Supplement to Revelation Bible Study
Annihilation or Eternal Punishment? part 2
(part 1 was an additional Supplement which was given with Chapter 9)

This is from Answers in Genesis, which began in 1994, as *an apologetics ministry, dedicated to helping Christians defend their faith and proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ*. You are familiar with the ***Ark Enounter*** and ***Creation Museum,*** to that end. For further information about this excellent organization and the work they do, see Endnote [1].

There are …a number of different terms used in Scripture that describe a place of judgment after death: Sheol (Isaiah 14:15), Gehenna (Matthew 5:22), Hades (Luke 16:23), Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4), fiery furnace (Matthew 13:42, 50), the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11–15), and so on. We need to be careful not to assume that all these terms refer to the same place. For example, when Jesus spoke of the rich man being in Hades (Luke 16:23), we can be confident that he was not describing the final location of the rich man after the final judgment. The rich man spoke of having brothers who were still alive, and he wanted Lazarus to warn them about the place of torment he was in (Luke 16:27–28). While this speaks of conscious torment for the wicked after death, we know that Hades is not the final place of punishment because one day, Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14). Since a thorough discussion on these matters will inevitably lead to debates over which passages are speaking of the final judgment and which are speaking of an intermediate state, we will focus our attention on some passages that (1) indisputably are speaking of the final destination of both the saved and the condemned and (2) indicate that both the existence of the saved and the condemned is eternal. Any annihilationist *must* grapple with these passages.[2]

> *And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (Daniel 12:2–3)*

The fact that Daniel uses the same word to describe the duration of the life of the righteous and the contempt of the unrighteous is a strong argument that the duration is the same.

This is the first passage that indicates that some people will be resurrected for judgment. The word translated "*everlasting*" in this passage is the Hebrew word *ōlam*. This word is flexible enough to refer to a person's lifetime (Exodus 21:6), 10 generations (Deuteronomy 23:3), an age (2 Chronicles 7:16), and eternity (Exodus 15:18). However, the fact that Daniel uses the same word to describe the duration of the life of the righteous and the contempt of the unrighteous is a strong argument that the duration is the same. And since we all agree that the "everlasting life" truly is life without end, then why should we think the duration of the contempt is any different?

> *Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." . . . And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Matthew 25:41–46)*

The same word for "eternal" (*aionion*) is used for the duration of the punishment of the wicked and the life of the righteous. If the punishment has an end, then so does the life of the righteous.

However, that clearly contradicts Scripture. Some annihilationists will argue that annihilation is an eternal punishment because someone is forever erased from existence. However, that does not seem to be the sense in which Christ is speaking here. And many atheists believe that nonexistence is what awaits them, and they are fine with that, so what kind of punishment would that be? The plain sense of this passage is that the righteous will live forever, and the wicked experience the torment of eternal fire forever.

> *Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. (John 5:28–29)*

The word "*resurrection*" (*anastasin*) is used for both groups, but only one is described as "*life*." This is because while both are returned to bodies that are suitable for ongoing existence, only believers will be in perfect fellowship with the Creator and source of life. The condemned will continue to exist, and their bodies are suitable to bear the judgment that God has for them, but that existence is never called "*life*."

These three passages are the strongest indication that the final judgment of the wicked is eternal. Yes, there are degrees of punishment (Luke 12:47–48; Matthew 11:20–24), but the duration is unending. This grim fact *should* make us uncomfortable, and it should spur us on to evangelism and personal holiness.

No Rest Day or Night

One final passage needs to be considered because the straightforward reading seems to directly refute the notion that the unredeemed will one day be annihilated. However, we want to be careful to point out that we are not promoting a particular view of eschatology, but this passage is central to the debate over annihilationism and needs to be addressed.

> *And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night, these worshipers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name." (Revelation 14:9–11)*

Answers in Genesis does not adopt a particular position regarding how most passages in Revelation should be understood, so the following discussion should not be seen as an endorsement of a particular millennial view. However, there are some details here that are vital for understanding the duration of judgment described here. John essentially says that anyone who worships the beast (whoever or whatever that might mean in one's eschatology) will be tormented with fire and sulfur, and he says that the "*smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night.*" These words can hardly be spoken about people who have ceased to exist. Annihilationists have pointed out that Isaiah 34:10 uses similar language about the judgment on Edom to show that this wording does not require eternal suffering. However, while Isaiah does speak of Edom's smoke going up forever, it is not referring to a human being made in God's image, and it does not say (as John does in Revelation) that it has no rest day or night.

John does not specifically mention the lake of fire in Revelation 14:9–11. However, the description of this judgment matches the description of the judgment of the beast and false prophet in Revelation 19:20: "*And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur.*" So those who worship the beast receive the same type of punishment as the beast—torment with fire and sulfur.

Immediately following this, John describes Satan being bound and imprisoned in the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (whether we understand these things literally or figuratively here is beside the point). After that we read, "*And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever*" (Revelation 20:10 NASB). According to John's vision, the beast and false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire before Satan was thrown in there, and they were still there when Satan is thrown in. Furthermore, they will be "*tormented day and night forever and ever*." In other words, they will not be annihilated.

Right after this passage, we read about the final judgment where the unredeemed throughout history will be judged according to their works and thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11–15). If Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and the beast's followers were not annihilated in the lake of fire, we should not assume that those thrown into the same place at the final judgment will be annihilated.

How Should We Speak About the Final Judgment?

We have to be careful to be reverent when we're speaking about God's judgment—especially if, as Cameron says, he hasn't come down on a particular view. While any view of hell is uncomfortable to think about because we don't rejoice that some people will face permanent separation from God, we have to keep in mind that God is perfectly just. That means that whatever form of hell you believe in, we agree that God will give people no more and no less than what their sins deserve. And all Christians confirm that only God can perfectly judge that.

God is perfectly loving and perfectly just.

The podcast between Kirk and James Cameron seemed to make some misstatements about God's mercy. In particular, the statement was made that "God limits his justice" out of mercy. If they simply meant that God's justice and mercy are perfectly balanced, then we can agree with that. But we have to be very careful not to pit attributes of God against each other. God is perfectly loving *and* perfectly just. He will enact perfect justice *while maintaining* perfect mercy.

We first need to look at how God's mercy manifests itself in the fallen world. The moment Adam ate the fruit God forbade, he was under the sentence of death. God would have been perfectly just to kill him right then and there and start over with a different progenitor. He also would have been just to sentence Adam and Eve to hell with no hope of salvation—that's what he did to Satan and the angels, none of whom will ever be saved.

But God let Adam live long enough to have descendants, and he promised a way of salvation that was later revealed to be Christ's sacrifice on the cross and subsequent resurrection from the dead. God gives infinite mercy through Christ. The worst sinner can be washed completely clean and given an eternity in heaven none of us deserve, but this is only through Christ.

> ***We can't comprehend the magnitude of what Christ's sacrifice cost, so to say that there is any mercy outside of it is to insult the cross.***

The Camerons say that God might be merciful to use annihilation to be merciful to the condemned. But what mercy is available outside of Christ? The Bible is clear that any good thing an unbeliever experiences is mercy—a loving marriage, financial well-being, having enough food to eat—God is ultimately the source of every good thing and every comfort we have (James 1:17). And creation is witnessing to that unbeliever all along (Romans 1:19–20), but if that unbeliever does not turn to Christ and dies in his sin, what mercy is there for this person? None—the only mercy available is through Christ, who the unbeliever failed to embrace.

Is it a problem to say that there is absolutely no mercy for the person who dies outside of Christ—even a mercy as slight as an end to the suffering? *It would be a far greater problem to say that there is mercy for him!* We can't comprehend the magnitude of what Christ's sacrifice cost, so to say that there is any mercy outside of it is to insult the cross, which the Camerons would surely never intend.

Evangelism: An Urgent Task

None of us knows the day that we will die, only that we certainly will if Christ does not return first. We aren't promised endless chances to believe in Christ, and we aren't promised endless opportunities to present the gospel to our loved ones or people that we come across. While it is important to understand the nature of hell, it is even more important to warn those who reject Christ about their future. This requires us to be confident and unapologetic about our belief in hell.

While we disagree with Cameron's annihilationist thoughts, we can agree with our brother in Christ that the task of evangelism is urgent, and we want to introduce as many people to Jesus as possible since he is the only way of salvation.[3]

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[1] Why Answers in Genesis Exists

Answers in Genesis (AiG) exists to proclaim the authority of the Bible—from the very first verse—without compromise by using apologetics in its world-class attractions, dynamic resources, and creative media to communicate the message of God's Word and the gospel so that believers are equipped to defend the Christian faith and nonbelievers are challenged with the truth of the Bible and its message of salvation.

Why AiG's Attractions Exist

The Ark Encounter and Creation Museum exist to be world-class, Christ-centered, family attractions impacting guests with life-changing experiences by providing immersive and captivating exhibits—tailored for all ages—that feature countless learning opportunities, entertainment, and adventure so guests can understand that the history and the saving gospel message of the Bible are true.

Core Values: SERVE

- **Serve**: We *serve* the Answers in Genesis family and others generously, with excellence, reflecting God's love.
- **Equip**: We *equip* believers to defend their faith.
- **Relate**: We *relate* the truth of God's Word and the gospel to all.

- **Value**: We *value* the opportunity and responsibility to publicly share biblical truth.
- **Engage**: We *engage* nonbelievers with sensitivity and love.

https://answersingenesis.org/

[2] https://answersingenesis.org/hell/annihilation-or-eternal-conscious-punishment/

AiG offers this Scriptural insight in response to:

Kirk Cameron, in a podcast with his son James, recently revealed some thoughts about hell that were controversial for many people. In a follow-up video, he emphasized that his thoughts were not finalized and that he was making no pronouncements but simply asking questions about the nature of hell. So we want to avoid being overly critical—we *should* be like the Bereans, searching Scripture to see what the truth is. However, it seems to us that Cameron and his son James are being influenced by their own emotions and being selective in the Scripture that they're referencing, so we want to offer a gentle response to explain AiG's position—that the unredeemed will suffer eternally apart from God in what the Bible calls the lake of fire.

[3] https://answersingenesis.org/hell/annihilation-or-eternal-conscious-punishment/, stet.