

A Rebuke of the Doctrine of Total Annihilation

This essay is written as a direct rebuke to a tract entitled "What the Bible Says about Hellfire." The tract, which promotes the false doctrine of Total Annihilation, was published as an excerpt from the book "A Love Stronger Than Death: Mysteries of the Great Beyond" by Family Heritage Books. This publisher is part of the work of The Voice of Prophecy, a prominent Seventh-Day Adventist organization. In the following pages, we will attempt to present Seventh-Day Adventist beliefs on what hell is by summarizing their arguments, quoting them directly whenever possible, and including the scriptures they reference. Once these arguments are addressed, we will take a short look at the underlying philosophy that is responsible for Seventh-Day Adventist's severe departure from what the Bible tells us about hell.

"WHEN DOES HELLFIRE BURN?" – SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST SAY HELL DOES NOT EXIST YET

Seventh-Day Adventists do not believe that the unsaved are currently in hell because they claim that hell does not yet exist. They contend that no one is burning right now, only after the judgment. When an unsaved person dies, they are reserved in the grave until then. The verses they use for this belief are:

John 5:28 "...all that are in the graves shall hear his voice..."

II Peter 2:9 "...reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

Matt 13:36-49 "As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world"

BIBLICAL ANSWER: LUKE 16

Read Luke 16, it is not a parable: Starting at verse 22, it says:

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died and was buried; (v23) and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (v24) And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

- A real man's soul is shown suffering in hell immediately after his death. Later in this passage he asks Abraham to warn his brothers who are still alive, so we know that this cannot be speaking of the judgment day.
- Verse 22 shows that the rich man's body is in the grave, but his spirit is in hell. This concept, the separation of body and spirit, is crucial for understanding what death is. James 2:26 holds the key, it says: **"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."** Thus defining death for us: i.e. the separation of body and spirit, not annihilation of the individual. This verse answers many of the Seventh-Day Adventist's arguments.
- The verses they use above are speaking of the physical bodies of unbelievers, which are currently in the grave. The body will be cast into the Lake of Fire along with the spirit at the Great White Throne Judgment, Revelation 20:14.

Note: It is clear that Luke 16 is not a parable for multiple reasons. Namely, (1) Biblical parables never include proper nouns, yet we see the names of three actual people in the passage (Lazarus, Abraham, Moses). (2) if it is a parable, why doesn't Jesus offer an interpretation or those around him ask for one? And, (3) what does the parable teach? Furthermore, why would Jesus reference such a place of torment if such a place does not exist?

“WHERE DOES HELLFIRE BURN?” – ON THE EARTH’S SURFACE AT THE JUDGMENT DAY

Seventh-Day Adventists teach that “Hellfire” will burn on the surface of the earth when the earth and all unsaved mankind are destroyed. This is the only “hell” they teach; a temporary condition of burning over the entire surface of the earth at the end of the world. The verses they quote are:

Revelation 20:9 – *“and they went up on the breadth of the earth, and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.”*

II Peter 3:7,10 – *“But the heavens and the earth, which are now,... are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ... the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”*

BIBLICAL ANSWER: HELL IS LOCATED IN THE CENTER OF THE EARTH

The passages given in support of this argument are speaking of the destruction of the corrupt earth, which will take place in the end times after the millennial kingdom, but this is not hell. The Bible reveals that the location of hell is very definitely the center of the earth as proven when taking the following passages together.

- Luke 16:23-25, quoted above, show that hell sat across a great gulf from Abraham’s bosom, i.e. paradise. Paradise is where old testament saints went to await the day when Christ Jesus would come and shed his blood to cleanse their sins, clothing them with righteousness (Rev. 19:8) and making them fit to enter heaven, God’s abode. This is where Jesus promised that the thief on the cross would go because he believed on Christ: “today thou shalt be with me in paradise” Luke 23:43.
- Ephesians 4:8,9 tells us that after his burial, Christ Jesus ascended up to heaven leading “captivity captive” (a phrase referring to paradise which had, until then *kept* the saints of God), after having “descended first into the lower parts of the earth”. Thus we learn the former location of paradise as well as the location of hell which sat across from it. When paradise was carried up into heaven, hell remained in the “lower parts of the earth,” where it is today.

“DO THE WICKED BURN FOREVER?” – “FOREVER” IS JUST AN EXPRESSION

Seventh-Day Adventist say that phrases such as “everlasting”, “forever” and “forever and ever” can mean either *eternity* or just a period of time that seems extremely long to the person speaking. Thus, they contend that it depends on the context of the passage to determine which is meant. The *feels long* idea is then applied to Matthew 25:41’s “everlasting fire”, Revelation 20:10’s “tormented day and night for ever and ever” as well as other passages that would otherwise indicate eternity as its meaning. Passages where these phrases are used in reference to God still imply eternity. The two passages below are given as examples of the phrase “for ever” meaning a measurable length of time that simply feels long to the person speaking.

Jonah 2:6 – *“the earth with her bars were about me for ever”*

Exodus 21:6 – *“he shall serve him for ever”*

Here’s a direct quote from their tract concluding this argument:

Since the terms “for ever” and “everlasting” must be read in context to determine if they truly mean never ending, then the question of whether or not the wicked are tormented forever, can only be settled by examining what the rest of the Bible says about the destruction of the wicked, and about hell.

BIBLICAL ANSWER: EXAMINE THE CONTEXT

Context is king, and the Seventh-Day Adventists, while claiming to lift up the authority of context and the Bible in general, are hiding the contexts of the passages they are using.

- First, examine Matthew 25:41 and the text surrounding it. When discussing this passage, Seventh-Day Adventists acknowledge that the Greek word *aionios* is translated “everlasting.” They then reference the same Greek word translated “eternal” in Jude 7 which reads: “*Sodom and Gomorrha...are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*” Their argument: The cities Sodom and Gomorrha were destroyed, they no longer exist, and therefore “eternal” here means a temporary state. This is easily rebuked by simply examining the middle of the verse, which the Seventh-Day Adventists left out of their tract. The full verse reads: “*Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*” Can a physical city commit fornication? No. But the *people* who live in the city certainly can. Therefore we see that the book of Jude is stating that the people of Sodom and Gomorrha are suffering eternal fire because of their apostasy in turning from God to sin.
- Also, if we examine Matthew 25:46, we see the Greek word *aionios* being accurately translated as both “everlasting” and “eternal.” The verse reads: “*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.*” The Seventh-Day Adventists do not spend much time on this verse. They only point out that the phrase “everlasting punishment” is referring to the “everlasting fire” of verse 41, which we just examined. They make no attempt to explain the context, but seem to hope that no one reading their tract will take the time to examine the verse in full. But when read in full, this verse shows a striking contrast between the never-ending life of the believer and the never-ending punishment of the unrepentant. Note: Jesus makes no apology for the severity of this statement, so why would any true Christian presume that we must apologize to an unbelieving world for the doctrine of hell?
- Before we move on, let’s examine one more instance of “for ever and ever.” Revelation 20:10 “*And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*” This is Satan’s end. The verse not only tells us that the devil is thrown into the lake of fire, but also reminds us that the beast and the false prophet, who were cast into the lake of fire in Revelation 19:20 (at least a thousand years earlier at the start of the millennial kingdom) are still in conscious torment. The beast and the false prophet, although the devil’s tools during the Tribulation, are still mortal men. This ruins the argument which some Seventh-Day Adventists have proposed that only Satan and his minions will suffer forever.

“HOW LONG DOES HELLFIRE BURN?” – THE WICKED ARE BURNED UP AND ARE ANNIHILATED

The Bible says the wicked will be destroyed and also that they will die a second death. How then will they live and suffer eternally if they are dead? Using such logic, Seventh-Day Adventists erroneously conclude, Hellfire only burns until the wicked are consumed.

Romans 6:23 “*the wages of sin is death...*”

Malachi 4:1 “*and the day that cometh shall burn them up...*”

Revelation 21:8 Sinners “*shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*”

Psalms 37:10 “*They shall be as though they had not been.*”

BIBLICAL ANSWER: THE BIBLICAL DEFINITION OF DEATH

Remember what the Bible defines as “death” in James 2:26. Bible passages that talk of the destruction and death of the wicked in hell are all referring to the physical body’s destruction and its eternal separation from the human spirit, which suffer alone in hell for all eternity. Also, the very fact that the Bible uses the phrase “second death” disproves the Seventh-Day Adventist’s definition of what death is! They say that death equals annihilation, but if that is the case how then were the unsaved not *annihilated* when they died the first time? Are there suddenly two definitions of death now? The Bible makes no distinction, but simply calls both “death.”

Also, Psalm 37:10, which they add on as an additional proof text, is not talking about hell at all. The context reveals that it is speaking of the wicked who attack the righteous throughout the righteous person's lifetime.

THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY: MAN IS NOT THAT BAD AND GOD IS NOT THAT ANGRY

Secular Humanism has been around for a long time. The Epicureans of Paul's day practiced a form of it, teaching, in essence, that no personal restraints are necessary because nothing we do is really all that bad. And this mindset is more prominent today in American culture than it has been for many years. Whether in children's television programs or in movies that encourage us to trust our hearts and believe in ourselves, our society is permeated with a false religion which denies the doctrine of man's depravity and, to quote the beginning of the Seventh-Day Adventist tract, finds "the doctrine of eternal torment... revolting." Indeed, this brainwashing has been so effective that even those who know the Bible are intimidated and affected by its acceptance in mainstream society and religion. It is here where the unsaved religious crowd smells an opportunity to attack true Christians and align themselves with popular opinion. Seventh-Day Adventists are more than happy to do this as this excerpt from their tract shows:

[People's] belief that God is loving and merciful is offended, and their sense of justice is violated by the doctrine that the wicked are punished in an eternally burning hell, and that for the sins of a brief earthly life some of their loved ones are to suffer torture for as long as God shall live

This language pulls at the heartstrings. But the Bible tells us not to trust our hearts, in fact Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" You may think you know yourself, your feelings and emotions, but the Bible tells us that your very own heart is trying harder to deceive you than anything or anyone else, period. Not even the devil is trying as desperately as your own evil heart to convince you to follow a false way. How then could you ever be so stupid as to trust it? Of course our sense of justice is violated by God's punishment of the wicked! *Our* sense of justice says that we should get to do whatever we want and not face any consequences. *Our* sense of justice says that nothing we desire is wrong; nothing we do, say, or think is worthy of severe punishment. This is true from childhood on. But the Bible disagrees completely.

James 2:10 "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

Romans 3:10-12 "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one."

Romans 3:19 "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: **that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.**"

Not only does it disagree, but the Bible even tells us what evil men say when they hear the Bible, as shown by the following passage:

Ezekiel 18:20, 29-30 "The soul that sinneth, it shall die... Yet saith the house of Israel, the way of the Lord is not equal. O house of Israel, are not my ways equal? Are not your ways unequal? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin."

Notice that last part of that passage. It is paramount that sinners admit their sin in its entirety. It is essential that they do not downplay the depth of the wickedness that is behind the sinful things that they say, do, and think. Any reservations of this sort—anything short of full repentance for the wicked and depraved lives we have lived—do not constitute repentance towards God. And without repenting, and turning to Christ's sacrifice as the only way to be made clean and just in God's sight, there is no salvation.