

issue 50
SEP
2011

from death to life in 5.24



Is the doctrine of hell the elephant in the living room?

life · death · resurrection · eternal destinies · bible teaching

In This Issue:

Welcome to Issue 50.

On page 1, we have republished Warren Prestidge's article *The Truth About Hell* from NZ Baptist, a response to a panel that recently met at Carey Baptist College to debate Rob Bell's book *Love Wins*. (See Iss 49 for a review of *Love Wins*). On page 5 you will find a review of *Erasing Hell* by Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle, which they wrote to defend the traditional view of hell.

I would like to recommend *Solving the Problem of Hell* by Jefferson Vann on page 9. And we continue our series *What Happens when we die* by Armand Newrick on page 18.

Tarnya Burge *co-editor*

PROJECT 2011/2012

GEN. 12:1

Go forth from your country
and from your relatives
and from your father's house
to Thailand, which I will show you

www.acmissionz.org.nz **SHORT TERM MISSION**

The advertisement features a background map of Thailand with labels for various cities and regions. The text is overlaid on the map, with 'Thailand' underlined in red. The top section has a blue background with 'PROJECT' in white and '2011/2012' in red. The middle section has a white background with 'GEN. 12:1' in large, bold, black letters with a white outline. The bottom section has a blue background with the text in white and red.

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THE TRUTH ABOUT HELL

by Warren Prestidge ¹

On 19 May I attended “*Conversations Around Love Wins*”, at Carey Baptist College. A panel of three debated matters raised by popular Christian communicator Rob Bell in his recent book, *Love Wins*, with contributions from the floor. I applaud Carey for hosting this timely discussion about very significant issues of Christian faith and practice.

One issue in particular was highlighted, both in the way the event was advertised and during the course of the evening: the issue of hell. Indeed, one contributor from the floor described the doctrine of hell as “the elephant in the living room”, which is rarely faced but which we cannot afford to leave unexamined! Apparently both Rob Bell and Carey agree!

So do I. Why so? We cannot proclaim Christ as Saviour, unless we talk about what it is He saves us from. The Bible and Christian tradition both talk about that in terms of “hell” (among many other things). Yet those interpretations of “hell” which predominate in Christian tradition are extremely difficult to square either with the Gospel itself, the Gospel of a God of love and justice, or with any human sense of right and wrong. The result is that, on the one hand most Christians are reluctant to speak much at all of final judgment, while on the other hand biblical Christian faith is totally discredited in the eyes of a great many unsaved.

The good news is, however, is that “hell” is not, in reality, what Christian tradition has made it. Surely, as Baptists, we are used to the fact that Christian tradition does sometimes get it wrong. After all, we have discovered that baptism is not for infants, as traditionally taught and practised, but for believers! Well, “hell” is not a place or state



of everlasting suffering, whether physical or psychological or spiritual or all three. “Hell” is but one of many ways in which the Bible refers to the final fate of those who reject, or are rejected by, God. Most commonly the Bible refers to their fate, quite literally, as either “death” or “destruction”. “Hell” is another way of referring to the same reality: destruction,

As Baptists¹, we are surely familiar with the need to judge tradition in the light of Scripture. Our whole movement is based on this principle. So it is with “hell”. The truth about hell is not to be found in this or that ideology current in Jesus’ day. Actually there were almost as many views then as there are today and Jesus Himself taught us to beware of those who “make void the word of God” for the sake of tradition (Matthew 15:6). Nor is the truth about hell to be sought in the tradition of this or that church, let alone in the experiences of people who claim to have been granted visions of the hereafter. The matter is too important to settle by speculation or surmise. The truth about hell is to be sought in the Bible alone.

Actually it is Jesus Himself who

speaks most often of “hell”. What does He say? In Matthew 25:46, He says that the rejected will “go away into eternal punishment”. Both final destruction and everlasting suffering are “eternal punishments” and so this statement does not settle what kind of punishment is involved. That question has already been settled by Jesus earlier. In Matthew 10:28 we read:

Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

The punishment of hell is not everlasting suffering, but destruction, a comprehensive destruction of the whole person, of the “soul” as well as the “body”.

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato taught that the “soul” cannot be destroyed and Christian tradition has largely followed him in that view. That sounds fine, until you realise that, logically, this means lost “souls” must suffer forever. Our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed the contrary. God can destroy us, totally! Therefore hell, thankfully, does not have to be a state or place of everlasting torment – and it isn’t. It is the means whereby, after judgment, God

will put out of existence (“annihilate”) those who have rejected Him.

Actually the word “hell” is used in Scripture in only a handful of other places, all in the Gospels. In Mark 9:48, Jesus describes it as a place “where their worm never dies and the fire is never quenched”. Is this about everlasting suffering? Not at all. Jesus is merely quoting, and endorsing, Isaiah 66:24, and this text explicitly speaks of the destruction of “dead bodies”, not the torture of everlasting souls! The references to undying worms and unquenchable fire merely characterise this destruction as total and irreversible: worm and fire cannot be prevented from completing their work. Jesus does not add a single syllable beyond this Old Testament foundation. If only we would follow His ex-

God’s judgment is death and destruction, not eternal torment. Our favourite Gospel texts tell us this! In John 3:16, the alternative to “eternal life” is to “perish”. In Romans 6:23, “the wages of sin is death”, not everlasting suffering. All through the Bible, from Genesis 2:15-16 to Revelation 21:6-8, the great alternatives are life and death. After all, only in and through God can we live. If we have finally rejected God, or God has rejected us, what is left but to perish? As I John 5:12 says:

Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

The judgment of God is dreadful, but it is just and it makes sense. It is, in fact, what we choose, when we choose against God: “All who hate me love death” (Proverbs 8:36).

I have presented a thorough biblical case for “annihilation” in my book, *Life, Death and Destiny*, available from Resurrection Publishing (email: respublishing@slingshot.co.nz) or from [Amazon](#) (*Life, Death and Destiny* by Warren Prestidge) or from www.lulu.com. Regrettably there is still a tendency to dismiss the case against eternal torment as biblically uninformed. My book



ample!

shows otherwise. The freedom to read and interpret Scripture for oneself, within agreed evangelical limits, is another fundamental Baptist¹ principle. I am perfectly willing to fellowship and work with people who continue to believe in eternal torment. However, by the same token, it really is high time to re-examine the traditionalist view thoroughly in the light of Scripture alone. At least Rob Bell, and Carey, have raised the issue once again. Thank you!

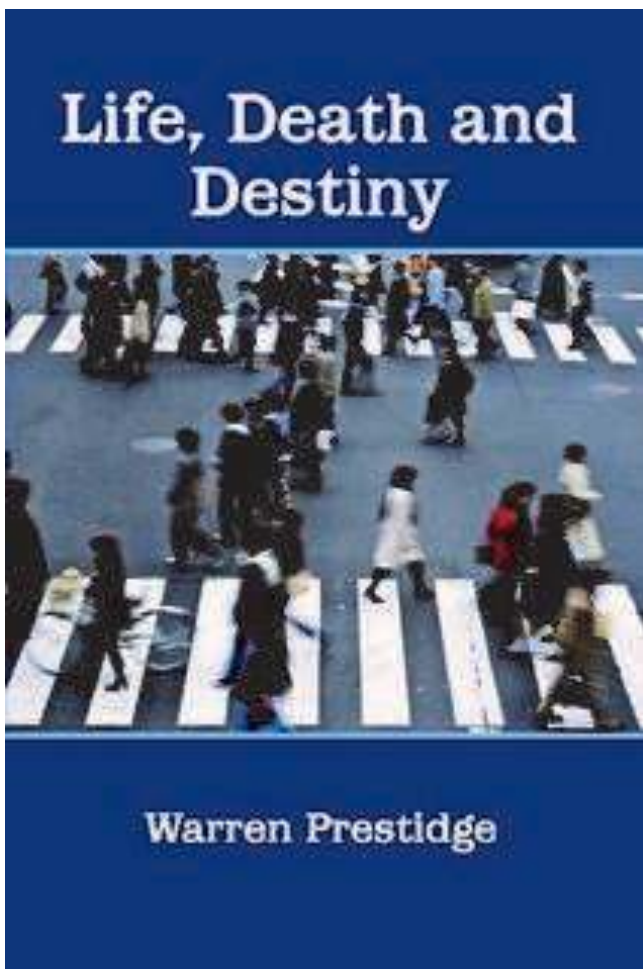
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¹ First published in NZ Baptist Vol 127 No.7 August 2011. Also available online www.baptist.org.nz/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2300:explore-the-



[truth-about-hell&catid=186:general-opinion&Itemid=246](http://www.truth-about-hell.com/catid=186:general-opinion&Itemid=246)

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From Off the Shelf

Book Review :Erasing Hell by Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle ¹

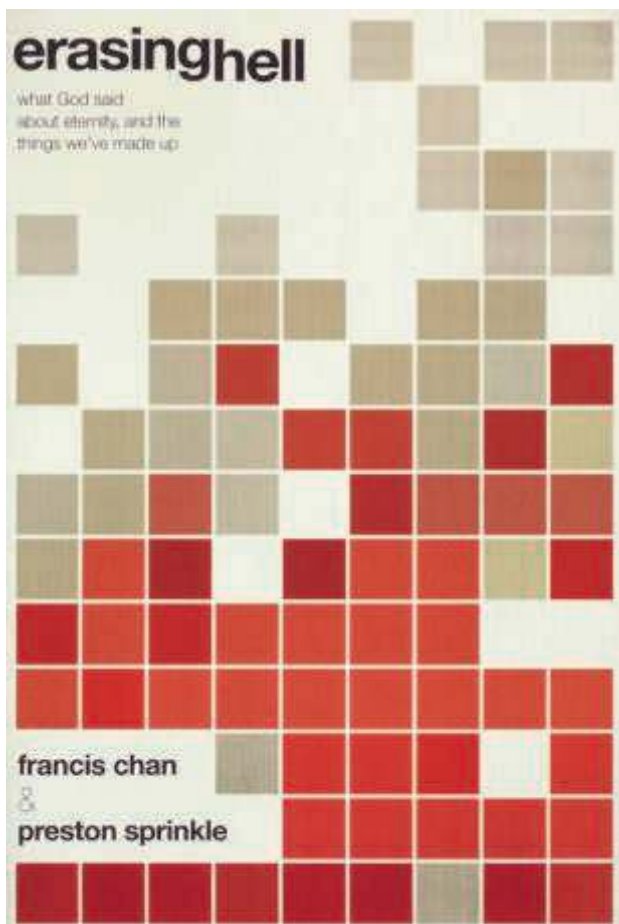
Reviewed by Jefferson Vann

Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle have joined forces to produce a contemporary book on hell that not only speaks to the hearts of today's evangelicals, but engages our minds as well. Although admitting a reluctance to take up the subject, their approach flows from people who are serious about it, and

who want to faithfully represent what the Bible says about it. They did not want to “get so lost in deciphering” and “forget to tremble” (p87).

The title is a bit misleading – since the authors have no intention of actually erasing hell – or letting their readers forget it. Instead, the title speaks to the almost universal reluctance that modern humanity has of even thinking about the possibility of divine punishment. Most of us “would love to erase hell from the pages of Scripture” (p13), but the references to final punishment are there, nonetheless.

Some have tried to erase hell by suggesting that it is merely a temporary phenomenon – that eventually all nonbelievers will be restored and God's love will finally win the day. The problem is, nothing in Scripture “suggests that there's hope on the other



side of the lake (of fire)” (p33).



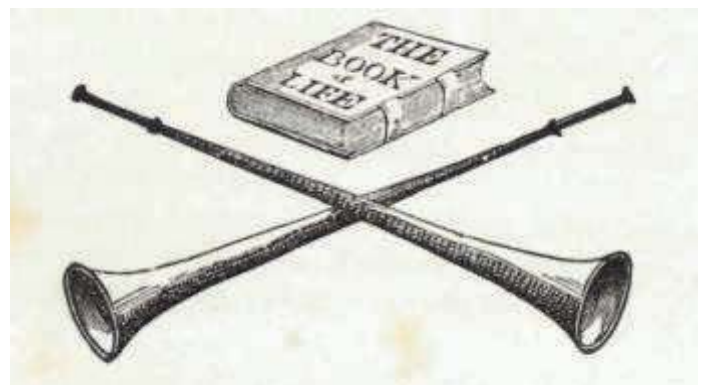
The book prescribes a solution to our problems with hell – that we wise up to the fact that God is sovereign, and he is going to punish the lost so we might as well accept it. He is the potter, we are the clay. If he chooses not to save everyone, his love still wins, because his love is intrinsic. It is not defined by what we might expect it to do. The book defends God and hell, and encourages its readers to accept both as reality.

With one exception, that reality is exactly the teachings of popular Christianity that Rob Bell reacted so strongly against.² Chan and Sprinkler defend what the modern universalist might call the traditional view of hell – as a place where God will torment unbelievers perpetually for all eternity. The only exception is that

for Chan and Sprinkler, hell takes place after the final judgment, not immediately after death. They rightly conclude that the intermediate state is “where the wicked await their judgment” (p156). What they do not admit is that it (sheol/hades) is also where the righteous await resurrection, and that for both it is a state of unconsciousness the Bible calls sleep.

No, Chan and Sprinkler will not erase hell. They are uncomfortable with the thought of people suffering for eternity, but conclude that they should not “erase God’s revealed plan of punishment because it doesn’t sit well with” them (p135).

The book avoids any discussion of the essential nature of humanity, but proceeds from the same presuppositions regarding that question that Rob Bell did – that human souls are indestructible. This is seen in the explanation of Matthew 25:46,



where Jesus speaks of the two destinies. The book argues that “Because the life in this age will never end, given the parallel, it also seems that the punishment in this age will never end” (p85). If the authors had not already concluded that both destinies involve life, they could perhaps see that Jesus is not giving a description of two parallel destinies, but contrasting two permanent destinies, where only one involves life. The punishment is not life, but death, and it is just as permanent (Gk. *aionios*) as the believer’s life.³



Since they hold this presupposition of innate immortality, although the authors quote numerous texts of Scripture

where hell is described as destruction (pp26-29, 80, 101-102, 109-111, 130), they conclude that this cannot be taken literally in any of them. They also conclude that the fire of hell is not a literal fire (p154), and that the second death will not be a literal death (pp106-107). Neither of those conclusions can be established by exegesis of the texts themselves. They are all based on the presupposition of the innate immortality of the soul – a doctrine borrowed from paganism and infused into Christian thought by syncretism.

For those convinced that humans already have eternal life, Erasing Hell might achieve its purpose: to encourage them to accept the traditional notion of hell as God’s best — even if it is repugnant to them. Chan admits that he does not feel that God is doing right by tormenting people for eternity, but adds “Maybe someday I will stand in complete agreement with (God), but for now I attribute the discrepancy to an underdeveloped sense of justice on my part” (p141).

For me, the problem is not with God’s justice. If God created human beings immortal, his justice demands that they spend eternity suffering for their rejection of him. But that is just it. The Bible

insists that humanity lost its chance at immortality in the garden of Eden. Since then, the only hope for anyone to live forever is found in Christ. Hell is designed for those outside of Christ. They have nothing immortal that would burn forever if thrown into a lake of fire. The fires of Hell will do what God says they will do. They will destroy those thrown into



them, body and soul.⁴

This is both God's justice and his love, because his new creation will be purged of all sin and evil. There will be no hell existing perpetually beside the kingdom. Christ will destroy all of God's enemies.⁵ That is the

biblical hell. It ends God's judgment and makes room for the eternal kingdom of life and love. That event is absolutely essential to God's plan in history. No one should want to erase it. ■

References

¹ *Erasing Hell* by Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle (Colorado Springs, Colorado: David C. Cook, 2011) Kindle edition.

² Rob Bell, *LOVE WINS: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*. (Robert H. Bell, Jr. Trust, 2011).

³ For more on the meaning of *aionios*, see my article "Solving the Problem of Hell." <http://www.afterlife.co.nz/2011/theology/annihilationism/solving-the-problem-of-hell-by-jefferson-vann/>

⁴ Matthew 10:28. For more on this fate, see Edward Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, third edition. (Eugene Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011).

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

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Solving the Problem of Hell

by Jefferson Vann

Our ancestors' rebellion in Eden has changed humanity from what God originally intended. Because of that rebellion, humanity has inherited a sinful inclination that devastates all our attempts at being good and doing good things. We are tainted with evil, depraved to the core. Legally, we stand condemned before God, so that even our obedience is never enough to justify us. We all sin in so many ways and so many times throughout our lives that destruction in Gehenna hell is almost the only solution for a just God to apply to the problem of us.

Hell

Every life so corrupted by the initial rebellion of Adam – so separated from God by its inherently selfish sinful inclination – deserves the punishment that God warns us of in the Bible. Unfortunately, there has been so much unbiblical tradition added to what the scripture says about that punishment that the term “hell” has ceased to be a helpful word to describe it. A better term – the one Jesus used – is *Gehenna*. Unlike the hell of tradition, this hell does not begin at death, but begins on judg-

ment day at the end of the age. Also, unlike the hell of tradition, this hell is not a place for the torment of disembodied spirits, but is the place for the punishment and destruction of the whole person – body and spirit.



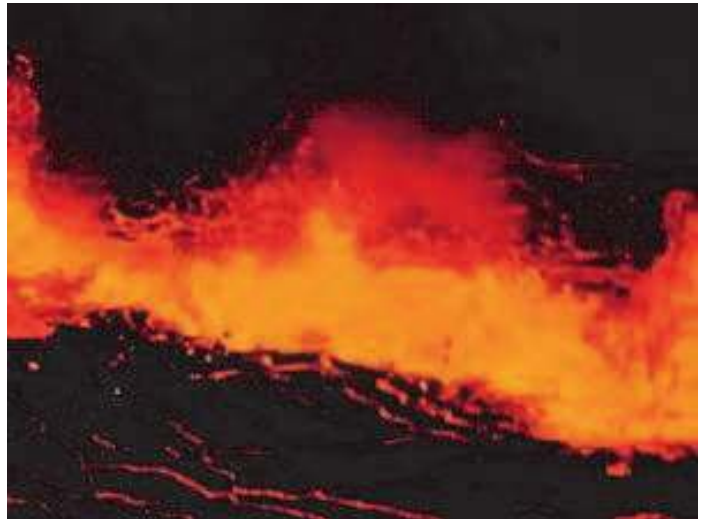
Originally designating a valley near Jerusalem where garbage was burned, Gehenna for Jesus is a place where every sin – no matter how small it might seem – counts. It is an event and a place for the punishment of every act of violence. It is also a place for the punishment of every careless thought and word of violence. Jesus said “everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment ... and

whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire."¹ The reality of hell should make us careful about how we express our emotions.

Gehenna will also punish all those who have followed false teachers, and willfully passed on their deceptions. This idea makes modern humanity a little less comfortable, because it implies that humans are held accountable for the lies they are told or believe as well as the lies they tell. But Jesus clearly taught that the religious leaders of his day were going to Gehenna, and taking with them all of their converts. He called the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, because they "travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, (they) make him twice as much a child of hell as (them) selves."² The reality of Gehenna should make us all wary of accepting any "new" doctrine.

The scribes and Pharisees were considered the super-spiritual of their day. If anyone envisioned what a holy man looked like, the appearance would be similar to that of a scribe (scripture expert) or Pharisee (law expert). Yet Jesus detected an inner spiritual defilement in these religious leaders. He

said they "outwardly appear righteous to others, but within (they) are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."³ He warned them by saying "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?"⁴ The reality of Gehenna should make us all yearn for genuineness in our relationship to God and obedience to his



word.

The hell of tradition is a different matter. Rather than teaching that hell is a place where sin is dealt with ultimately by God, tradition teaches a hell that is a sort of repository where God puts all those pesky sinners that he could not cure. It is a place of punishment and confinement, but not destruction. Having bought into the Greek concept of the immortality of the human soul, tradition is not in a place where it can accept what Jesus literally says

about Gehenna. For Jesus, the judgment will take place not during the intermediate state (between death and the resurrection), but “on the last day.”⁵

That “last day” will be truly the last day for all sinners, because they will be raised not for life but for condemnation,⁶ punishment (including torment) appropriate for each of their personal sins,⁷ and then destruction. Yes, destruction. God has not created anything that he cannot destroy. Jesus said that he “can destroy both soul and body in hell.”⁸ Jesus compared the Day of Judgment to the day the world was destroyed by Noah’s flood,⁹ and the day the people of Sodom were destroyed by fire.¹⁰ In calling people to himself, he urged them to take the narrow gate which leads to life, not the broad gate, which leads to destruction.¹¹

Gehenna is a place for that destruction of both soul and body. That is why Jesus said “If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into

hell.”¹²

Gehenna is not a place known for life, but death. Those who suffer on judgment day will suffer for only as long as it takes to punish them for their sins, and then they will experience the same reality as anything else that is thrown into fire: they will die. The redeemed who are not condemned to Gehenna are said to “enter life.” But those condemned to Gehenna have entered death. That is why Jesus said “if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire.”¹³

Destruction in Gehenna hell is almost the only solution for a just God to apply to the problem of sinful us. Thankfully, there is another solution. Since sin is so pervasive, and its consequences in our lives so comprehensive – God has provided in salvation a solution which touches upon every problem that sin has caused for his creatures. That solution is the gospel, which explains what Christ did for us (substitutionary atonement), and what he will do (resurrection and glorification).

Substitutionary Atonement

The apostle Paul put forth an axiom which applies to every as-

pect of sin discussed. He said “the wages of sin is death.”¹⁴ Carried to its logical conclusion, that axiom would place every human being who has ever lived in the fires of Gehenna for a just destruction. Fortunately, there is a “but” in Paul’s statement: “but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” The gospel tells us that Christ’s death on the cross can serve as a substitute punishment for the personal sins of everyone who turns to him in faith.

This substitutionary atonement is God’s idea. It is a free gift from a loving God who is determined to destroy all sin, but does not want to depopulate his universe in doing so. It is a manifestation of God’s attribute of grace. It is also a manifestation of his attribute of justice, since the punishment and death due us for our sins has been meted out on the substitute. The lesson Abraham learned on Mt. Moriah was that God will provide.¹⁵ In that case, he provided a ram, whose head was caught in thorns. That ram served as a substitute for Abraham’s son, Isaac. The event prefigured another substitute God provided, when he allowed his own son to wear a crown of thorns, suffer punishment he did not deserve, and die. The wages of our sin was

his death on the cross.

Resurrection

Since the wages of sin is death, the countryside of every country on this planet is littered with cemeteries. The sin imputed to all humanity as a result of Adam and Eve’s rebellion has resulted in just what God predicted: mortality and eventual – inevitable death. God offers a solution to this problem as well. He cannot simply reverse the curse and make it so that human beings will never die. He will not undo his just penalty. Instead, he offers a resurrection unto eternal life at Christ’s return.

This solution is once again a miraculous combination of God’s justice and his grace. His just punishment of mortality and eventual death still reigns. The cemeteries are still being filled. But the free gift of God is eternal life. This life will begin with a resurrection unto



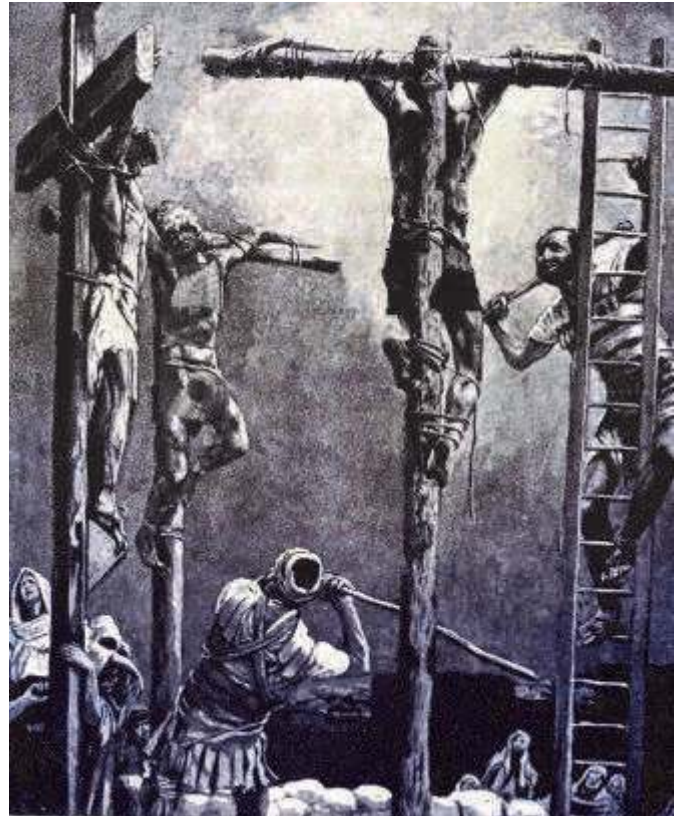
eternal, immortal life. It is the believer's inheritance.¹⁶ Peter says that God "has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."¹⁷ Resurrection life is God's solution to the problem of imputed sin, which keeps us heading to the grave.

Glorification

The axiom "the wages of sin is death" is also true spiritually. Our inherited sin has resulted in spiritual death. We not only experience death because of God's justice, we also have died to his justice (and his grace too). Paul described this dilemma well: "For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"¹⁸ As much as we might want to do the right thing, spiritual death causes us to continue

to sin.

God has provided a solution for this sin-reality as well. For every believer who trusts in Christ for his justification, God initiates through his Holy Spirit a process



that will eventually lead to glorification – a complete restoration to a sinless state. This is a work of God from start to finish. Paul says "those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."¹⁹ He speaks of glorification as a past tense event because he is emphasizing that it is a work of God.

In the present, however, most of us do not feel all that glorified yet. Our lives are a struggle where we keep getting in the way of the Holy Spirit as he seeks to sanctify us more and more. In fact, if anyone ever starts boasting that she has arrived and no longer sins, she is calling God a liar, and his word is not in her.²⁰ But we can look forward to more and more victories over sin as we yield to the Holy Spirit. He is the seal and guarantee of the glorified life that awaits us.²¹

In this life, believers do not have to experience the wages of spiritual death. This is true because “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh (sinful inclination) with its passions and desires.”²² We have been spiritually resurrected. Our baptism symbolizes this truth. Paul says “we were buried ... with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”²³ Our death to sin allows Christ to live his resurrected life through us. This allows us to experience a glimpse of the glorified life now – in victory over sin.

The only way to solve the problem of the hell of destruction we all deserve is to trust in Christ for salva-

tion now. All who do so will receive forgiveness from sins now, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives leading to their resurrection and glorification at Christ’s return. All others will face hell, which the Bible calls the second death. That hell is permanent. There will be no coming back, and no second chance. For sinners today, Christ is the only way to avoid destruction in hell tomorrow.

Recently, pastor Rob Bell has suggested that God’s love will eventually restore even those who are thrown into hell itself. In his bestselling book, *Love Wins*, Bell speaks of “a long tradition of Christians who believe that God will ultimately restore everything and everybody”²⁴ – even those he has thrown into hell. That long standing tradition was the belief in purgatory. It was based on another long tradition in the church – the doctrine of the immortality of souls. The reasoning was that since souls burning in hell will be alive for eternity, there is a chance that God’s mercy might eventually restore them. Bell suggests that this is God’s plan – to eventually restore all to himself and through that resto-

ration his love will win over his wrath.

Bell's solution to the problem of hell has much appeal to today's society, just as the invented doctrine of purgatory did in the dark ages. It allows humanity to continue to reject Christ – the only solution God offers – and still come out alive. Bell's problem with the traditional hell is that in it God never gets what he wants. He points out two conflicting facts: “ ‘that God is mighty, powerful, and “in control” and that billions of people will spend forever apart from this God, who is their creator, even though it's written in the Bible that “God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2). So does God get what God wants?’”²⁵

Bell's solution is to suggest what pagan Christianity did: that Hell is not permanent.

But everything the Bible says about hell suggests otherwise. Hell is a second death from which there is no resurrection. The first death is temporary, because all will be raised from it to stand before God on Judgment Day. Only those whose names are on the Lamb's book of life will be rescued from that second death.²⁶ Those who are not listed as having been saved

will perish,²⁷ be destroyed,²⁸ and be burned up.²⁹

This destruction is permanent. The New Testament had many ways of describing something that is permanent. It could talk about things that remain after other things disintegrate. In such cases it would use the Greek verb *meno*. Paul said that the new covenant has more glory than the old, because the new covenant remains (*meno*), while the old covenant was being brought to an end.³⁰

Sometimes a word indicating the impossibility of destruction would be used of permanent things. Examples include the adjective *afthartos* (imperishable)³¹ and the noun *athanasia* (immortality).³² These words are never used to describe the people in hell. They are only used of God, and of those who come to Christ and so never see hell.

The word the New Testament uses of hell that causes the most confusion is the adjective *aionios*, usually translated eternal. The English word eternal suggests a process that goes on forever. The way the New Testament uses the word, it usually depicts something that is permanent in contrast with things that are tempo-

rary.

Notice, for example how the New Testament uses *aionios* to compare some things that were permanent with some things that were temporary:

- the permanent sin which can never be forgiven (Mark 3:29).
- the permanent weight of glory compared with our slight momentary affliction (2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 5:10).
- the permanent things that are unseen compared to the transient things that are seen (2 Corinthians 4:18).
- the permanent house (body) in the heavens compared to our temporary tent (body) on earth (2 Corinthians 5:1).
- the permanent destruction the lost will face at Christ's return (2 Thessalonians 1:9).
- the permanent comfort and good hope we have through God's grace (2 Thessalonians 2:16).
- the permanent glory that accompanies salvation in Christ (2 Timothy 2:10).
- Philemon's permanent return to Colossae, after being parted from them for a while (Philemon 1:15).
- The permanent salvation made possible by Jesus, our great high priest (Hebrews 5:9).
- The permanent judgment that

will take place after the resurrection of the dead (Hebrews 6:2).

- The permanent redemption secured by Christ's sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary (Hebrews 9:12).
- the permanent covenant made possible by the shedding of the blood of Christ (Hebrews 13:20).
- entrance into the permanent kingdom provided for all those who make their calling and election sure (2 Peter 1:10-11).

Use of this adjective was never intended to negate the concepts of destruction and coming to an end already inherent in the idea of hell. The adjective *aionios* was used to show that the event of hell could not be reversed. Sadly, this reversal is exactly what Bell is suggesting. He attempts to solve the problem of hell by making it a temporary phenomenon.

God's justice demands a hell that is hot enough to destroy, and to do so permanently. The problem of hell cannot be solved until hell itself is destroyed. Paul envisioned a reign of Christ which would destroy all his enemies, including death itself. Death would be the last enemy destroyed.³³ That means all

other enemies will be destroyed – not punished for a while and then restored. Sadly, there will probably be billions in that number. Jesus said “the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.”³⁴ That is a terrible tragedy, but pretending that it will not be so is not going to help.

We should question the traditional view of hell (that of unending torment), because it is wrong. But suggesting that God is not serious when he warns people of their impending destruction is also wrong. Those who know about God’s grace, and his limited time offer of eternal life through Christ should be finding fresh new ways of proclaiming that truth to this generation on its way to hell. The gospel is the only solution to the problem of hell. ■

References

- ¹Matt. 5:22.
²Matt. 23:15.
³Matt. 23:28.
⁴Matt. 23:33.
⁵John 12:48.
⁶Matt. 12:37; Mark 12:40; 16:16; Luke 20:47; James 5:12; 2 Pet. 2:3.
⁷Rev. 20:13.
⁸Matt. 10:28.
⁹Luke 17:27.
¹⁰Luke 17:29.
¹¹Matt. 7:13-14.

¹²Matt. 5:29-30.

¹³Matt. 18:9.

¹⁴Rom. 6:23.

¹⁵Gen. 22.

¹⁶Gal. 3:18; Eph. 1:11,14,18; 5:5; Col. 1:12; 3:24; Heb. 9:15.

¹⁷1 Pet. 1:3-5.

¹⁸Rom. 7:22-24.

¹⁹Rom. 8:30.

²¹1 John 1:10.

²²2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:13-14.

²³Gal. 5:24.

²⁴Rom. 6:4.

²⁵Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived
Bell,97.

²⁶Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27.

²⁷Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:16; 10:28; Acts 8:20; 13:41; Romans 2:12; 2 Pet. 3:9.

²⁸Matthew 7:13; 22:7; Luke 17:27, 29; Acts 3:23; Romans 9:22; 1 Cor. 8:11; 10:9f; 15:26; Philippians 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; Heb. 10:39; 2 Pet. 2:12; 3:7.

²⁹Malachi 4:1, 2 Peter 2:6; Jude 7.

³⁰2 Cor. 3:11.

³¹Mark 16:8; Rom. 1:23; 1 Cor. 9:25; 15:52; 1 Tim. 1:17; 1 Pet. 1:4, 23; 3:4.

³²1 Cor. 15:53f; 1 Tim. 6:16.

³³1 Cor. 15:26.

³⁴Matthew 7:13.

What Happens when we die:

Part One (ii)

By Armand Newrick

(continued from Iss 49)

Man became a Living Soul

We read in Genesis 2:7 that when God breathed, into the nostrils of the dust that he had formed into a man, the “breath of life” (spirit Ruach) man became a “living being” (NIV). In the AV it says man became a “living soul”. “Ah ha the “soul” is immortal then and it is that which lives on consciously beyond death!” No read it again! The combination of dust and spirit results in life. Therefore



when the spirit is removed from the dust the human ceases to be a “living soul”. The term “soul”, or “being” in my NIV, is translated from the Hebrew word Nephesh. This word is used 755 times throughout the OT.

Although traditionally thought to be that which distinguished human beings from the animals, and the immortal bit that survives death, it is in fact the exact same word used of animals as living creatures. Where in Gen 1:21 we read of the “great creatures of the sea” the word “creature” is Nephesh as used exactly of humans. The word shows up again and again to describe animal creatures; e.g. Gen 2:19; 9:10, 12, 15, 16.

Human beings are not distinguished from animals as having “souls”. All living creatures are defined as “souls”! The Hebrew OT concept of “soul” is quite different from what we have come to define as a soul in western thought.

It could be said, therefore, that

the term “soul” means a living breathing creature combining both dust and spirit. However, this is too simplistic! The word Nephesh is used contextually in some 14 different ways throughout the OT. For example in Genesis 34:3 it is used of an emotional attachment of the heart. Although used in some 14 different ways never once in its 754 uses is it used of some immortal subsistent phantom that is contained in a body and released at the point of death! In fact the OT speaks plainly against such a false notion! In Ezekiel 18:4 we read “The soul

that sins; it shall surely die.” In Leviticus 18:29 any “soul” (Nephesh) that defies God’s commands shall be “cut off” from the people; in other words put to death. Souls can be killed!

Well maybe neither “spirit” or “soul” is the part that leaves the body and lives on consciously in an afterlife. Surely when a person dies they go to either “heaven” or “hell” in the form of some sort of indestructible personality as tradition has informed us! What does it mean when we read many times of the ancients being “gathered to their fathers” when they die? Does this mean more than the cemetery?

The word heaven (although having more than one Hebrew word translated as such) is used 318 times in the AV. Never once is a human being spoken of as going there at death; or ever for that matter! The closest we get to such an idea is in Proverbs 30:4 where we read “Who has gone up to heaven and come down?” Paul in Ephesians 4:7-10 alludes to this quote to define the unique nature of Jesus Christ who has been resurrected from the grave and ascended to heaven to come again one day.

The AV uses the word “hell”; or



Sheol , 31 times so maybe here we're in luck in supposing that people go somewhere at the point of death in the OT. Never once in my NIV does the OT throughout use the word "hell". Why is that; because it rightly translates Sheol as the "grave" and not as "hell". On this point the AV is misleading because of the preconceived ideas attached to the word "hell". Traditional notions are powerful and very difficult to overturn in people's minds even though all the evidence might be brought to bear on the subject; don't worry I understand this.

Conclusion

When God said the day you eat of it you will surely die (Gen 2:17) the reason that Adam and Eve did not return to the dust from which they were formed was not because God meant "spiritual death" in the sense that the human spirit was no longer connected to God as some have tried to argue. This is simply nonsense! Adam and Eve did not die that very day, which meant that the "breath of life" would be removed from the dust body and the person would cease to be a living soul, because, as the original act of God's grace He sacrificed innocent animals to death in Adam and Eve's place.

Why did God do this – he did this in order to cover their nakedness and in so doing he extended the existence of the human race to continue to procreate and fill the earth in order that God could work out His masterly redemptive plan for both humanity and the whole of creation. The fact that Jesus Christ himself followed this original pattern of becoming an innocent sacrifice for humanity is significant in light of the approach of Easter and in plumbing the real significance of the empty tomb.

The good." ■



Armand Newrick has had a keen interest in theology since his teenage conversion (See Issue 30) and came to the conditionalist position about eight years into his walk with the Lord. He is married to Suzanne and they have two children Daniel and Emma

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1. We believe in God and His one and only Son, Jesus the Christ. Heb. 11:6; John 14:1; 3:16; 20:31; Mat. 16:16.
2. We believe in the Holy Spirit. 2Pet. 1:21; 1Cor. 6:19; Jude 20; Eph. 3:5.
3. We believe that Jesus died for us and gave himself a ransom for all. Rom. 5:8; 1Cor. 15:3; 1Tim. 2:6.
4. We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead; that by resurrection He became Lord of both the dead and the living, and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep; and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Rom. 10:9; 14:9; 1Cor. 15:20; John 3:16.
5. We believe that baptism is commanded by Christ, was practiced by His Apostles, and is taught in the New Testament. Mat. 28:18,19; Acts 8:12,38.
6. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2Tim. 3:16,17.
7. We believe that human beings are by nature mortal. Gen. 2:7; 3:19; 1Tim. 6:16; 2Tim. 1:10; Rom. 2:6-7.
8. We believe that human beings in death are unconscious. Psa. 6:5; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5,10. This is likened to "sleep". Job 14:12; Psa. 13:3; Jer. 51:39; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11-14; 1Cor. 15:51.
9. We believe that immortality is obtained only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 1Cor. 15:21-23; 2Tim. 4:7-8; 1John 5:9-12.
10. We believe that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, to be followed by the Judgment. Acts 24:15; John 5:25,28,29; Rev. 20:12,13.
11. We believe that evil and evil-doers shall be finally destroyed. Psa. 145:20; Mat. 10:28 Rom. 6:21; Phil. 3:19; Heb. 2:14; 1John 3:8; Rev. 22:3.
12. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Acts 1:11; John 14:3; 1Thes. 4:16.