

"THE SMOKE OF THEIR TORMENT ASCENDETH UP FOREVER"

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A Sermon by Robt. G. Huggins *

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"Then shall he say unto them on his left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41).

"And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name" (Rev. 14:11).

Everlasting Fire Prepared

By comparing the 46th, 41st, and 31st verses of Matthew twenty-fifth chapter we learn that the "cursed" are to suffer "everlasting punishment" when "the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him." They then "depart into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." "Prepared" is a very suggestive word. It enables us to see that while the "cursed" are punished at the coming of Christ, the devil and his angels are spared temporarily. As the fire is only "prepared" for them when Jesus returns they are not punished then; but the implication is that sometime later they will be punished like the cursed, at the same place, in the same way, and in the same fire.

Allow us to accentuate these remarks by tracing the analogy between the punishment which is to be inflicted upon the cursed at Christ's coming and the same punishment which is to be meted out to the devil and his

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angels later. The heaven and the earth existing now are "prepared" and "stored" with fire, but it is "reserved," Peter says, "against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Pet. 3:7). "Prepared" and "stored" away yet "reserved," it does not break into "flaming fire" until the Lord is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels (2 Thess. 1:7,8). "Prepared" but "reserved" fire then becomes "flaming fire" which, flashing from the hidden power of the Holy One from Mount Paran, becomes visible in pestilence and burning coals (Hab. 3:4,5) which destroys the cursed "from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:9). "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him" (Psa. 50:3). This "flaming fire" in which Christ is revealed at his coming constitutes "the glory of his power" by which he destroys the cursed; not only as individuals, for they have solidified themselves into political and ecclesiastical organizations which must be broken up as well. So the prophet enlarges his view to national proportions and depicts Christ's coming as "the name of the Lord coming from far, burning with his anger, and the burning thereof is heavy: his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire: and his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity" (Isa. 30:27, 28). The "devouring fire" of Christ's presence is not confined in its destructive effects to the wicked as individuals who are "cursed in everlasting fire": it acts like "an overflowing stream" and inundates "the nations." All the kingdoms of this world are broken in pieces and consumed (Dan. 2:44; Rev. 11:15). A "fiery stream issues and comes forth from before him" (Dan. 7:10) that is fatal to all the beastly governments of men, being particularly deadly to the fourth beast, which represents Rome. This beast is first slain, then its body

is destroyed "and given to the burning flame" (Dan. 7: 11). "The glory of his power" manifested in what Paul calls "the brightness of his coming," consumes the mystery of iniquity from the face of the earth (2 Thess. 2: 8), destroys the "cursed" as individuals, and "prepares" an "everlasting fire for the devil and his angels," in which they shall finally suffer the extinction of being.

The Devil and His Angels

As the cursed and the devil and his angels are all punished in "everlasting fire" but at different times, we must differentiate between them. The word "devil" comes from the Greek word *diabolos* and means "a calumniator or accuser" (see Cruden and Parkhurst). The Bible uses the words "devil" and "sin" as interchangeable terms (Heb. 2:14; 9:26; 1 John 3:5; Rom. 5:12; Jas. 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:56), and therefore it always links the devil with "flesh and blood." It does this even when speaking of Christ in the days of his flesh (Heb. 2:14; John 6:7; Heb.5:7). As the wages of sin is death according to God's irreversible and eternal law (Rom. 6:23; Rom. 5:12; Jude 6; 2 Pet. 2; Gen. 3:19; Deut. 32:48,52; 2 Sam. 6:6,7), it follows that both the devil and his angels, the devil and "the works of the devil" are doomed to destruction (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Sin as embodied in political and ecclesiastical powers on the King's left hand is destroyed at the coming of Christ. "The Lord comes with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire" (Isa. 66:15). These "flames of fire" are "the everlasting fire" which consume the cursed in an individual sense, as Isa. 66:16 states: "For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many." Individual sinners are totally destroyed at the return of Christ (Zech. 14:4, 12). The destruction is universal save that a few "left of the nations" (Zech. 12:16) find "grace in the wilder-

ness"; and these are spared from the sword provided they obey the stringent laws promulgated from Mount Zion by the King of kings when he sits upon his throne (Jer. 31:2; Isa. 2; Matt. 25:31). But the nations, through whom sin has expressed itself, are also fuel for the "flaming fire." Jehovah sends a fire on Magog (Ezek. 39:6), and the beast and false prophet, symbols of papal, political, and ecclesiastical systems, together with all Protestant nations, are smitten with the sword and "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:15,19,20). This lake of fire devours all Catholic and Protestant nations at the coming of Christ, but the devil and his angels are not then thrust into it, although it is then and there "prepared" for them. The devil is deprived of his nations and (false) prophet as organs through which to manifest himself, but he exists still. The descending angel, after plunging the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire, proceeds to "bind the devil with a great chain"; imprisons, shuts him up and seals him to prison-life for a thousand years (Rev. 20). The culprit is incarcerated, and the lake of fire is "prepared" as the place of his execution; but that is all. The devil bound is sin restrained; and the restraint of sin during the thousand years reign of Christ and the saints results from the fact that they execute "the judgment written" when Christ comes, an "honor" they both have of binding the devil, an apocalyptic symbol which is explained to mean an execution of "vengeance upon the heathen (nations) and punishments upon the people (national and individual punishments combined, notice); to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron" (Psa. 149:7-9). To execute such a judgment as this upon the nations and their rulers is to "bind the devil" in apocalyptic phraseology.

Everlasting Fire

The terms "everlasting" and "unquenchable" when applied to fire in the word of God signify that it is eternal in its effects. "Fire unquenchable" is *puris asbesto* in the Greek. Eusebius makes use of this very term when speaking of the martyrdom of Julian, Cronion, Epmachus, and other Christians at Alexandria (Eccles. History, 6:41). Eusebius was a Christian bishop and a learned Greek who lived within three hundred years of Christ. He surely knew how to use his mother tongue accurately and write it correctly, and he says martyrs were consumed in "unquenchable fire." If unquenchable fire burnt up saints, as Eusebius declares, certainly it can burn up sinners, as the word of God affirms. And the classical reader will recall the famous passage of Homer where he speaks of the Trojans hurling "unquenchable fire" upon the Grecian ships (Homer, Iliad., 16:123,194). Unquenchable fire means a fire that cannot be extinguished until it consumes all the fuel on which it preys. Eternal preservation and torment form no part of its meaning. Scriptural illustrations are many which show this. An unquenchable fire is said to be poured "upon man, and upon beast, and upon the trees of the field, and upon the fruit of the ground" in Jer. 7: 20; but certainly no one understands by this that "beast," "trees," and "fruit" are tortured forever! "I will kindle a fire in the gates (of Jerusalem), and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched" (Jer. 17:21). This certainly does not mean that "the palaces of Jerusalem" were to be preserved and tormented eternally! We understand that unquenchable fire is "everlasting fire" burning like an oven; "and all the proud, yea, and all they that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal. 4:1). Everlasting fire inflicts an "everlasting destruction" upon the wicked (2 Thess. 1:

9). "They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 4:3).

**"The Smoke of Their
Torment Ascendeth up Forever and Ever"**

With the fund of scriptural information which we have now acquired about the devil and his angels, unquenchable and everlasting fire, we are qualified to understand Rev. 14:11: "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever." This passage is confidently relied upon to prove the existence of a hell of eternal woe. That this is a mistaken interpretation of the text is manifest when we read Isaiah 34th chapter, the fountain head of Rev. 14:10,11. In predicting judgment upon Idumea the prophet says in verses 9,10: "The streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up forever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste." As this prophecy pertains to the past and not the future, we have the facts of history to give us a clew to its interpretation. The poetic figures of Idumea's judgment, such as the perpetual furnace of burning pitch, brimstone, unquenchable fire, and smoke ascending forever, are all reproduced in Rev. 14:10,11. The meaning of these figures in both texts is therefore the same. Isaiah 34 describes Idumea's irrecoverable ruin and gives a spectacle of God's vengeance to all succeeding ages. This is the essence of his figures when they are reduced to sober prose. A hell of woe as generally understood and believed is not described by them. Any one, it seems to us, must see this simply by reading the chapter. "The cormorant (pelican) and the bittern shall possess it; the owl also and the ravens shall dwell in it" (vs. 11). The popular mind never conceives of these birds being in hell, suffering eternal torment! "There shall the great

owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with his mate" (vs. 15). Owls, ravens, and vultures do not live in the popular hell; they do not make nests, lay eggs, and "hatch" them there! The orthodox mind could conceive how eggs might be cooked in the regions of the lost, but "hatched"—never! From his viewpoint the place is so hot that the mother bird's "shadow" would make no shade whatever for her little babes.

Now Isaiah 34 is the historic basis of Rev. 14:10,11. Idumea's judgment is a type of Babylon's when Jesus comes. Therefore we observe that as Isaiah did not describe the hell of popular conception by his poetic figures, neither does the gospel prophet. In John's smoke that ascends forever there are "fowls" and "horses" as well as men (Rev. 19:17,18), but even orthodoxy grants them exemption from eternal torture. Rev. 14:10,11 then is certainly not a description of the orthodox hell.

The pertinent question now presents itself as to what John really means by the smoke of torment ascending forever. The smoke ascends forever, you will notice, not the torment. Read Rev. 14:10,11; 18:20,21,24 and the entire 19th chapter and you will learn that at the return of Jesus Babylon (Rome) is swallowed up by a volcanic earthquake after the analogy of Num. 16:32. A mighty angel took a great millstone and cast it into the sea to show John how violently and suddenly Rome is to go down (Rev. 18:21). After going down in a volcano "her smoke rose up forever" amid the joyous alleluias of the redeemed (Rev. 19: 3). In this way "the beast was taken and with him the false prophet These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20). When Rome sinks into this volcanic abyss a "lake of fire" is formed; and as the "smoke ascends forever" from this lake, it ascends "in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of

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the Lamb" (Rev. 14:10), because when Christ comes all the holy angels come with him (Matt. 25:31). Smouldering Rome will be an "example" to sinners during the reign of Christ just as the Dead Sea has been a memorial of Sodom for centuries—a warning to all who live ungodly. It appears from Isa. 66:23,24 that the carcasses of transgressors will be monuments of God's wrath in the new earth, "an abhorring unto all flesh." It seems, then, that John, with admirable wisdom, combines past judgments with future ones; he uses judgments accomplished to illustrate those hereafter, using the same expressions to describe both. Temporal judgments are not mere types of the eternal: they are identical, the first often being an "example" of the second (Luke 13:3; 1 Cor. 10:9-11; Jude 7; 2 Pet. 2:6). To make these "examples" of temporal judgments consonant with endless misery is a task we leave in the hands of the advocates of eternal agony.

Destruction of the Devil, A Thousand Years After the Beast

When Christ comes he destroys both the beast and false prophet in a "lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20); the wicked also perish at the same time and in the same lake. Rome sinks in volcanic convulsions, which form the lake of fire that emits memorial smoke during the millennium. The lake of fire thus "prepared for the devil and his angels" is the "bottomless pit" in which the devil is bound during the thousand years (Rev. 20). The tenth verse of this chapter now becomes, in view of these facts, deeply significant: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet are." There is no Greek word for "are" in the text, and the translators have filled the hiatus with the wrong word. The beast and false prophet had been cast into this smoking lake, as you may see from Rev. 19:20. A millennium now elapses, the lake smoking and the fire

"prepared," and then the time comes for the devil to be cast into the same lake the beast and false prophet had perished in a thousand years before; therefore Rev. 20:10 is correctly translated: "And the devil that deceived them was cast into a lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet were cast." "Fire from God out of heaven" (vs. 9) is now added to the seething, smoking volcano of Rome, and all belligerents are electrocuted, "devoured"; "and the devil that deceived them was cast into a lake of fire and brimstone ('prepared for the devil and his angels'—the belligerents deceived by him), where the beast and false prophet (had been cast a thousand years before), and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever" (Rev. 20:9,10).

"Tormented" and "Forever"

Terms of Limited Time Lexically and Scripturally

The words "tormented" and "forever" in this passage have been made to do service for the cruel doctrine of eternal torment. Just a word or two about them in conclusion. "Torment" is a word of temporary duration, and is applied to things without life as to living things. The same Greek verb translated "torment" is used to describe the "tossing" of the boat in Matt. 14:24. In Heb. 11:37 Paul speaks of the ancient worthies "being destitute, afflicted, tormented": but he never dreamed of saying those men "of whom the world was not worthy" suffered, or would suffer, eternal torture. The word is plainly of limited duration.

The Greek word *alou*, translated "forever," and its adjective *alouos*, rendered "everlasting," is often used with a limited meaning. Neither of these words, of themselves, signify eternity. Stuart says of *alou*, page 15: "The classical sense of *alou* is (1) length or space of time, time of life, age of man, age considered as a space of time; (2) long time, eternity, long indefinite space of time. These are the usual significations given

by lexicographers." Clearly, then, *aión* may signify a short or long time, time or eternity. Bible usage sustains this indefinite sense of the word. In Matt. 13:39, 40 we read of *aión*, forever: "So will it be at the end of this forever (*aiónios*): the harvest is the end of this forever (*aiónios*)." The end of forever! Very unorthodox language, but it is biblical nevertheless.

"Tormented day and night forever and ever" in Rev. 20:10 is limited by John in several ways. In the first place, he says only "a little season" is meant by the phrase (vs. 3). Again he limits the torment by saying it lasts only while "day and night" continue to alternate. After seeing Christ enthroned on Mount Zion (Rev. 19: 1), Rome overthrown, the beast and false prophet destroyed (vs. 20), the reign of Christ and the saints one thousand years accomplished (Rev. 20:4), "a little season" of judgment after that expired (vs.3)—then he sees a new heaven and a new earth. "There shall be no night there" (Rev. 21:25). "It shall be one day (continually) . . . not day nor night (alternating as now): but it shall come to pass, that at evening time (when usually darkness enshrouds the earth) it shall be light" (Zech. 14:7). The Lord be praised, there shall then be no night, smoke, torment, fire, brimstone, lake of fire, death, hell, tears, sorrow, nor crying, "neither shall there be any more pain: for the (se) former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new" (Rev. 21:4, 5).

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