Satan standing at the entrance to a large cavern with flames of fire inside, which portrayed hell. This was the pastor's proof that hell exists; he did not present one single Scripture to back up his claim. I rest my case!

Another preacher was asked if he believed in *hell* and whether unbelievers go to *hell*. He very quickly declared something like this: "Jesus spoke more on *hell* than anyone; therefore, I believe what Jesus taught. *Hell* is real and the lost go there, for this is what Jesus taught." Really, did Jesus actually teach this? Granted, Jesus spoke on this subject more than anyone else. In fact, Jesus was the only one who really spoke on this subject. Except for the epistle of James, one will search in vain for any specific use by the apostles of the word *gehenna*—or *hell*, for that matter.

In Greek Scripture, the word *gehenna* is discovered in twelve verses, eleven of which are directly attributed to Jesus' speaking in Matthew (5.22, 29, 30; 10.28; 18.9; 23.15, 33), Mark (9.43, 45, 47) and Luke (12.5). The twelfth one is found in the book of James (3.6). Following are three verses for reference purposes.

Yet I am saying to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to the judging. Yet whoever may be saying to his brother, 'Raka!' shall be liable to the Sanhedrin. Yet whoever may be saying, 'Stupid!' shall be liable to **the Gehenna of fire**. (Matthew 5.22 cv)

"And do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul; but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in **gehenna**." (Matthew 10.28 WNT)

And if your eye is causing you to fall into sin, tear it out and away with it; it is better for you to enter into Life with only one eye, than to remain in possession of two eyes but be thrown into **the Gehenna of fire**. (Matthew 18.9 WNT)

*Gehenna* does not refer to a place of torment where the lost <sup>1</sup> go upon or *in* death. Anyone with a clear mind and a basic understanding of salvation by grace through faith should immediately see why *gehenna* is not for the lost. We are saved by a pure act of the grace of God apart from any work or merit on our part. Sinners can do nothing but believe what *Another* has done for them. And yet, when Jesus referred to *the gehenna of fire* He often joined it with a work.

We are saved on the basis of grace through faith, apart from any work. Paul wrote: We are reckoning a man to be justified by faith *apart from works of law* (Romans 3.28 cv). If it is by grace, it is *no longer on the basis of works*, otherwise grace is no longer grace (Romans 11.6 NASB). For in grace, through faith, are you saved, and this is not out of you; it is God's approach present, *not of works*, lest anyone

---

<sup>1</sup> The word *lost* refers to those who will be excluded from being part of the eons of the eons due to their unbelief. The lost will appear at the great white throne judgment and will suffer the second death. The word does not imply that they are lost forever, for they are lost *only* for the eons.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

should be boasting (Ephesians 2.8-9 cv). Even our faith to believe does not come from us; it is the faith of Christ that saves us, for He is the Inaugurator and Perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12.2 cv). Paul wrote: I live by faith, *the faith of the Son of God* (Galatians 2.20 DNT).

It is perfectly clear that works do not under any circumstance enter into salvation by grace. In other words, unbelievers are never saved by their works; they can do nothing to be saved except to believe what Christ did for mankind. Even their faith is a gift of God.

However, a study of Jesus' use of the word *gehenna* immediately reveals that He told those listening that they could do something to avoid *gehenna*. If people are told to cut out their offending eye or to cut off their offending hand, is this not a work? Can you imagine telling people that if they want to be saved, they must gouge out their eye or cut off their hand? Do you see the absurdity of such a demand? Hardly anyone, except perhaps the most desperate or demented, would ever be saved. Of course, this is figurative language to convey a spiritual lesson. Remember, Jesus' words are spirit and life. In essence, Jesus was saying they needed to clean up their act to enter eonian life, which refers to life in the oncoming eons and **not** immortal life. But what sinner can do this to be saved?

What about calling someone stupid? Can you imagine preaching to an unbeliever that he must not call someone stupid if he wants to be saved? The unbeliever needs to hear *that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that He was entombed, and that He has been roused the third day according to the scriptures* (1 Corinthians 15.3-4 cv).

Yet, some use the *gehenna* verses to preach on what they call *hell*, which is most often likened to an eternal torture chamber. However, when He made these statements about *the gehenna of fire*, Jesus did not have the unbelieving gentiles in view. He spoke directly to His Jewish brethren or, more specifically, the nation of Israel that was in apostasy.

### ***The background.***

It is essential to see that every Greek text in which the word *gehenna* is used was directed toward Jews, with a view to entering the kingdom of Messiah. Jesus spoke to His own people that He came to save from their sin of unbelief. In many respects they knew God and followed the teaching of Moses. In coming out of Egypt, they were a saved people, for they had applied the blood; however, their history had been, was and still is one of apostasy, adultery and idolatry. Because of their unbelief they were dead *in spirit*, and their hearts were far away from God; their hearts were hardened, and their hearing was dull (Mathew 13.14-15). They needed new hearts and new spirits (Ezekiel 11.19; John 3.3-7); they needed a renascence (Matthew 19.28). Consequently, when Jesus spoke about *gehenna* He saw them in a condition that is best likened to death; a condition that would lead to their exclusion from His Messianic kingdom if it were not reversed. To make the

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

point, He used a symbol of physical punishment by death that they would readily understand.

The issue is who will be found worthy to enter the coming kingdom, to enter into *eonian* life during the millennial reign of Christ. Some will not be found worthy and will find themselves excluded from this time by remaining among the dead, but this does not exclude them from one day putting on immortality after the second resurrection. Others will find themselves on the outskirts of the governmental and bridal affairs of the kingdom. Instead of ruling, they will be ruled over. Instead of enjoying an allotment in the kingdom, they will be shut out. Instead of enjoying the bridal wedding feast and marriage to the Lamb, they will be estranged. They will be the ones who, spiritually speaking, will be in outer darkness weeping and gnashing their teeth over their loss (Matthew 8.11-12; Luke 13.24-30).

The unbelieving gentiles (nations), apart from Christ, cannot stray, for they are simply lost for the eons. They will not be raised up in the first resurrection, for their destiny is the second resurrection and the judgment of *the lake of fire*.

Now, with this background, let us consider four points, keeping in mind that first the physical and then the spiritual.

### ***A garbage dump.***

First, when He spoke of *the gehenna of fire*, Jesus referred to something that most Jews, particularly the devout ones, living in Jerusalem would have easily understood, both physically and historically. It was not something mystical or mysterious that they had to figure out. We could say that it was as obvious as the Jewish nose on their face.

Essentially, *gehenna* referred to a big garbage dump south of Jerusalem where refuse was burned day and night. It was actually a place, not the unseen. It was located outside the walls of Jerusalem in a place that all could see. They could see the smoke of its burning going up day and night. All the refuse of the city was thrown into this place, including dead human bodies, especially those of criminals and beggars. It was a smelly and gross place from which smoke from burning refuse rose day and night. The place was filled with all the nasty things that one would expect where dead matter is thrown, including worms. The way to *gehenna* was through the *Dung Gate*. In the mind of the Jew, it was a horrible place, a place that no one would desire to visit. It was a place of death, but not a place of torment. The dead cannot be tormented, for they are dead! The dead know nothing!

### ***The valley of Hinnom.***

Second, the location of this garbage dump also had meaning in the history of the nation of Israel. Unfortunately, it was part of one of the worst chapters in their history, for it represented a period of severe idolatry and apostasy, as well as severe judgment upon God's people.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

*Gehenna* refers to *the valley of Hinnom*. The word *gehenna* comes from the Old Testament phrase *the valley of Ben-Hinnom* or *the valley of the sons of Hinnom* (Joshua 15.8; 18.16; 2 Kings 23.10; 2 Chronicles 28.3; 33.6; Nehemiah 11.30; Jeremiah 7.31, 32; 19.2, 6; 32.35). *Gehenna* and *the valley of Hinnom* are one and the same in Scripture. Initially, this valley was a delightful place with trees and fountains, but later it turned into something quite the opposite.

According to Joshua, the valley was south of Jerusalem, marking the territories of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The *Dung Gate*, which was on the east side of Jerusalem, had a common sewer that ran to the brook *Kidron* and the valley of *Hinnom*. Within the valley of *Hinnom*, there was a place called *Topheth*, which means “a place that burns.” It was a high place that is referred to ten times in the Old Testament (2 Kings 23.10; Isaiah 30.33; Jeremiah 7.31, 32 (twice), 19.6, 11, 12, 13, 14).

In the history of Israel, especially of Judah, the high place called *Topheth* marked the lowest point in their history. It was there that they committed great acts of idolatry as they offered human sacrifices to the false gods of Baal and Molech. God’s people had fallen away from their God by committing gross sin that would only be expected of the heathen nations. They were *idolatrous* and *apostate*.

King Josiah, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might (2 King 23.25 NASB), defiled the high places, so that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire for Molech (2 Kings 23.10 NASB).

There were two other events that occurred in this valley. The army of Sennacherib (185,000 men) was killed there and their bodies were consumed by fire. Also, idolatrous Jews were slaughtered by the Babylonians in this valley. Their bodies could not be buried, so they were preyed upon by scavengers.

Perhaps, the word of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah the prophet gives the best understanding of the matter of *gehenna*. Jeremiah was sent to speak against the apostasy of Judah and Jerusalem, and in his words, we discover a reference to *Topheth*, which as shown previously means “a place that burns,” which refers to *gehenna*. Through Jeremiah the Lord passed judgment on His people and this place and called it the valley of *Slaughter*.

“For the sons of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight,” declares the LORD, they have set their detestable things in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. And they have built the high places of **Topheth**, which is in **the valley of the son of Hinnom**, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, and it did not come into My mind.” “Therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no more be called **Topheth**, or **the valley of the son of Hinnom**, but **the valley of the Slaughter**; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place. And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky, and for the beasts of the earth; and no

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

one will frighten them away. Then I will make to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land will become a ruin.” (Jeremiah 7.30-34 NASB)

Please take special note of the fact that the Lord referred to their dead bodies as food for the birds and the beasts. This was not a place of torment for so-called *living souls* but a place of death for the dead.

Later, in Jeremiah 18.11, the prophet was told to speak to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

“So now then, **speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem** saying, ‘Thus says the LORD, “**Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds.**”’ “But they will say, ‘It’s hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.’ “Therefore thus says the LORD, ‘Ask now among the nations, who ever heard the like of this? The virgin of Israel has done a most appalling thing. (Jeremiah 18.11-13 NASB)

The remainder of the chapter speaks to their rebellion against God and explains why they will be judged. In chapter 19, Jeremiah introduces the ultimate destiny of the city of Jerusalem.

Thus says the LORD, “**Go and buy a potter’s earthenware jar**, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the senior priests. Then go out to **the valley of Ben-hinnom**, which is by the entrance of the potsherd gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you, and say, ‘Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, “Behold I am about to bring a calamity upon this place, at which the ears of everyone that hears of it will tingle. Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, a thing which I never commanded or spoke of, nor did it ever enter My mind; therefore, behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “**when this place will no longer be called Topheth or the valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather the valley of Slaughter.**”’ (Jeremiah 19.1-6 NASB)

Jeremiah was commanded to buy a potter’s earthenware jar and go out to the valley of Ben-hinnom, which again refers to *gehenna*. Here the prophet brought the indictment against Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They were apostate because they had turned to other gods and committed atrocious crimes.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

Consequently, their nation and the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed and the people led to slaughter. To graphically make the point, Jeremiah was commanded to break the jar.

**“Then you are to break the jar in the sight of the men who accompany you and say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, ‘Just so will I break this people and this city, even as one breaks a potter’s vessel, which cannot again be repaired; and they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place for burial. This is how I will treat this place and its inhabitants,’”** declares the LORD, “so as to make this city like Topheth. The houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah will be **defiled like the place Topheth**, because of all the houses on whose rooftops they burned sacrifices to all the heavenly host and poured out drink offerings to other gods.” Then Jeremiah came from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of the LORD’S house and said to all the people: “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, **‘Behold, I am about to bring on this city and all its towns the entire calamity that I have declared against it, because they have stiffened their necks so as not to heed My words.’”** (Jeremiah 19.10-15 NASB)

Once an old jar is broken it is of no further value because it cannot be repaired. According to the word of the Lord through Jeremiah, there is only one place to dispose of the broken jar and that is in Topheth. In other words, Jerusalem was going to be broken and cast aside like garbage thrown into the city dump located south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was going the way of *gehenna*. Jeremiah was commanded to speak a death sentence to the city of Jerusalem. But take note that this sentence has finality to it. The potter’s vessel was to be broken, which cannot again be repaired. In other words, the ancient city of Jerusalem must be broken in such a way that it will never be repaired.

Now, this presents a problem because the ancient city has been rebuilt by some counts at least nine times, and there is a modern-day Jerusalem thriving in the state of Israel today. Many Christians see this Jerusalem surviving the tribulation to come and being the world capital in the next age. However, this cannot be possible if Jeremiah’s prophecy is to stand. We need to be reminded that in the Patmos vision John referred to Jerusalem as the great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also the Lord Jesus was crucified (Revelation 11.8). Nothing good can be said about this Jerusalem. As He faced the cross, Jesus cried out: **“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!”** (Matthew 23.37 NASB). According to Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, the present Jerusalem is in slavery and must be cast off (see Galatians 4.21-31).

If we are to hold Scripture as the truth, then we must also hold that even the modern-day Jerusalem will one day be destroyed, never to be rebuilt. It must go

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

into *gehenna*. Why? Because Jerusalem has continually rejected Jesus the Messiah, even to this day.

Thus, taking all together of what has been presented so far, the most significant fact is that the valley of *Hinnom* involved the death of God's people of the nation of Israel, not the heathen nations; and when Jesus spoke of *gehenna*, He spoke to His disciples and the Jews, not to the gentiles (the nations). In the context of Israel's apostate history, *gehenna* refers to the judgment of death and destruction due to moral corruption of the highest order, in the same vain as the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. They had failed miserably to obey God's law given to them through Moses.

When He walked among the Jews of that day, Jesus put His finger on the pulse of the condition of the people and, in particular, the religious leaders, the Pharisees and the scribes. They were in danger of *the gehenna of fire* because they had sunk to a low moral state in which they, as ones called of God through the fathers, refused to believe His word, which led them to profanely demand the death of God's Son, their Messiah, the very One who came to save them.

Again, Jesus' words are spirit and He was pointing to more than a physical death; the nation of Israel that came out of Egypt was spiritually dead as well.

### ***Corpses of mortals.***

Third, to the Jews who knew the sacred Scriptures of the prophets, Jesus' warning must have been clear; it was not a hidden secret like the parables. They knew the meaning from their history and with their eyes as they saw the fire and smoke of this garbage dump on the south side of Jerusalem. Also, they knew that it had to do with the kingdom of Messiah. Jesus was not stating something new, for He was looking back to the past and carrying it forward to the future, to the Messianic kingdom when He will rule in righteousness over the earth. *The gehenna of fire* was a reminder of Israel's history of moral corruption of the highest order that led to their death. It was a physical reminder of a physical reality, and it pertained to judgment and death.

Jesus undoubtedly had Isaiah the prophet in mind when He spoke of *gehenna*.

And it will come to be, as often as the new moon comes in its monthly time, and as often as the sabbath comes in its sabbath cycle, all flesh shall come to worship before Me in Jerusalem, says Yahweh. And **they will go forth and see the corpses of the mortals who transgressed against Me, for their worm shall not die**, and their fire shall not be quenched, and they will become a repulsion to all flesh. (Isaiah 66.23-24 cv).

A fire that is unquenched means it will do its job fully and completely. Worms are also found in garbage dumps, for they feed off organic matter. Both will outlast the flesh, for their purpose is to consume all flesh. Notice that the fire and worms are

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

associated with the consumption of corpses, which means the person is **dead** and not alive in some fiery torment. He prophesied of **the corpses of mortals**, ones who are not beyond death. This should dispel any notion that *the gehenna of fire* is a living hell, as held by so much of Christendom. Contextually, Isaiah prophesied of the fate of apostates that are denied entrance into the Messianic kingdom. The fact of the matter is they are **dead**.

There are other Scriptures that refer to various judgments of mortals that result in suffering and physical death.

John the baptist appeared on the scene heralding the kingdom, and he pointed to a day when Christ will burn up the chaff.

“Whose winnowing shovel is in His hand, and He will be scouring His threshing floor, and will be gathering His grain into His barn, yet the chaff will He be **burning up with unextinguished fire**.” (Matthew 3.12 cv)

Jesus later added to His disciples’ understanding. In the parables of the secrets of the kingdom of the heavens, Jesus explained to His disciples that all snares and lawless ones must be removed out of His kingdom, as executed by God’s messengers (angels).

The Son of Mankind shall be dispatching His messengers, and they shall be culling out of His kingdom all the snares and those doing lawlessness, and they shall be casting them into **a furnace of fire**. There shall be **lamentation and gnashing of teeth**. (Matthew 13.41-42 cv)

In this case, *the furnace of fire* is the wrath of God poured out on them. As judgment comes upon them, they will be in great anguish over what they are experiencing and over their impending doom. Until they die (not after they die), there is much *lamentation and gnashing of teeth*.

This is why it would be better to be maimed and enter the kingdom than remain intact and suffer the fury of God. If they did not heed Jesus’ warning, they too would find themselves counted among the snares, lawless ones, and stumbling blocks in *the gehenna of fire*. They would not be exempt from such judgment just because they are sons of the kingdom. This is why they were exhorted to seek first the kingdom and its righteousness, and to have a righteousness that exceeded that of the scribes and Pharisees.

Thus, *the gehenna of fire* refers to a death sentence, which is rightly referred to as the capital punishment of the kingdom. Those who receive a verdict of death do not receive a proper burial; rather, their dead bodies remain on the ground and are consumed as if they were garbage or refuse. Those whose bodies are decayed and burned in this fashion will be judged at the great white throne and will not participate in the first resurrection that leads to eonian life.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Clearly, Jesus was not only looking back nor was He merely looking at the condition in that day; He was also pointing to the days ahead for the unbelieving, apostate Jews. In 70 AD, all they held to in Jerusalem was brought to total destruction as the temple was destroyed, and many were killed and scattered to the nations. Jerusalem was judged and cast into *gehenna*, which refers to destruction by fire, which is how the city was ultimately destroyed. The world saw a similar *gehenna of fire* during WWII when Nazi Germany tried to wipe out the Jew from Europe through the holocaust. If we are to believe Jeremiah's word, then the modern-day Jerusalem will suffer the same fate as ancient Jerusalem. Her destiny is *the gehenna of fire*. This has been the history of the Jews since they rejected the One who came to save them, and it will continue until they believe on the Lord Jesus, like the rest of mankind.

Although there are obvious physical aspects of *the gehenna of fire*, we again need to be reminded that the physical is followed by the spiritual, and it is no exception with *the gehenna of fire*. Jesus' words are spirit. Apostasy and unbelief always leads to a death in the spiritual sense as well. As a nation, Israel was in unbelief then and many of the blood descendants of Jacob will yet be in unbelief at the end of our present wicked eon. They are in a place of death, which is most clearly seen in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, which is taken up in another chapter. As long as the blood descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remain in apostasy and unbelief, they will remain in the persecution of fire at the hands of the nations. Their only way out is to repent and believe in the very One their fathers demanded to be crucified, Jesus, the Savior of the world. They do not get a free pass just because of their genealogy. As with all mankind, they need the grace of God and the faith of the Son. Apart from Christ Jesus they are dead spiritually. If they do not repent, then, as with most of mankind, their account with God will be settled at the great white throne judgment, and they will go through the lake of fire. Yet, as Paul reminds us: *So all Israel will be saved* (Romans 11.26 NASB).

### ***Eonian, unextinguished fire.***

Fourth, *the gehenna of fire* is associated with the eons and not with eternity, contrary to the King James Version rendering of everlasting. The more exact rendering is *eonian*, which means that *the gehenna of fire* involves the eons, not eternity.

Now, if your hand or your foot is snaring you, strike it off and cast it from you. Is it ideal for you to be entering into life maimed or lame, or, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into **the fire eonian**? "And if your eye is snaring you, wrench it out and cast it from you. Is it ideal for you to be entering into life one-eyed, or, having two eyes, to be cast into **the gehenna of fire**?" (Matthew 18.8-9 cv)

Another passage in Mark's gospel is often used to argue that *gehenna* is eternal in nature.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

And if your hand should ever be snaring you, strike it off. It is ideal for you to be entering into life maimed, rather than, having two hands, to come away into **Gehenna, into the unextinguished fire.** (Mark 9.43 cv)

The King James states that it will never be quenched. The same argument applies as to the fire *eonian*. Just because something is unquenchable does not mean that it will never go out. It simply means that it is a judgment that must run its course, and no one will be able to stop it.

A similar word is discovered in Matthew: The chaff will He be burning up with *unextinguished fire* (Matthew 3.12 cv). Many translations use the term *unquenchable fire*, but this is not the best rendering. It is unextinguished, meaning the fire will continue without interruption until all that is being burned is burned up. Once it starts, no one or nothing can stop it. Thus, it will burn until the chaff is consumed completely.

Besides, we discover a similar word in Jeremiah when the Lord Jehovah rebuked idolatrous Israel: *Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, mine anger and my fury shall be poured out upon this place; upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched* (Jeremiah 7.20 DNT).

Surely, this fire did its complete work and has long ago burned itself out. This means that it was not an eternal, never-ending fire, for today there is no sign of this fire in the modern state of Israel. Besides, this fire is symbolic of God's judgment that came upon ancient Israel and ended a long time ago.

Now, beginning with Pentecost, many responded to Peter's call to the sons of Israel for repentance and many were added to the embryonic ecclesia (Acts 2). As time progressed and the kingdom of Christ was not manifested on the earth as they expected it to be, some of the believers, particularly ones considered Hebrews, were in danger of going back to the ways of Judaism and the old covenant. To address this danger, an epistle was written to the Hebrews, and in it we discover the reference to God is a consuming fire.

### ***A consuming fire.***

For this reason, [since we are] receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us be having grace, through which we are sacredly serving God in an acceptable manner, with reverence and godly fear. For indeed our **God [is] a consuming fire** [or, [is] as to His essence consuming fire]. [Exod 24:17; Deut 4:24] (Hebrews 12.28-29 ALT)

The writer to the Hebrews declared that *our God is a consuming fire*; something the Hebrews of that era understood all too well, for fire had played a major role in their history. Their beginning as a people can be traced back to when the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3.2; Acts 7.31). The Lord also

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

appeared on Mount Sinai in a blazing fire (Hebrews 12.18), which brought fear and trembling upon the people. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego were thrust into a raging, fiery furnace by Nebuchadnezzar, but the fire had no effect on their bodies or clothing (Daniel 3.27), which symbolizes how the Lord will prevail in bringing His faithful ones through the fire of persecution, the fiery trials, and into His kingdom.

Contextually, the Hebrews epistle refers to the Messianic kingdom. The unshakable kingdom refers to when Christ takes the scepter of the kingdom over this earth. This kingdom shall have no consummation (end) and, as such, is unshakable (Luke 1.33). Shakable kingdoms can be destroyed, but this one will not pass away (Daniel 7.14); therefore, it is unshakable.

The call to be well-pleasing with piety and dread (fear) speaks of the righteous standard placed on entering the kingdom. Dread is a form of fear, for it is a deep feeling of apprehension. But who is to be apprehensive? Is it not the apostate? Read Hebrews and you will discover the many warnings (e.g., Hebrews 2.3; 3.12; 4.1-3; 6.1-8; 10.26-27) about failing to enter *the impending inhabited earth*, that is, the next eon on earth (Hebrews 2.5 cv). If the Hebrew believers fell away from the faith (apostasy) by returning to the old covenant where there was a continual sacrifice for sin, and thus trampling under foot the sacrifice of Christ, they would have a fearful expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire that will consume the adversaries (10.26-27).

The phrase *for our God is also a consuming fire* speaks to the righteous and just judgment of God. The reason for proper behavior is so that God's people will not come under the severe judgment of God that would disqualify them from entering the unshakable kingdom in the oncoming eon.

What are we to conclude from these verses? They are a warning against apostasy. The Hebrew believers were being exhorted not to neglect so great a salvation and to hold fast firm until the end, not turning from the faith (back to the old covenant) and the expectation of the inhabitable world to come (e.g., see Hebrews 2.3, 5; 3.12-14). One could imagine that the Hebrews of that day about 2,000 years ago were much like Peter and the other disciples who, after listening to Jesus teach on entering the kingdom, were astonished and cried out: "*Then who can be saved?*" [i.e., delivered into the coming kingdom of Christ]. Looking at them, Jesus said, "*With people it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God*" (Mark 10.26-27 NASB).

How does God make the impossible possible? One way He does it is through discipline.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

### ***Discipline.***

And you have forgotten completely the encouragement which reasons with you as with sons [and daughters], “My son [fig., child, and in verses 6-7] stop thinking lightly of [the] discipline of [the] LORD, and stop becoming discouraged when being corrected by Him. “For whom [the] LORD loves He disciplines, and He scourges [fig., punishes] every son whom He receives.” [Prov 3:11,12] **It is for discipline [that] you endure. God deals with you as with sons [and daughters]; for what son is [there] whom a father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become sharers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons [and daughters].** Furthermore, we indeed have had fathers of our flesh [fig., earthly fathers] [as] discipliners, and we were respecting [them]; will we not much rather be subjected to the Father of spirits, and we will live? For they indeed were disciplining [us] for a few days [fig., a short while] according to the [thing] seeming good to them, but He for [our] advantage, for [us] be sharers of His holiness. Now indeed, all discipline for the present does not seem to be joyful, but painful; but afterwards it yields [the] peaceful [or, free from worry] fruit of righteousness to the ones having been trained by it. For this reason brace up the having been weakened hands and the having been paralyzed knees, [Isaiah 35:3] and make straight paths for your feet, so that the lame [person] shall not be turned aside [or, the lame [limb] shall not be dislocated], but rather shall be healed. [Prov 4:26] (Hebrews 12.5-13 ALT)

Notice that the discipline of the Lord is for sonship, holiness and even for healing. Discipline is both physical and spiritual. Healing should not be restricted to merely a physical healing but also to a spiritual one. God does not bring healing immediately to all infirmities. Timothy and Trophimus are good examples (1 Timothy 5.23; 2 Timothy 4.20). Some bodily weaknesses have spiritual value and are not removed at all because they are for the glory of God, such as in the case of Paul (2 Corinthians 12.7-10). Some weaknesses are disciplinary in nature and require recognition and repentance of sin. And yet, some weaknesses are simply the result of wear and tear on our bodies of humiliation that are given a maximum of 120 years. Finally, as we will see, some weaknesses lead to premature death. In God’s mercy, He might allow for the early death of His own, so that the person will not be judged with the unjust world. It is better to be chastened by God in this life than to face His indignation as if an unbeliever (see Luke 12.36).

### ***Handed over to Satan.***

It might seem strange to us, but sometimes the Lord allows His people to be handed over to Satan to sift the person, as if sifting wheat, for the purpose of chastening. The first example of such a sifting occurred with Job, who the Lord allowed to be tested by the fire of trial through the activities of Satan. In the New Testament, the best example of such testing by fire is that of Peter.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

“Simon, Simon, behold, **Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat**; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” But he said to Him, “Lord, with You I am ready to go both to prison and to death!” And He said, “I say to you, Peter, the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that you know Me.” (Luke 22.31-34 NASB)

We must assume that Satan was granted permission to sift him, for Peter did deny knowing the Lord a short time later. But what was the result of that sifting? Surely, Satan sought to destroy Peter, but Jesus prayed that his faith may not fail. In spite of his failure, Peter was fully restored and went on to be a pillar of the Pentecostal ecclesia. Before He ascended to His Father’s throne for the last time, Jesus appeared to His disciples on the shore while they were out on the lake fishing. When he realized it was the Lord cooking some fish on shore, Peter jumped into the water to rush to see his Master. At this time, Jesus commanded Peter to tend and shepherd His people, as signified by lambs and sheep (see John 21). Peter’s faith was strengthened, not destroyed.

To Peter, the sifting must have seemed like a fierce fire (as he later wrote, a fiery trial) that tormented his soul. After all, denying knowing the One who called him to follow Him must have reached into the very gut of Peter and caused deep anguish and remorse. Why was this necessary for Peter to experience? It was so that he would see of what he was made. He had to see how strong his flesh was and, consequently, how dependent he had to be on the spirit of God. We could say that it broke Peter in a good way, which is the way God intends discipline and *chastening judging* to work. This is clearly seen in the way that Peter answered Jesus’ question about loving Him.

When, then, they lunch, Jesus is saying to Simon Peter, “**Simon of John, are you loving Me more than these?**” He is saying to Him, “Yes, Lord, Thou art aware that I am fond of Thee!” He is saying to him, “Graze My lambkins!” He is saying to him again a second time, “**Simon of John, are you loving Me?**” He is saying to Him, “Yes, Lord, Thou art aware that I am fond of Thee!” He is saying to him, “Shepherd My sheep!” He is saying to him the third time, “**Simon of John, are you fond of Me?**” Peter was sorry that He said to him the third time “Are you fond of Me?” and he is saying to Him, “Lord, Thou art aware of all things! Thou knowest that I am fond of Thee.” And Jesus is saying to him, “Graze My little sheep!” (John 21.15-17 cv)

Notice that Peter could not say that he loved the Lord; he was fond of Him. Twice the Lord asked him if he loved Him. The Greek word for *love* that Jesus used is *agapaō*, which is the love attributed to God. It is a deep love that is associated with self-less sacrifice, an unconditional love. However, Peter could not use this word; instead, he used the Greek word *phileo*, which refers to a personal attachment to another. In other words, Peter could not say that he had that deep love for Jesus that he knew Jesus had for him. He had seen the weakness of his love for Jesus in his denial of knowing Him. All Peter could acknowledge was that he had a personal

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

attachment to Him, a fondness for Him. Finally, Jesus met Peter on his ground and asked if he was fond of Him, to which Peter answered yes. What compassion and love we sense in this story, as Jesus reached out to His disciple that had been in the fire, so to speak, and had suffered deep sorrow. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Peter's denial occurred while he was in a courtyard warming himself (Mark 14.67), presumably by a fire, and his restoration occurred as Jesus sat before a fire.

Later, through Paul, the apostle of the nations, we see the hand of discipline being applied as Paul dealt with sin in the ecclesia. In one case, a man was in sin with his father's wife, which was something that even the unbelievers did not do in that day. In another case, two men were blaspheming.

It is actually reported that **there is immorality among you**, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. ... **I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.** (1 Corinthians 5.1, 5 NASB)

This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom **I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.** (1 Timothy 1.18-20 NASB)

In each case, Paul handed them over to Satan with one purpose in mind, so that they might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. In other words, Paul was willing to allow them to be sifted like wheat, even to go through a fire so-to-speak while in their bodies of death, so that at the future judgment of God they will be saved, even if it is yet so as through fire. The spiritual principle is that it is best to be dealt with in this life and be changed than to face the fire of God on judgment day.

We are not told whether Hymenaeus or Alexander changed their ways, but we are given an indication that the man who sinned with his father's wife did repent and change his ways.

For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears; not so that you would be made sorrowful, but that you might know **the love which I have especially for you.** But if any has caused sorrow, he has caused sorrow not to me, but in some degree—in order not to say too much—to all of you. Sufficient for such a one is this punishment which was inflicted by the majority, **so that on the contrary you should rather forgive and comfort him, otherwise such a one might be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.** (2 Corinthians 2.4-8 NASB)

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Paul turned such a one over to Satan, so that he might be restored out of love. The sifting produced the result for which it was intended. It produced great sorrow in the one who had sinned, and Paul encouraged the brethren to reach out to him in love. He had been separated from the others, and keeping him outside the fold served no purpose other than to overwhelm him with a sorrow that he could not bear. Chastisement or discipline is always for the purpose of restoration, and this is always done out of love. *Reaffirm your love for him* reveals the true outcome of all discipline, no matter how severe it might be.

Is this not the very heart of *God is love*? It most assuredly is!

### ***Some have died.***

Now, Scripture clearly reveals that there are varying degrees of discipline and judgment meted out to God's people. In some cases, judgment can lead to physical death, as revealed through John the apostle.

If anyone sees his brother [fig., fellow believer] sinning a sin not [leading] to death, he will ask, and He will give to him life, to the ones sinning [a sin] not [leading] to death. [There] is **sin [leading] to death**; not concerning that [sin] am I saying that he should urgently ask. (1 John 5.16 ALT)

I have no doubt that when he wrote these words, John thought back on the day that he witnessed Ananias and Sapphira drop dead for lying to the Holy Spirit.

But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." And as he heard these words, **Ananias fell down and breathed his last**; and great fear came over all who heard of it. (Acts 5.1-5 NASB)

In that day, the apostles held the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16.19), which meant that if they retained the sin of any, then they could be brought into judgment in that day.

And when He had said this, He breathed on them and \*said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; **if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.**" (John 20.22-23 NASB)

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

This is apparently what happened in the case of this couple. Their sin disqualified them from participating in the power and work of the Holy Spirit as the ecclesia grew from a few to thousands.

In writing to the believing Jews who were called, beloved in God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ, Jude exhorted them to be merciful to others, in particular, the ones who were in danger of falling away from the truth.

And to those, indeed, who are doubting, be merciful, **yet others be saving, snatching them out of the fire**, yet to others be merciful with fear, hating even the tunic spotted by the flesh. Now to Him Who is able to guard you from tripping, and to stand you flawless in sight of His glory, in exultation, to the only God, our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, might and authority before the entire eon, now, as well as for all the eons. Amen! (Jude 22-25 cv)

Obviously, Jude was not referring to a physical fire but a figurative one. It seems that believers were in danger of a type of *gehenna of fire* judgment that would lead to their premature death, which is clearly seen in a similar passage from the epistle written by James.

My brethren, if anyone among you should be led astray from the way of the truth, and someone should be turning him back, let him know that **he who turns back a sinner out of the deception of his way will be saving his soul from death and will be covering a multitude of sins**. (James 5.19-20 cv)

Saving a soul from death must refer to saving one's life from death, for a soul that has returned to the unseen, which is what death is to the soul, can only return if the body has died as well. How does one save his soul from such a death? It is by receiving the implanted word within him.

For this reason, you yourselves having put aside all filthiness [fig., moral uncleanness] and abundance of evil, in humility receive **the implanted word** [within you], which is able to save your souls. (James 1.21 ALT)

Just as Jesus' words are spirit and life so is the entire word of God, which is the law of God. It is through this word that we save our souls, and ultimately our lives, from being brought into chastening that could lead to death.

During our present eon, believers called out from among the nations, joined to Christ as the ecclesia, which is His body, are not exempt from the judgment of God. They too can experience something similar to *the gehenna of fire* of the Lord in this day and die prematurely, for judgment begins with the house of God (1 Peter 4.17). If we believe in Jesus, then we are not exempt from the judgment of God and His spiritual fire (Romans 14.10; 1 Corinthians 3.13-15; 2 Corinthians 5.10).

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, an ecclesia that was operating in the gifts of the spirit and yet was not spiritual, to warn them about the manner in which they were taking the Lord's Supper together and how they were not rightly judging themselves.

So then, whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily [or, in a careless manner], he will be guilty of the body of the Lord and blood of the Lord. But let a person be examining himself, and in this manner let him be eating of the bread and let him be drinking of the cup. For the one eating and drinking unworthily [or, in a careless manner], eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning [or, correctly judging] the body of the Lord. **For this reason, many among you [are] sick [or, weak] and infirm [or, ill], and many are fallen asleep [fig., have died].** For if we had discerned [or, correctly judged] ourselves, we would not have been judged. **But being judged by the Lord, we are disciplined [or, chastened], so that we shall not be condemned with the world.** (1 Corinthians 11.27-32 ALT)

Because they were not discerning themselves (seeing their true condition), the Lord had to chastise them, so that they would not be condemned with the world. In other words, they would not have to appear at the great white throne judgment and appear with the unjust. It was His love for them that led the Lord to chasten them. But notice how He chastened them for their lack of discernment. They were sick, infirm and some had died. Undoubtedly, they opened themselves up to the powers of darkness, as allowed by the Lord, and it led to all sorts of physical infirmities, some of which led to death.

This is something that should cause all of us to consider in light of what might be going on in our own midst in this evil day. If many in our midst are sick and some have died years before one would expect them to naturally die (i.e., prematurely), then we need to seek the Lord to inquire the reason, specifically to see if we are being chastened. However, these deaths are not premature to God who works all according to the counsel of His will (Ephesians 1.11).

### ***The fiery trials.***

Another facet of the discipline manifested through fire is what is called *fiery trials*. All the apostles of Christ entered into what is called *the sufferings of Christ*, and this suffering came from the hand of the world or of the unbelieving Jews. Peter called them *fiery trials*.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning **the fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. (1 Peter 4.12-13 KJV)

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

James reaffirmed Peter's word as he exhorted the twelve tribes of believing Jews that were scattered abroad in the known world.

Reckon it nothing but joy, my brethren, whenever you find yourselves hedged in by **various trials**. (James 1.2 WNT)

As presented by Peter, the word *fiery* is used in the figurative sense. When God's people are hedged in by various trials, even trials that seem quite strange, it seems as if they are in the midst of a fire that will consume them. The counsel from these men of long ago is to rejoice when we find ourselves in such trials.

Of all the apostles, it seems that Paul suffered the most as he was constantly buffeted or tossed about by a messenger of Satan (2 Corinthians 12.7). Many people debate the nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh, but it is very apparent that he was constantly berated and persecuted by the unbelieving Jews. Even so, Paul was able to look beyond flesh and blood to see that the real battle is not with people but with the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials that energize people and nations.

**Put on the panoply of God, to enable you to stand up to the stratagems of the Adversary, for it is not ours to wrestle with blood and flesh, but with the sovereignties, with the authorities, with the world-mights of this darkness, with the spiritual forces of wickedness among the celestials.** (Ephesians 6.11-12 cv)

If we find ourselves in fiery trials, we can be assured that the agitator behind the trial is some spiritual force of wickedness. However, we are not to fear such trials; but to put on the panoply of God and fight the good fight of the faith, running the race until we reach the finish line (see 2 Timothy 4.6-8). This is God's way of entrance into His kingdom for all who love Him.

Paul truly experienced the sufferings of Christ, even to the point of seeking to enter into His sufferings (Philippians 3.10), for he saw that at the judgment seat of God everyone's works will be tested by fire.

### ***Spiritual judgment of works.***

As a reminder, God is spirit, and His judgment must be viewed primarily as a spiritual judgment of His people. His spiritual fire is not a physical fire; but a spiritual one that is meant to purge and purify, that is, to remove all the impurities and dross in the life of His people and, ultimately, in all mankind. For those of us who believe in Jesus in this eon, all that is of Christ in our lives will remain, but the rest must go. How else will any of us be sharers in His holiness? How else will any of us be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5.48)? How else will any of us be pure as our Lord is pure (1 John 3.3)? How else will any of us truly know the love of God for us? Again, Paul has given us a word on this matter in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and **the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is**. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be **saved; yet so as by fire**. (1 Corinthians 3.12-15 KJV)

We know that we all must appear before the judgment seat or bema of Christ to give account for what we have done in the body, both good and bad (2 Corinthians 5.10), and, as presented by Paul, fire will be involved in this judgment. In the day that we stand face to face with the Lord, we will be judged by the very fire of God; that which is of gold, silver and precious stone will be purified, and that which is of wood, hay and stubble will be consumed. Notice that even our works of the character of gold, silver and precious stone must be purified. These materials represent good works done while in the body, but they too must be refined in the fire of God. We see a similar word from Christ as He walks among the ecclesia of the Laodiceans and exhorts them over their lukewarm condition. *I counsel thee to buy of me **gold tried in the fire*** (Revelation 3.18 KJV). The fiery trials are designed to try the gold and make it even more precious.

No one of mankind is exempt from the fire of God. It is in the fire of God *in spirit* that we are made like the Son of God. It is in the *lake of fire* that the rest of mankind will be reconciled to God. The fire of God is not meant to destroy but to perfect, purify and restore. Oh, the love of God!

Before proceeding to the lake of fire, it is probably best to lay down the remaining six of the fourteen spirituals principles discussed in this chapter. Without doubt, there are many more that could be added, but these are the most germane to what I see regarding our God is a consuming fire. At this point, they will be listed without explanation.

*Ninth*, the lake of fire is a spiritual lake of fire that comes out from the throne of God as a river of fire that engulfs mankind standing before the throne.

*Tenth*, God judges by His spiritual law, His word (law), which is like a fire.

*Eleventh*, the royal law is love.

*Twelfth*, the saints will judge the world for the purpose of establishing righteousness and justice according to His law

*Thirteenth*, the judging is for a season, not for eternity.

*Fourteenth*, the judging is for chastening and restitution, not for punishment.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

### ***The lake of fire.***

This leads to the last mention of fire in Scripture, and it refers to *the lake of fire*. In Scripture, we discover the phrase *the second death* (Revelation 2.11; 20.6, 14; 21.8) and the phrase *the lake of fire* (Revelation 19.20; 20.10, 14, 15) occurring exclusively in the Revelation.

Right from the start, we need to be clear that neither phrase is associated with the modern-day concept of *hell*. Many preachers might refer to *the lake of fire* as hell, keeping in line with a pagan idea of a fiery lake of *physical* fire in which the wicked are tormented mercilessly and endlessly; their souls tormented without any relief. If we are to be open to what Scripture teaches on the matter, then we must discard any thought of hell as preached today from the pulpits of Christendom.

The conclusion of the matter is that, for mankind, *the lake of fire* means that all their *dead and wicked works* will be brought into what is called *the second death*. We must look at this death as a second-type of death; that is, it is not physical death of the body. I believe those who are brought to life in the second resurrection will not die a physical death again; however, they are not immortal at this point.

Their works will pass through the fire of God to be consumed. If there are any good works, then these too must pass through the fire to be purified. This is all in accord with what Paul taught the Corinthians about being saved, yet so as through fire. All mankind will ultimately be saved, but their works of the flesh must pass through *the lake of fire*, for the purpose of chastening and restoring.

For most of mankind *the lake of fire* comes into view as they are resurrected from the state of physical death (first type of death), and they appear before a great white throne.

And I perceived **a great white throne**, and Him Who is sitting upon it, from Whose face earth and heaven fled, and no place was found for them. And I perceived the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. And the scrolls were opened. And another scroll was opened which is the scroll of life. And **the dead were judged by that which is written in the scrolls in accord with their acts**. And the sea gives up the dead in it, and death and the unseen give up the dead in them. And they were condemned, each in accord with their acts. **And death and the unseen were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire. And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.** (Revelation 20.11-15 cv)

With the completion of the 1,000-year reign of Christ, the adversary will be cast into *the lake of fire*, the second heaven and earth will pass away in combustion (cleansed, purged), and a great white throne will be set. All the dead who were not resurrected 1,000 years earlier and those who died during the previous millennium will be resurrected and come to life. John tells us in regard to the com-

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

mencement of the millennial kingdom: *The rest of the dead do not live until the thousand years should be finished.* The wicked from Cain down through the ages will appear before God's throne to be judged, not on the basis of Adam's imputed sin paid for at Calvary but according to works or acts. Paul reminds us that we all must be judged for what we have done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5.10). Often, we think these words only apply to believers, but the underlying spiritual principle is the same for the unbeliever as well.

Remember that God's plan is to save all mankind, and this will be done in progressive stages in the oncoming eons.

Just imagine the scene: The heavens and the earth have fled before the One sitting on the throne. The Lord of all will appear sitting on His throne in all His splendor and majesty. The size of this great white throne, which means it is no small throne, and the power of its appearance are what the great and the small will see. It is also white, which means it is absolutely holy, perfect and pure. Looking upon the Lord and His throne will be a sight that will cause even the most hardened heart to quake and fall down in worship. The judgments that come from His throne will be exact and righteous. The scrolls that are opened will be conclusive and absolute. There will be no defense at that moment, for the books are the last word in the matter.

Death will be cast into *the lake of fire*, which is a figure of speech denoting a guarantee that no one standing there will be able to retreat back to the place of physical death and avoid what is to come upon them. They must face *the lake of fire*. With this, all whose names are not written in the scroll of life will be cast into *the lake of fire*. Those whose names are written in the scroll will not be cast in but will be saved, yet so as through fire, and will receive immortal life.

Physical death (first death) will not have resolved anything for the unjust; they merely will have been in the unseen, which did nothing to purge and cleanse them. The unseen has no effect on the unjust. On the other hand, fire is a purifying agent, and so is sulfur, which in our day is used in medicines to kill bacteria. In other words, fire and sulfur are good things.

By contrast, those justified by faith in our present eon, are cleansed and purified while in bodies of humiliation. They are disciplined as sons. It is better to be chastened in this day than to fall into the hand of the living God in the oncoming eons. This is the great advantage for those called and chosen to reign with Christ and the first to truly enter His kingdom. The principle is that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14.22 NASB), and this applies to all mankind. The question is which eon will one enter the kingdom. Some might not enter until the consummation of the eons. Do you have any idea what such a person will miss during those years, especially if the last eon goes on for thousands of years? I wouldn't want to miss seeing the glory of God begin to fill the earth and all creation until God is All in all! Would you?

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

*The lake of fire* will purge and cleanse all the works or acts of man; no dross will remain. The fact of the matter is that it will kill all the imperfections, the wickedness, the evil—**sin**; anything else that has stood opposed to godliness and righteousness. This is what is meant by the second death. It is **a type** of death, the second type of death, which contrasts it from the first type of death. The first death pertains to the physical body, and the second death pertains to works and acts, or we could say, it is based on what comes forth from the character of the person, the sinful flesh. Consequently, the second type of death has to do with the spirit rather than with the physical.

One vital point that is often overlooked is that Scripture does not state that the humans cast into *the lake of fire* will be tortured, and it definitely does not state that they will be in torment for *eternity*. Read Revelation 20.11-15 to see if any mention is made of such a thing. You will not find it. It says that they will be condemned, which means that they will receive an adverse judgment, one that must be remedied in fire.

Now, before proceeding to the remaining principles, we need to be reminded of three principles already presented. *God is spirit*; consequently, His judgments are spiritual in nature. *God is a consuming fire*; consequently, His fire must consume in the spiritual sense. *God is love*; consequently, He loves the world and gave His only-begotten Son as the Savior of all mankind, especially of believers, but not exclusively of believers. This last principle alone ensures the eventual salvation of all mankind. Because so many today adamantly reject the restoration and reconciliation of all, let us be reminded of a few Scriptures, as given to us through Paul.

### ***Life for all.***

For since, in fact, through a man came death, through a Man, also, comes the resurrection of the dead. For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, **in Christ, shall all be vivified.** (1 Corinthians 15.21-22 cv)

Yet each in his own class: **the Firstfruit, Christ; thereupon those who are Christ's in His presence; thereafter the consummation**, whenever He may be giving up the kingdom to His God and Father, whenever He should be nullifying all sovereignty and all authority and power. For He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet. **The last enemy is being abolished: death. For He subjects all under His feet.** Now whenever He may be saying that all is subject, it is evident that it is outside of Him Who subjects all to Him. Now, whenever all may be subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also shall be subjected to Him Who subjects all to Him, that God may be All in all.) (1 Corinthians 15.23-28 cv)

Consequently, then, as it was through one offense for all mankind for condemnation, thus also it is through one just award for all mankind for life's justifying. For even as, through the disobedience of the one man, the many

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

were constituted sinners, thus also, **through the obedience of the One, the many shall be constituted just.** (Romans 5.18-19 *cv*)

Paul's use of the word *many* might lead some to think that there are exclusions to all mankind being constituted just and all being vivified or made alive. We know that *death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned* (Romans 5.12 *cv*), which means that all mankind are subject to death, even believers. The proof is that we all die; no one lives forever in bodies of death, which is what all of us occupy, regardless of whether we believe or not (Romans 7.24). When he wrote of Adam plus the many, Paul referred to all humans that have proceeded from the loins of Adam, which encompasses all mankind. Thus, Adam and the many equal all mankind; Christ plus the many equal all mankind. We cannot have Adam and the many include all mankind, and then have Christ plus the many only include believers. Christ died for all, and He will give life to all, not all at the same time, but all eventually (*thereafter the consummation*), the testimony in its own eras.

For there is one God, and one Mediator of God and mankind, a Man, Christ Jesus, Who is giving Himself a correspondent Ransom for all (**the testimony in its own eras**).... (1 Timothy 2.5-6 *cv*)

Rather than react with disdain and scorn to those of us who hold such a view, it should bring out the praises of God, just as it did in Paul.

O, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How inscrutable are His judgments, and untraceable His ways! or, who knew the mind of the Lord? or, who became His adviser? or, who gives to Him first, and it will be repaid Him? seeing that out of Him and through Him and for Him is all: to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen! (Romans 11.33-36 *cv*)

We need to be reminded that the verse before these declares that *God locks up all together in stubbornness, that He should be merciful to all* (Romans 11.32 *cv*). Why does God lock all up in stubbornness, so that He should be merciful to all? The answer is quite straightforward, if we are willing to let it be so.

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; **Who will have all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2.3-4 *KJV*)

The reason is that God will have all men to be saved. It does not say that He wishes all men to be saved, or that He hopes all men will be saved. The word declares that God *will have* all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. Let us praise God for His marvelous love and for His Son who laid down His life out of love for all mankind.

Although this might seem to be a bit of a diversion from the topic; actually, it is essential to our understanding of the true nature and purpose of the lake of fire.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

### ***A spiritual lake of fire.***

The **ninth principle** states that *the lake of fire* is a fire *in spirit*, a *spiritual fire*, as opposed to a literal, physical fire. No human body can live in a physical fire, for it will consume not only the flesh but the bones. Further, it cannot be a physical fire that is meant to torture the soul either, for what soul could endure endless torture. Since the body and the soul are intimately joined, eventually the tormented soul would lead to the death of the body. John, the beloved apostle, has given us the principle that *you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers* (3 John 2 NASB).

A physical fire will kill anyone cast into it. If *the lake of fire* were a fire in the physical sense, then it would be used to annihilate most of mankind, for according to some people billions are destined for *the lake of fire*. Of what value would *the lake of fire* be in the judgment of God? Of what value would it be to God to raise the dead, to reveal their wicked ways, and then to destroy them. What kind of justice would this be? It would seem that God merely wants one more chance to speak His mind to billions that He created to be in His image and from which His Son's death was unable to save them. Don't believe this lie for a millisecond!

Further, *the lake of fire* must be a spiritual fire because Satan, a spirit, will be cast into the lake as well. As far as we know, a spirit cannot die and is not affected by fire. Of what value would it be to throw a spirit being into a physical fire that would have no affect on it? A spirit must be dealt with in a spiritual manner.

I know that this suggestion might be met with disdain by some, but I offer it only as food for thought. What if Satan is not even an individual spirit entity; but rather, something entirely different that is beyond our human comprehension? After all, if the whole concept of an evil serpent was created by God who is spirit, perhaps what He created is entirely different from anything that we can understand with our minds of flesh. Also, perhaps this evil entity will one day be totally annihilated. After all, evil will be no more beyond the eons. Just a thought!

As an aside, this reminds me that some people believe that there will be two parallel universes, one which is good and one which is evil. The evil one is for all who will be cast out of the presence of God, that is, cast into *hell*. According to this thinking, *hell* simply is outside the presence of God. If this were true, which it is not, then how will God ever be All in all? This means that God would not be the Supreme of all His creation and that the cross of Calvary was an utter failure. Let it be written on our hearts that beyond the eons is not even about good and evil; it is about love, the love of God for all mankind that was created to be in His image.

It is important to keep in mind that the works or acts of the person are to be judged, not the physical body of the person. Who can see acts or capture them in the physical sense? When mankind appears before the great white throne, the acts will have been long gone, but God will bring them back into view. Just as John was in spirit on the isle of Patmos and saw the Unveiling of Christ, so will all mankind

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

in spirit in the presence of the living Almighty God see all their dead works or acts in the light of the One who died for them.

If all mankind is to be saved, then the second death refers to a death of a nature other than a physical death of the person. So, to what does the second death refer? It has to refer to the one thing that the fire is used to judge, and that is the works or acts. In other words, the acts are brought into the place of death; they are consumed by the fire of God, and in the process, the person is purified of all the dross and wickedness of his life, notably his immoral, unrighteous, sinful character. The very things in his character that can never stand before a holy and righteous God will be purged by the fire of God, so that when the process is completed, he (i.e., all mankind) will be able to stand before God, holy and without blemish.

As a side note, those who conquer through the love of Christ, though they might die, especially as martyrs, will not have a part in the second death (Revelation 2.11). They will rise in the first resurrection. How does one conquer? Because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death (Revelation 12.11 NASB). Although not stated, we can assume that believers that do not conquer will have a part in the second death, which means that they will appear before the great white throne to be judged through the lake of fire (or perhaps, a part of it).

Knowing that the lake of fire is spiritual in nature helps in our understanding, but it leaves us with a question: What does the fire represent? This is answered in the tenth principle.

### ***The fire is the spiritual law of God.***

The **tenth principle** states that the fire represents the spiritual law of God. God judges by His law, which is spiritual. His word is law, and it is like a fire, a fiery law. A few Scriptures make the point for us.

For we know that **the law is spiritual**.... (Romans 7.14 KJV)

**“Is not My word like fire?”** declares the LORD, “and like a hammer which shatters a rock?” (Jeremiah 23.29 NASB)

The voice of the LORD hews out **flames of fire**. (Psalm 29.7 NASB)

“Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and **on earth He let you see His great fire**, and **you heard His words** [commands, law] **from the midst of the fire.**” (Deuteronomy 4.36 NASB [added by writer])

From his right hand went **a fiery law** for them.... (Deuteronomy 33.2 KJV)

Isaiah intimates that judgment is a spiritual matter and relates it to burning, which represents fire.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, **by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning...** (Isaiah 4.4 NASB)

### ***A river and a lake of fire.***

Now to understand this matter of the law, we need to see that both Daniel and John were given vision of the great white throne.

“I kept looking until thrones were set up, and the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow and the hair of His head like pure wool. **His throne was ablaze with flames, its wheels were a burning fire.** **“A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him;** thousands upon thousands were attending Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; the court sat, and the books were opened. (Daniel 7.9-10 NASB)

Then I saw **a great white throne and Him who sat upon it**, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, **standing before the throne**, and **books were opened**; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and **they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.** Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. **And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.** (Revelation 20.11-15 NASB)

Daniel was given a picture of the throne and Who sat upon it. He was shown thousands attending to the Ancient of Days and myriads upon myriads standing before the One on the throne. Clearly this is a judicial scene, for the court sat. In other words, it is a scene of the divine court room in which judgments will be made. The King is seated, and from His throne come forth judgments.

In our day, a judge sits upon a bench and makes judgments of guilt by applying what is written in the books of law that he is sworn to uphold. In Daniel’s vision, books were opened, which refer to the law by which the court will judge the myriads standing before the Ancient of Days.

John’s vision reveals who are summoned to appear before the court of God. They are the great and the small that were not included in the first resurrection. They are standing before the throne to be judged according to their works.

There are many comparisons that could be made of the two visions, but we must confine this discussion to the fire. Daniel saw the throne itself ablaze with fire, along with a river of fire flowing from the throne, and John saw a lake of fire.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Putting the two visions together reveals that the source of the fire is the throne. In fact, the throne is ablaze with fire, which speaks of the law emanating from God Himself.

We could say that the fire flows from the throne as a river, which grows into a lake. Interestingly, the English definition of a lake includes this: **“A place where a river widens out greatly.”** It seems that we are given a picture of a river of fire that widens out so greatly that it engulfs the myriads upon myriads standing before the throne.

### ***Signifies the law.***

*The Revelation* was given to John to *signify*, that is, to symbolize something spiritual that must be understood spiritual to spiritual.

The Unveiling of Jesus Christ, which God gives to Him, to show to His slaves what must occur swiftly; and **He signifies it**, dispatching through His messenger to His slave John, who testifies to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, whatever he perceived. (Revelation 1.1 cv)

The word *signify* means “to be a sign or indication of, to show or make known by signs, words, etc.” *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* is a vision of many signs that must be understood *in spirit*, as John came to be *in spirit in the Lord’s day*. Thus, the river that becomes a lake of fire must be seen in spirit and not through our carnal mind that wants to make it into a literal, physical lake of torture.

Now, what does the fire signify? It signifies the law of God that emanates from His throne. How else can a judge rule unless he has law upon which to judge? If there are no laws, then his decisions would be open to subjectivity and capriciousness, which means “subject to change abruptly and without reason, erratic and unpredictable.” Unfortunately, we see all too much of this type of judging throughout the world today. The judicial system of man can be without reason. But with God this cannot be so because the foundation of His kingdom is righteousness and justice. Every determination made in the court of God is right and just, and it is applied uniformly to all, for God shows no partiality (Acts 10.34).

Many see the books opened in John’s vision as a record of the lives, specifically the works or acts, of each one standing there. This might seem plausible except that in a court of law, the law books are opened to adjudicate the matter, that is, to determine the nature of the matter based on the law of the land. In the case of Daniel’s vision, the books refer to the law of God, which we could call God’s absolute and universal law. The books being opened *signify* that God’s judgment will be based on His law, not on man’s law.

In the kingdoms of the world, kings have often been the law of the land. Whatever the king declared was the law. As the saying goes, “the king is the law.” This meant that there were no written laws of the land that bound the king; he could do what-

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

ever and whenever he wanted. If he was an unrighteous king, then unrighteous law would come forth from his throne, often dependent on his mood or whim.

Interestingly, the United States was formed after the colonies broke away from the King of England. Under the king's rule, the king was the law. To counter such potential tyranny, the founders of the United States formed a government of law. In other words, the laws of the land were binding on the people and on the leaders of the government. No one was allowed to capriciously set law as if a king. America was the first of a kind for this type of government. This was ordained by God, for it speaks of how His law is administered. We could say that God set His law before eonian times and has bound Himself by His absolute law. He will not and cannot apply law from His throne in a capricious or arbitrary way, for His throne demands righteousness and justice.

If God does not have absolute law by which He judges, then on what basis will He judge? Further, if He does not have such law, then all who are judged could rightfully accuse God of being arbitrary and unjust.

### ***What is the law of God?***

But what is the law of God? On one level, the word of God (Scripture) is filled with the law of God. In fact, it is the law of God. On a primal level, it all began with Moses and the Ten Commandments, which is the basis for all the rest of the laws and commands. The foundation of the law given to Moses is the royal law of love, which is taken up as the eleventh principle. On a personal level, the law is whatever the spirit of the Lord commands us to do according to His word. On a much higher level, the law is contained in Christ Himself. When the Son of God came to this earth, He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matthew 5.17). As we are led by His spirit, we walk in His law.

Many who have been saved by the grace of God seem to view the law with disdain, as if it does not matter anymore; they have thrown it out, thinking that it applied to the Jews and therefore has no application today. Many equate the law with the religious system called Judaism and all the trappings of its institution, including the Talmud, which is nothing but the traditions of men and not the inspired law of God.

Many might retort: We are under grace and not under the law! Yes, we are under grace, but this does not negate the fact that God has a righteous standard by which He judges all mankind. Do we think for a minute that believers who are saved by the grace of God are not under law as well? If we are not, then on what basis are we to please our Lord? Paul exhorts us to walk as children of light.

For you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; **walk as children of Light** (for the fruit of the Light consists in **all goodness and righteousness and truth**), **trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord**. Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. (Ephesians 5.8-12 NASB)

How are we to learn what is pleasing to the Lord if we do not know His absolute standards laid down in His law, which leads to goodness and righteousness?

On what basis will the Lord judge our works for good or bad? There has to be some basis upon which He judges; otherwise, the judgment seat of Christ will be as capricious as man's courts are today. How will we be made to know what works are good and what are bad? There must be some righteous standard by which He will judge. How else will mankind know what sin is?

All have sinned and by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3.20, 23). We are under grace; but what is the purpose of grace if it is not to lead us to obey God and follow His commands. After all, grace is the enabling power of God to do what we are not capable of doing. But with grace we are enabled to be obedient.

When the Lord walked on this earth with His disciples, He referred to His word (logos) and the need to keep His word and His commandments.

“If anyone loves Me, **he will keep My word...**” (John 14.23 NASB)

“If you **love Me**, you will **keep My commandments.**” (John 14.15 NASB)

It is the spirit which gives Life. The flesh confers no benefit whatever. **The words I have spoken to you are spirit and are Life.** (John 6.63 WNT)

In other words, we are to heed His word and obey it. And to do this, we take His words and discern them **spiritual to spiritual**. Our carnal flesh is of no benefit to us. Only that which is *in* spirit is of any benefit to us. This is what was actually demanded of the ancient sons of Israel, but they failed by looking at the law of God as simply something to do or not to do. They missed the spiritual significance of the law, and they fell in unbelief (Hebrews 4.2).

When He appeared to the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai, the Lord spoke to them from the mountain and brought great fear upon the people in order to discipline them.

“Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and **on earth He let you see His great fire**, and **you heard His words from the midst of the fire.**” (Deuteronomy 4.36 NASB)

David, the Psalmist, declared that fire came forth from the mouth of the Lord to devour.

Then the earth shook and quaked; and the foundations of the mountains were trembling and were shaken, because He was angry. Smoke went up out

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

of His nostrils, and **fire from His mouth devoured**; coals were kindled by it. (Psalm 18.7-8 NASB)

### ***What is consumed?***

This poses the question: What is destroyed, devoured or shattered by His word like fire? Again, let us be reminded that first the physical, then the spiritual. Surely, there are many examples of physical fire going forth to destroy or devour; but, spiritually speaking, *My word like fire* is sent forth to devour all unrighteousness and injustice, for the foundation of His throne is righteousness and justice. This is the river of fire that engulfs the myriads upon myriads in the lake of fire. It is the word of the Lord, His absolute law, that goes forth to devour all unrighteousness and injustice that is represented by the works or deeds of the ones standing before the judgment seat of God.

“For the LORD your **God is a consuming fire**, a jealous God.” (Deuteronomy 4.24 NASB)

God must consume all that is not of the character of His kingdom. The word *fire* in Hebrew means “the strong devourer or consumer.” When Moses used this word, he was not referring to God consuming the physical flesh of man. This is what the sons of Israel thought would happen to them when the Lord spoke from Mount Sinai, and they refused to draw near to God (Exodus 20.18-21). In recounting their experience in that day, Moses reminded the people what they had said.

“And when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was **burning with fire**, you came near to me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders. You said, ‘Behold, the LORD our God has shown us His glory and His greatness, and **we have heard His voice from the midst of the fire**; we have seen today that God speaks with man, yet he lives. **Now then why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer, then we will die. For who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived?**” (Deuteronomy 5.23-26 NASB)

By their own admission they acknowledged that God could speak to man and live; that is, his flesh would not be consumed. But fear and doubt gripped them, and they believed this great fire would indeed devour their flesh, and they would die physically. They had no view or expectation of a spiritual death or of their works of the flesh being devoured; this did not even enter into their minds. They feared for their physical life because they were a carnal people.

The purpose of God’s fire is to devour mankind’s uncircumcised flesh, which speaks of man’s carnal, fleshly nature, not his physical body. God disciplines for sonship, which requires being in the image of His Son. Yet, it is no different in our day, for many believers think just like the ancient Israelites, especially those who

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

see the lake of fire as a living hell, a torturous punishment of human flesh that either never ends or leads to total annihilation of the person and, in either case, is forever and ever.

**Clements of Alexandria (150-213 AD)** wrote: “God does not wreak vengeance, for vengeance is to return evil for evil, and God punishes only with an eye to the good.” Clements’ predecessor, **Origen of Alexandria (180-253 AD)** wrote: “The Sacred Scripture does, indeed, call our God “a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), and says that “rivers of fire go before His face: (Dan. 7:10), and that “He shall come as a refiner’s fire and purify the people” (Mal. 3:2,3). As therefore, God is a consuming fire, *what is it that is to be consumed by Him?* We say it is wickedness, and whatever proceeds from it, such as is figuratively called “**wood, hay, and stubble**” (**1 Cor. 3:12-15**) which denote the evil works of man. Our God is a consuming fire in this sense; and He shall come as a refiner’s fire to purify rational nature from the alloy of wickedness and other impure matter which has adulterated the intellectual gold and silver; consuming whatever evil is admixed in all the soul.”

Consider Psalm 1 and note that it is the way of the wicked that will perish. It does not state that the wicked will perish. What are the ways? They are the unrighteous works or deeds that must be judged by the spiritual fire of God.

For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but **the way of the wicked will perish.** (Psalm 1.6 NASB)

For all who have believed during the Pentecostal Age, the fire of God is a baptism in fire with the purpose of destroying sinful flesh, to free all from the bondage of the flesh. We must not fear this fire but embrace it, for it is the only way to come into the depths of the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Let it be declared again: God seeks and, in fact, demands righteousness and justice. Isaiah 26.9 tells us that when *the earth experiences His judgments, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.* Burning billions of people to a pile of ashes or tormenting them in their physical bodies is not teaching them righteousness, for it is strictly punishment with no learning or correction involved.

People of God, it is time for us to wake up to the truth of Scripture and the heart of love that God has for all mankind.

Consider this: When all mankind is purified through the fire of God, sin will be no more, and when sin is no more, death itself must be abolished, for sin reigns in death.

***All scripture is inspired.***

Before moving on, we need to be clear regarding the importance of the law.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

Paul reminds us that *all scripture is inspired by God, and is beneficial for teaching, for exposure, for correction, for discipline in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped, fitted out for every good act* (2 Timothy 3.16 cv).

There are many Scriptures that refer to the law. It is not my intent to present a thorough review of these many references, but there are a few worth highlighting.

The Psalms begin with the law, for it is the way to yield fruit.

**But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.** He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1.2-3 NASB)

Doing the will of God is an act of obedience to the law of God. Notice that the law is a heart matter.

I delight to do Your will, O my God; **Your Law is within my heart.** (Psalm 40.8 NASB)

The law is perfect and restores the soul.

**The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul;** the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. (Psalm 19.7 NASB)

Being saved or delivered into the coming kingdom is through the law of God.

I long for Your salvation, O LORD, and **Your law is my delight.** (Psalm 119.174 NASB)

Do we want to know the truth that sets us free? Then, we need to know the law of God.

Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and **Your law is truth.** (Psalm 119.142 NASB)

Entering eonian life is about becoming a son of God, a son of the kingdom, even becoming a son of the resurrection. If we keep or obey the law of God, we will be maturing as sons of God who will enter into the joy of the oncoming eons.

**He who keeps the law is a discerning son,** but he who is a companion of gluttons humiliates his father. (Proverbs 28.7 NASB)

Why is there no vision amongst God's people today? Because His people have abandoned the law of God! If we want vision, then we must obey His law. We are not obeying His law, so we lack vision in a day in which we desperately need vision.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Her gates have sunk into the ground, He has destroyed and broken her bars. Her king and her princes are among the nations; **the law is no more**. Also, **her prophets find no vision from the LORD**. (Lamentations 2.9 NASB)

Why is violence so rampant and justice so perverted in our day? Because the law of God is ignored!

Therefore **the law is ignored and justice is never upheld**. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore **justice comes out perverted**. (Habakkuk 1.4 NASB)

Why is the law made for the unrighteous? Because the law will be the standard by which God will judge lawlessness and immorality!

But we know that **the law is good, if a man use it lawfully**; knowing this, that **the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient**, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers.... (1 Timothy 1.8-9 KJV)

Finally, the law is holy, just, good and spiritual.

Wherefore **the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good**. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that **the law is spiritual**: but I am carnal [of flesh], sold under sin [bondage to sin]. (Romans 7.12-14 KJV [NASB])

### ***Love is the greatest law.***

The **eleventh principle** states that the foundation of the law is love; the royal law is love.

We know that the foundation of all the commandments is love, and as we apply these *in spirit*, we begin to see that there are spiritual laws that transcend even these (read Matthew 5-7). But they all come back to love and what God commands us to do, and what He speaks to our hearts to obey in order to manifest His love in this earth.

Love sums up all the commandments.

And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. **This is the great and foremost commandment**. The second is like it, YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF. On these two

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22.37-40 NASB)

Love is the ultimate law of God, for it is the foundation of the Law and the Prophets. Everything will be judged for how much love was manifested. All mankind will be judged by their works of love, for love is the fulfillment of the law.

**Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.** (Romans 13.10 NASB)

Because of its relationship to all of God’s law, love grows cold and ceases among lawbreakers; they become lawless. When there is lawlessness (i.e., one acts apart from God’s law), there is no love.

What is a sign that lawlessness is taking hold? Governments have to issue more laws to deal with the lawlessness. What do we see happening in the United States today? More and more laws are being enacted every year. Are God’s laws being ignored in our day? You bet! This should be a warning to us.

Many false prophets will rise up and lead multitudes astray; and **because of the prevalent disregard of God’s law the love of the great majority will grow cold**; but those who stand firm to the End shall be saved. (Matthew 24.11-13 WNT)

This particular translation truly captures the heart of the matter. A rampant disregard of God’s law leads to the loss of love. When we meet someone who seems to lack love, we call such a person *coldhearted*. Their love has grown cold; it is rigid and lacking in warmth, and it is tantamount to being dead!

So the law of God and love are inseparable. Break the law (i.e., become lawless), then love grows cold and dies. Become loveless (i.e., not laying down your life for one another), then you are breaking God’s law and you are a lawbreaker (i.e., a lawless one).

James called the commandment to love the royal law.

If, however, you are fulfilling **the royal law** according to the Scripture, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” you are doing well. (James 2.8 NASB)

The Greek word for *royal* is *basilikos*, which means “belonging to (or befitting) the sovereign; the king’s.” This law belongs to the King, the Sovereign of all. The Greek word for *love* is *agapaō*, which is the verb form of the love that is attributed to God. We are commanded to love our neighbors unconditionally as we love ourselves unconditionally.

Jesus Himself has given us the commandment to love.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

“If you **love Me**, you will **keep My commandments**.” (John 14.15 NASB)

“If anyone loves Me, he will **keep My word**; and **My Father will love him**, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. **He who does not love Me does not keep My words**; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father’s who sent Me.” (John 14.23-24 NASB)

“**This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you**. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15.12-13 NASB)

Consider Jesus’ progression of thought. First, He tells His disciples to keep His commandments out of love for Him. Then, He defines His commandments as His word. Those who keep His word (commandments) will be loved by the Father. So now we have a reciprocal love. Love Me, keep My word and My Father will love you in turn. Finally, love itself is the commandment of Jesus to His disciples. His commandment to us is to love one another as He has loved us.

In his first epistle, John, the apostle of love, wrote: *This is **His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us*** (1 John 3.23 NASB).

Faith (trust in the Son) and love (love of the Son) go hand-in-hand.

Paul, the striving apostle, reinforced all that John wrote on the matter, for he encouraged brethren to pursue love and faith, and he looked for it in them and commended them when he saw or heard of it in their midst (e.g., Ephesians 1.15; 3.17; Colossians 1.14; 1 Thessalonians 3.6; 5.8; 2 Thessalonians 1.3). Paul referred to it as *the faith and love in Christ Jesus* (1 Timothy 1.14 cv).

Consequently, works of love according to the royal law are what will survive the spiritual fire of God. All other works will be judged according to the law of love, and they will come short of the glory of God and be brought into the second death.

Before moving on, there is one more thought on the law and grace! Grace gives us the ability or enabling to obey the law of God. It isn’t a matter of do’s and don’ts; rather, it is a matter of life and intuitively knowing the good to do out of sacrificial, unconditional love. **It is not legalism. It is liberty**. There is no life in do’s and don’ts. Life is in love, for love knows what to do without hesitation or comparison or compromise!

Further, the law does not mean that we return to animal sacrifices, circumcision and other physical demands. We must learn to apply the law spiritual to spiritual, which means we apply it from the perspective of Christ and the new covenant. This requires spiritual discernment and a heart response to the Lord.

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

When the word of the Lord goes forth from His throne of righteousness, it will be His law going forth to the myriads upon myriads standing before His throne. His righteous and just standard will flow like a river from His throne and will engulf all lost humanity in a lake of righteousness that will devour, like a consuming fire, all unrighteousness of the flesh committed by every person. They will be bathed in the righteousness of God; their unbelief will be overwhelmed with the love of God; and God's laws will be written upon their hearts and on their minds, so that they will reach God's end. Some indication of this is given in the new covenant.

### ***Laws written upon their hearts and on their minds.***

And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying, "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: **I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM,**" He then says, "AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE." (Hebrews 10.15-17 NASB)

During our present wicked eon, those who believe are being brought into the new covenant. Those of us who have been given the faith of the Son of God to believe have also been given an earnest of the spirit of God (2 Corinthians 1.22; 5.5; Ephesians 1.14), which means that we have been given a taste of what is to come, but we are not there yet. We have not entered into the full promise of God in His Son and this involves a full anointing of the Holy Spirit (glorified, spiritual bodies); therefore, we only have an earnest of the spirit in this eon. We wait for the completion of this eon and the presence of our Lord Jesus. In the above verse, the Holy Spirit testifies to us that after those days (after this eon), the Lord will put His laws upon our heart and on our mind. Today, we must read His word and apply it to our life and our actions by the power of the spirit of God. This is why we must walk by the spirit (Galatians 5.25). But even this is only an earnest of what it will be like for true believers in the oncoming eons.

If this is so according to God's word, then could this point to God's desire for all mankind at the consummation of the eons? Perhaps so! I believe Jesus has given us the final word on the matter.

"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law **until all is accomplished.**" (Matthew 5.17-18 NASB)

*Until all is accomplished* is the word of the Lord. In other words, a day will come when all will be accomplished and even the law as we know it will not be needed, for it will be written on the heart and in the mind of all.

Until then, the law written on the heart and mind of the saints of God is an integral part of God achieving the purpose of the eons. Those who are called and chosen in

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

this eon to be part of the body of Christ and the bride of the Lamb are destined to be His complement in summing up or heading up all in the heavens and on the earth, until He has subjected all to Himself, that He might be all in all.

### ***Saints will judge the world.***

The **twelfth principle** states that the saints will judge the world for the purpose of establishing righteousness and justice according to His law.

Or do you not know that **the saints will judge the world**? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent to constitute the smallest law courts? Do you not know that **we will judge angels**? How much more matters of this life? (1 Corinthians 6.2-3 NASB)

It is hard to imagine that ones who were once sinners just like the rest of mankind will be called upon to judge the world and angels (messengers). <sup>2</sup> Believers are from the same stock as the rest of mankind. Think about it before your pride makes your head swell!

But how will the saints be able to judge the world and the angels? Are there any amongst us today that could say we are qualified? Surely, there is no one who has the wisdom or even the full depth of knowledge of God's law to do such a thing. We would fail, even though we have the spirit of God within. Besides, who knows enough about the angels and the celestial realm to know where to start in judging them?

The answer to the question is found in the Hebrews verses about the new covenant. Again, the law will be written on our heart and in our mind. In other words, it will be part of who we are. We won't have to look it up in books, for it will flow out of us as naturally as we breathe.

Now, here is the part that will amaze you. The saints will be the ones who will administer the judgment of God through the lake of fire.

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.** Yea, he loved the people; **all his saints are in thy hand:** and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words. (Deuteronomy 33.2-3 KJV)

In a prophetic view of judgment, it is revealed that the fiery law goes forth from the Lord's right hand, which signifies authority and power. But also notice who is in the right hand of the Lord. His saints are in His hand, and they are the ones who will judge the people according to His fiery law. Judging should not be seen as one

---

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word translated as *angel* is literally *messenger*. I have often wondered if the ones that the saints will judge will be the human messengers (pastors, preachers, etc.) that have attempted to teach God's people the word of God. Just a thought! A scary one at that!

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

sitting on a bench to condemn but as one who works to restore. They will be called upon to teach mankind righteousness and justice until each and every human is brought out of outer darkness and into the kingdom of God.

Thus, to recap what has been presented so far. As signified by the river of fire, the absolute law of God will go forth from His throne to engulf all that are standing before the throne and whose name is not recorded in the book of life. In the eon that follows (God's day), they will be engulfed in the righteous standard of God to be purged and cleansed of all unrighteousness. What is being cast into the lake, if it is not to be engulfed in it? But this is not for punishment, but rather for correction; that is, they must be taught righteousness and justice and make restitution for their wicked deeds (discussed in what follows). They will be engulfed in the righteousness of God. Can you think of any other way to cleanse one from all unrighteousness? The saints will be the administrators of this judgment for the eon.

At night my soul longs for You, indeed, my spirit within me seeks You diligently; for when the earth experiences Your judgments **the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.** (Isaiah 26.9 NASB)

This is the longing cry of the conquerors of Christ who are called and chosen to lead the nations into the righteous and just kingdom of Christ. How will the world learn righteousness? It will be through the conquerors of Christ, the ones that were truly conquered by His love in this life. It will take an eon to achieve this goal; but it will be done, for it is according to the purpose of the eons, and it is God's plan to restore all mankind. Praise God!

At this point, I am sure that there are many questions raised in the mind of the reader. I realize that our carnal minds crave to have every single question that comes to mind answered in matters such as this. We must realize that we all see through a glass darkly and that there always will be unanswered questions, or even certain matters that might seem contrary to the overall understanding. We must not let this be a cause for rejecting what has been presented so far. What it should do is cause us to seek for the truth ever more diligently. Let us be as Isaiah and, by our spirit within us, seek the Lord diligently.

***For a time, not for eternity.***

This leads to another question: What will this judgment be like for those cast into God's spiritual fire? **We are not told! We can only imagine or speculate** that it will be some form of torment or deep anguish for those cast into this fire as they experience all the waste of their unrighteous and ungodly lives contrasted with the purity of the life of the Son of God. It could be a deep pain within the very being of the person that will not be very pleasant, to say the least. Just think of what it would be like to see all the missed opportunities because you did not love. In the same vein, consider what it would be like to experience all the pain that you caused others in your life (lack of love), or all the evil things that were done in your life (lack of love), as if they were all turned on you.

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

The **thirteenth principle** states that they will not experience torture, and it will not be forever and ever. It will be for a time or a season, but the time will not be wasted as the love of God pursues their cold hearts to win them through His divine love.

For His anger is but **for a moment**, His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning. (Psalm 30.5 NASB)

Even the commandments given through Moses indicate that there is a limit to any action on God's part.

“You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, **on the third and the fourth generations** of those who hate Me, but showing loving-kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Exodus 20.5-6 NASB)

Judgment for the iniquity of the father's is limited to the third and fourth generations. Consequently, there is no indication of eternal punishment in the commandments. But notice that it is the Lord's heart to show lovingkindness to thousands, especially to those who love Him and keep His commandments.

What are we to conclude? I don't know about you; but, as for me, I conclude that a new day is coming for all mankind, even if it takes thousands of years.

### ***Laws of restitution.***

Finally, the **fourteenth principle** states that judging is for chastening and restitution, not for punishment, and definitely not for torture. If restitution is the goal, then by definition the chastening is only for a season and not forever. What purpose would chastening serve if it never ended?

Again, Origen (180-253 AD) wrote: “They are purged with the “wise fire” or made to pay in prison **every debt up to the last farthing . . . to cleanse them from the evils committed in their error . . .** Thus **they are delivered** from all the filth and blood with which they had been defiled....”

The spiritual lake of fire is designed to judge in this fashion, and when restitution has been completed, the person will be released from the chastening judging.

One proof that all chastening will be for a season and not for eternity is discovered in the laws of restitution that were given to the nation of Israel when they were delivered out of Egypt under Moses. The law demanded that the person committing certain sins had to make restitution for the sin. He either had to pay in full or pay in full with some added to it; only then would the person be forgiven (e.g., see Leviticus 5.1-6.7). For example, if a person acted unfaithfully and sinned unintentionally against the Lord's holy things, he was commanded to make restitution in

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

full and with a fifth part added to it (Leviticus 5.14-19). However, even under the law the worst punishment that one could receive was a death sentence, that is, to be stoned. For example, one who is a medium or a spiritist was to be stoned to death (Leviticus 20.27), or one who worked on the sabbath by picking up wood was to be stoned (Numbers 15.36). They were brought into death, so that their judgment will be settled at the great white throne.

Now, one could argue over the severity of some of these judgments, but the point we must see is that **the absolute worst** punishment under the law was physical death. There was an end to it, even if it was death, and there was no torture in some hellhole with no way out. If the Lord instituted these laws with His chosen nation, do we honestly believe that He has changed His approach in dealing with all mankind? I doubt it! **Jesus Christ, yesterday and to-day the same, and to the ages** (Hebrews 13.8 YLT).

Turning to the New Testament, we discover that Jesus Himself reinforced the concept of restitution and that chastisement is only for a time. As a reminder, in the case of *the gehenna of fire*, the worst case is death, never endless torture. As a further reminder, as the Lamb of God, Jesus paid the price or wages of sin for us, and even He did not go to a hellhole for eternity. He simply was in death for three days, but death could not hold the Righteous One.

Agree with thine adversary quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, **till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.** (Matthew 5.25-26 KJV)

And, being indignant, his lord gives him up to **the tormentors [the inquisitors] till he may pay all he is owing him.** “Thus shall My heavenly Father also be doing to you, if each one should not be pardoning his brother, from your hearts.” (Matthew 18.34-35 CV [YLT])

### **Torment.**

Two translations of this last passage are presented because several translations use the word *torturers* rather than *tormentors* or *inquisitors*, which are more appropriate words. In the Greek, the word is *basanizō*, which is the same word used in other places to speak of torment, including torment of the soul. Following the concordant method of translation, the word *basanizō*, which appears twelve times in Greek Scripture, should be translated with the word *torment*. Looking at all the verses containing the word *torment* is quite instructive.

Now at His entering into Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, entreating Him and saying, “Lord, my boy is prostrate in the house, a paralytic, dreadfully **tormented.**” (Matthew 8.5-6 CV)

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

Jesus healed a boy who was in torment as a paralytic. Note that Jesus did not leave this gentile boy in torment but instead delivered him.

And at His coming to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, two demoniacs meet Him, who were coming out of the tombs, very ferocious, so that no one is strong enough to be passing by through that road. And lo! they cry, saying, "What is it to us and to Thee, Son of God! Didst Thou come here to **torment** us before **the season**?" (Matthew 8.28-29 cv; also Mark 5.6-7; Luke 8.27-28)

The demonic spirits knew that Jesus is the Son of God and that He had authority over them. Note that the demons had an expectation of being tormented at a future time or season, which refers to a distinct portion of time having special characteristics, an era or a period of time. A season is not eternity. Also, take note that the Lord delivered the person who was possessed by the unclean spirits.

And perceiving them **tormented** in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them, about the fourth watch of the night He is coming toward them, walking on the sea. And He wanted to pass them by. (Mark 6.48 cv)

The disciples were in torment as they fought to row their boat in heavy wind. Jesus showed up by walking on the sea and then calming it. He alone can and will end the torment of mankind as it struggles with the trials of life. The disciples were delivered out of their torment by the Lord.

Could this account be a type of Christ delivering all mankind out of torment, particularly those that will be cast into the lake of fire? The disciples were on the Sea of Galilee, which is a body of water, similar to a very large lake. Just as the disciples were in torment, so will be most of mankind at the judgment seat of God. There is only One who can and will deliver them from their torment. Jesus, who died for the sin of the world, is the Deliverer and the Savior of all mankind. Their torment might be severe; but, like the disciples, it will only last for a season.

And rescues the just man, Lot, harried by the behavior of the dissolute in their wantonness (for the just man dwelling among them, in observing and hearing from day to day, **tormented his just soul** by their lawless acts)... (2 Peter 2.7-8 cv)

Lot was tormented in his soul over lawless acts being committed in Sodom. Torment is what lawless acts cause in the soul of a righteous man. But Lot was delivered by the Lord out of Sodom and out of the torment of his soul before the judgment of God fell on the cities.

Have you ever been led into a torment of your soul? I have, and I can report that it is a most unpleasant experience. You seem to come to the end of yourself, and there is no way out but by the grace of God. It is like sitting in the bottom of a

## OUR GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE

barrel, and the only way out is up. Praise God for experiencing such a torment in this life. It is for our own good, for it is training us for the age to come.

And it was granted to them, not that they should be killing them, but that they shall be **tormented five months**; and their torment is as the torment of a scorpion, whenever it should be striking a man. (Revelation 9.5 cv)

According to the Patmos vision, when the fifth messenger trumpets, locusts (in a symbolic sense) appear as scorpions with the sole purpose of causing torment for all that do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. Note that this torment lasts only five months.

And those dwelling on the earth are rejoicing over them and are making merry, and will be sending approach presents to one another, seeing that these two prophets **torment those dwelling on the earth**. (Revelation 11.20 cv)

In John's vision, God raises up two witnesses in the likeness of the prophets Enoch, Moses, Elijah and John the baptist. They prophesy 1,260 days and have authority to lock heaven, so that rain is withheld, to turn water into blood and to smite the land with calamity, as often as they will. If anyone wants to injure them, fire issues out of their mouth to devour their enemies (see Revelation 11.5). This is an example of the figurative use of the word *fire*. They do not literally have fire coming out of their mouths like some dragon. It is the voice of the Lord hewing out flames of fire (Psalm 29.7), the fire of His word. Note that their torment of earth dwellers only lasts for their time of witness.

And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon underneath her feet, and on her head a wreath of twelve stars. And being pregnant, **she is crying, travailing and tormented to be bringing forth**. (Revelation 12.1-2 cv)

Later in the Patmos vision, a woman, which is a symbol of the true Israel, appears as if she is in child birth. She gives birth to a son. This is all symbolic language, but the point is that she is in torment as she brings forth this son. For a mother, what follows the birth of a child? Joy!

And another, a third messenger, follows them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone is worshiping the wild beast and its image, and is getting an emblem on his forehead or on his hand, he, also, is drinking of the wine of the fury of God, blended undiluted in the cup of His indignation, and he shall be **tormented in fire and sulphur** in the sight of the holy messengers and in the sight of the Lambkin. And **the fumes of their torment** are ascending for the eons of the eons. And they are having no rest day and night, those worshiping the wild beast and its image, and if anyone is getting the emblem of its name." (Revelation 14.9-11 cv)

## THE PURPOSE AND PLAN OF THE EONS

According to John, all who accept the mark of the beast and worship its image suffer the fury of God. Until they die, they are in torment due to the severity of God's indignation. But notice that it is the fumes of their torment that ascends for the eons of the eons. This is symbolic language to signify that there is a remembrance of this time for the eons of the eons. Their torment occurred due to the indignation of God, and it ends in their death; but the remembrance of this time lingers until the consummation of the eons.

And the Adversary who is deceiving them was cast into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the wild beast and where the false prophet are also. **And they shall be tormented day and night for the eons of the eons.**  
(Revelation 20.10 cv)

Likewise, the Adversary, Satan, and the demonized wild beast and the false prophet are tormented for the eons of the eons. Note that they are the only ones that Scripture says are tormented for the eons.

A new heaven and a new earth come into view with the lake of fire. In that glorious day, God makes all new, and there is no more death, all to the praise, honor and glory of God and His Son. However, I believe that no more death applies to the new Jerusalem and not to that which is outside on the new earth. It is not correct to believe that the lake of fire disappears with the new heaven and earth. We must keep in mind that the law of God's righteousness will continue its chastening work for those who were raised but only to mortality. The One who sits on the throne declared to John that these ones will have a part in the lake of fire, which puts them outside the new Jerusalem, but evidently on the new earth (Revelation 21.8, 27; 22.15).

### ***Conclusion.***

In conclusion, *the gehenna of fire* and *the lake of fire* refer to the judgment of God of all apostasy, idolatry, and everything opposed to godliness and righteousness, and everything opposed to the character of His Son, and every work of sinful flesh. God's judgment of mankind is through the fire of His absolute law. However, the good news is that out of the ashes of the fire of judgment will rise a new creation fully in the image of God's Son. This new creation will begin with the ecclesia, which is the body of Christ. But a day will come when all mankind will enter into the joy of salvation when God is *All* in all in all mankind.

The traditions of men are like set concrete; they are hard to break up. Perhaps, what has been presented in this chapter has served as a chisel to begin breaking away the traditional view of hell and has served to provide a better perspective of our God who is a consuming fire.

Let us give praise, honor and glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is working out all things according to His purpose of the eons. Amen!