

The Punishment Of The Wicked

FINGER POST No. 23

1. Will there be a resurrection of the wicked to suffer punishment?

ANSWER: Yes: for it is written, "There shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15); and "they that are in the graves . . . shall come forth; . . . they that have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:29).

2. Will all the unworthy of mankind rise from the dead to suffer punishment?

ANSWER: NO: for it is written of some, "They are dead, they shall not live: they are deceased, they shall not rise: thou hast visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory perish" (Isa. 26:13-14). "Like sheep they are laid in the grave: death shall feed on them ... He shall go to the generation of his fathers: they shall NEVER SEE LIGHT. Man that is in honour and understandeth not is like the beasts that perish" (Psa. 49:14-20).

3. Who are they that will never come to life again, but pass away as though they had not been?

ANSWER: Those who are in ignorance of the Gospel of Christ, and undeveloped children: for thus it is written: "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead" (Prov. 21:16). "Oh that I had given up the ghost (at birth), and no eye had seen me: I should have been as though I had not been. I should have been carried from the womb to the grave" (Job 10:19; 3:11-16).

4. Why will such never see the light of resurrection?

ANSWER: Because they are not responsible. It requires the light of knowledge to make men responsible; for so it is written: "This is the (ground of) condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light" (John 3:19). When men are blind, or ignorant of the word, they have no sin to be punished for: but at the same time, they are not forgiven and justified men, and unless they become so by learning and repenting, they cannot be saved for eternal life (John 9:41; 15:22, 24; 1 John 5:12, 13; John 11:25).

5. What will become of that portion of the wicked who are responsible, and who will come forth at the resurrection for punishment?

ANSWER: They will appear before Christ to give account: in his presence, they will be denied before the accepted righteous, and the attendant company of the angels: and will be commanded to depart, which they will do with shame and anguish, "weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth". All this is written in many parts. Paul says, "For we must all

appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive . . . according to that he hath done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Concerning those whose account is bad, Jesus says, "Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. 7:23.) "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out" (Luke 13:28).

6. But what will become of them after they depart? Will they live for ever in a state of suffering?

ANSWER: No: they will live as long in a state of suffering as the justice of their cases shall severally call for; but in every case, sooner or later, death by destruction is their final lot. Their whole experience, from their re-emergence from the grave to their ignominious return to death, is their punishment; when complete, it will be everlasting, and therefore "everlasting punishment", but not "eternal torment". Because they have died once before, their judicial death at the resurrection is called the "second death".

The passages that teach this are numerous. Jesus speaks of degrees of punishment in saying that the servant which knew his lord's will, and did it not, "shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:47-48). As to the final result of the punishment, we are told of the unhappy subjects thereof that "they shall die" (Rom. 8:13); "reap corruption" (Gal. 6:8); be destroyed (Psa. 73:27; 145:20); be burnt up, leaving neither root nor branch (Mal. 4:1); consume away into smoke (Psa. 37); suffer everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord (2 Thess. 1:9); disappear like a whirlwind (Prov. 10:25) in the judgment and fiery indignation that will devour the adversary (Heb. 10:26-28).

7. But what are we to understand by Gehenna?

ANSWER: It is the name of a valley in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, where, Isaiah informs us, the carcasses of the rejected will be consumed after the judgment (Isa. 66:20-24). It was used for judicial purposes in old times, and will be so again on a larger scale when the dreadful scenes of Zech. 14:12 are enacted. This Gehenna is a place where fire will be kindled: but it is not the hell of popular belief, for it is a place on earth for carcasses, and the fire will at last burn out, and the place itself be cleansed and made holy (Jer. 31:40).