

“What Happens When Men Die? Is Hell Eternal? Soul Sleep: Is It True?”

Timothy L. Dane

Introduction

From time to time the question arises about the nature of man and whether or not men continue in conscious existence when they leave this physical world. Sometimes this issue also involves the question of whether or not one should see a difference in this regard between the eternity of the saved or the unsaved.

This paper will attempt to give a relatively concise answer to three main theological issues that relate to these questions: (1) What does the Bible say about the nature of man? (2) What does the Bible say about the intermediate state of the saved and unsaved? (3) What does the Bible say about eternal destinies of the saved and the unsaved?

I. What Does the Bible Say About the Nature of Man?

When the Christian asks about the nature of man, one of the things he is doing is he is searching from the Scripture to know what we should understand on whether or not there is a metaphysical aspect to man, and if so how this metaphysical aspect relates to the physical. It is obvious to all that man does have a material existence, but the question is “What about the immaterial side of man?”

Many unsaved people would say that death brings a complete end to all existence. When they assert this, they do so with a completely naturalistic world view. Does the Bible support this kind of thinking? This discussion directly involves questions about the nature of man, and also about what happens to that metaphysical aspect of man upon death (assuming man does have a metaphysical side). This paper is written with the biblical premise that man does indeed have a metaphysical side to his existence. There are four major views that

theologians have posited to explain the relationship of the material and non-material aspects of man.

A. View 1: A trichotomous view. The argument is basically that man is a three-part being, consisting of body, soul, and spirit. History shows that generally speaking, the Eastern church believed that man was trichotomous—consisting of three parts—body, soul, and spirit with certain Greek and Alexandrian church Fathers holding this view, including men like Origen and Clement of Alexandria. In this view, the soul and spirit are said to be different both in function and in substance. The body is seen as world-conscious, the soul as self-conscious, and the spirit as God-conscious. The soul is seen as a lower power consisting of man’s imagination, memory, and understanding; the spirit is a higher power, consisting of reason, conscience, and will.²⁰ Support for the trichotomous view might be found in: (a) Paul seems to emphasize the three-part view in desiring the sanctification of the entire person (1 Thess. 5:23). (b) Hebrews 4:12 implies a distinction between soul and spirit. (c) 1 Corinthians 2:14–3:4 suggests a threefold classification: natural (fleshly), carnal (soulish), and spiritual (spiritual).²¹ There are considerable con arguments for this view. First, one cannot escape the reality that the passages used to support this view do not necessarily teach the view as it is held, as will be seen below. Furthermore, oftentimes it is explicit that **two or more expressions are simply varying ways of viewing the whole man** (e. g., cf. John 12:27: “Now My *soul* has become

20 20. Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, edited by Vernon Doerksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 161.

21 21. Ibid.

troubled; and what shall I say?” and John 13:21 which says “When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in *spirit*, and testified and said”).¹ As these two passages show, it is difficult to argue that one should see any difference between “soul” and “spirit.” Bearing this in mind, one can see that passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12 (and 1 Corinthians 2:14-3:4) are irrelevant for trying to support the trichotomous view. There is no separation whatsoever of the mental faculties of man from the spiritual nature of man.

B. View 2: Dichotomous view. This view sees man as being body and soul, a personal being who has a physical side as well as a metaphysical side. The Moody Handbook of Theology states this:

The Western church, on the other hand, generally held to the dichotomous position: man is body and soul. Men like Augustine and Anselm held to this view.” Further explanation of this view includes the idea that the nonmaterial part of man is the soul/spirit, which are of the same substance . . . The support for the dichotomous view is as follows: (a) Genesis 2:7 affirms only two parts. God formed man from the dust of the ground, breathed life into him, and he became a living soul (cf. Job 27:3). (b) The words soul and spirit may be used interchangeably (compare Genesis 41:8 with Psalm 42:6, and Hebrews 12:23 with Revelation 6:9). (c) Body and soul (or spirit) together are mentioned as constituting the entire person (cf. Matt. 10:28; 1 Cor. 5:3; 3 John 2).¹⁹

This view recognizes that there is both a material and immaterial aspect to man.

It also recognizes that there is interchangeability in terms when describing man.

This view also recognizes that the immaterial aspect of man separates from the body at death but continues to live on though temporarily in a disembodied state (Gen. 35:18; Ps. 31:5; Lk. 23:43; 24:39, 46; Acts 7:59; Phil. 1:23-24; 2 Cor. 5:8;

¹ Grudem, 473-74.

¹⁹ 19. See the helpful discussion in A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson, 1907), pp. 483–84.

Heb. 12:23; Rev. 6:9; 20:4).² This view also recognizes that the immaterial aspect of man will be reunited with a body at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:51-58; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

C. View 3: Monism. Explained: this view sees man as being a holistic being and cautions against making harsh divisions in man that the Bible does not make. This view looks to passages like Genesis 2:7 which says that man **IS** a “living soul” (הַיָּצִיק; נֶפֶשׁ, *nephesh chayah*), not just that he **has** a soul. The point to note here, is that “soul” should not automatically be seen as an abstract, spiritual idea. A good example to illustrate that “soul” refers simply to man as a person is in Isaiah 53:11-12:

As a result of the anguish of **His soul (Himself)**, He will see *it and* be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out **Himself** (Lit. **His Soul**) to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

D. View 4: Conditional unity. This view combines elements of views 2 and 3. It basically sees man with dichotomous perspective as having a material aspect (body) and an immaterial aspect (soul), but it looks at man as being a holistic being that was designed by God to be one living soul (Gen. 2:7). This view also recognizes that mankind at the present time is living in a realm that is not fully natural as God intended. This view understands that the entrance of sin has introduced an abnormality called death—a condition of separation in which the soul separates from the body in a non-corporeal existence, and that this separation

² Grudem, 473.

will continue until the time of resurrection comes at the second coming of Jesus Christ. At this time, the soul will be reunited with the body to become one bodily living being as God designed it. This period in between death and resurrection is called “The Intermediate State.” Thus, man is a unity, but his existence in this unity can be shattered due to the impact of death (2 Cor. 5:10; Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Tim. 4:6). The only way this separation might be avoided is for the return of Christ to come before death (at the rapture) so that the experience of resurrection brings one directly from the existence in a natural body to a resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:51-52; 2 Cor. 5:2-4; 1 Thess. 4:13-18).

E. A separate point of view that must be made and added to this fourth view (a point of view that could apply equally to views 2, 3, and 4) is the fact that the Bible uses various terms to refer to man with significant overlap of usage. Some have called this “the Multi-faceted” view. This view recognizes that most biblical usage does not try to view man as various pieces. George Zemek cautions against seeing man “like a hunk of this and a piece of that. Man biblically viewed is not a mosaic of multiple pieces each of which is totally distinct.”³ The Moody Handbook of Theology says that although soul and spirit are common terms used to describe the nonmaterial nature of man, there are also a number of additional terms that describe man’s non-physical nature. Hence, man’s nonmaterial nature can be understood as multi-faceted. As the Bible shows, there are many terms used to describe man’s nonmaterial nature, and oftentimes there is such overlap in

³ Zemek, 10, n. 36.

concept that one cannot escape the idea that they are all referring to the same thing.

Heart: The heart describes the intellectual (Matt. 15:19–20) as well as the volitional part of man (Rom. 10:9–10; Heb. 4:7).

Conscience: God has placed within man a conscience as a witness. The conscience is affected by the Fall and may be seared and unreliable (1 Tim. 4:2); nonetheless, it can convict the unbeliever (Rom. 2:15). In the believer it may be weak and overly scrupulous (1 Cor. 8:7, 10, 12).

Mind: The unbeliever's mind is depraved (Rom. 1:28), blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4), and darkened and futile (Eph. 4:17–18). In the believer there is a renewed mind (Rom. 12:2) that enables him to love God (Matt. 22:37).

Will: The unbeliever has a will that desires to follow the dictates of the flesh (Eph. 2:2–3), whereas the believer has the ability to desire to do God's will (Rom. 6:12–13). At conversion, the believer is given a new nature that enables him to love God with all his heart, mind, and will.

Flesh: Man as $\tau \acute{\alpha} \nu \theta \rho \omega \pi \acute{\alpha} \nu \tau \omega \nu$, *basar*: Flesh (NT, *sarks*). Here mankind is looked at from the perspective of his nature as a living being—a reference to man as a body that makes up a living being. Isaiah 40:5-6 is a good illustration: “Then the glory of the LORD will be revealed, And all flesh will see *it* together; For the mouth of the LORD has spoken. A voice says, “Call out.” Then he answered, “What shall I call out?” All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like

the flower of the field.⁴ (cf. e. g., Gen. 6:12-13; Pss. 56:4; 63:2; 78:39; 83:2; Jer. 17:5). At times God draws the comparison between man as a weak being (flesh) and Himself as a being of infinite power (spirit) as seen in Gen. 6:1-8 and Isaiah 31:3.

Soul: Sometimes man is described as soul, $\nabla\mathcal{P}, \mathbb{N}<$, *nephesh* (Gk. *psuche*). Zemek notes (in accord with what the Moody Handbook states above) that “soul” ($\nabla\mathcal{P}, \mathbb{N}<$) is “the most misunderstood anthropological term in both testaments.”⁵ Zemek also adds that in both testaments the meaning almost never denotes the metaphysical part of man in contrast with the physical.⁶ Usage shows that the “soul” can be seen as (1) the seat of appetite (Deut. 12:20), (2) the seat of emotion (Job 30:25; Ps. 86:4; Ct. 1:7), (3) the seat of will and moral action (Deut. 6:5 and 1 Chron. 28:9 which are both in parallel with “heart”), or (4) the seat of mental action (Esther 4:13).⁷ Most frequently, however, the term $\nabla\mathcal{P}, \mathbb{N}<$ refers to the whole person (Gen. 14:21; 27:4, 19, 25, 31; Ex. 1:5; 12:15; Lev. 11:43; 17:12; Ps. 63:1; Prov. 11:17; Is. 3:9; Jer. 17:21; 18:20; Lam. 3:25; Hab. 2:10).⁸ Main point of observation: biblical usage instructs us against focusing

⁴*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Is 40:5). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁵ Zemek, 13.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁸ Ibid.

Rather, it refers to the essential center of who man is. George Zemek puts it this way: “Most often the term heart relates to “man’s mission control center . . . the innermost part of man,” and not necessarily only an emotional side of man which is the most common assumption from English usage of the term heart.”¹¹

Biblically, the term is used to refer to (1) to the seat of emotions (Ps. 25:17; Prov. 14:30; 17:22), (2) the seat of will (Jer. 3:17; 17:9; Ezek. 2:4), (3) the seat of thinking and planning and rational functions (Ex. 35:5; Deut. 8:5; Josh. 23:14; Job 12:3; Is. 6:10), etc.

Other anthropological expressions. Some of the other terms and expressions the Bible uses for man would include ideas like (1) man as bones (Ps. 6:2; 35:10; Jer. 20:9), (2) man as kidneys (Ps. 16:7; Jer. 17:10), or even (3) man as belly, i. e., the inner part or bowels or womb (Prov. 20:27; Jer. 31:33; Is. 16:11; Hab. 3:16).

A key point to observe in all of this: one should not err by dividing man up into constituent parts when biblical usage shows that the various terms are often simply differing ways of viewing and describing man as a holistic being, the image bearer who lives in a physical body while here in his natural existence on earth. This does not erase or deny the fact that man has two aspects, material and immaterial, but it does guard against false distinctions.

Conclusion. Usage of all these various terms and the strong overlap shows that one must not err by making too strong of a division in the nature of man. Otherwise, one might end up with a man who is actually made up of four or

¹¹ Zemek, 16-17.

five or more parts; i. e., man is a body, and a soul, and a spirit, and a heart, and a mind, and a kidney, etc.

II. What Does The Bible Say About The Intermediate State?

When one says “the intermediate state,” he is using a theological expression that refers to the time after a man dies and before a final state of resurrection. The Tyndale Bible

Dictionary defines the issue in these words:

This [intermediate state] refers to the condition of the person between the time of death and the resurrection. The traditional orthodox view is that believers experience a state of conscious bliss in the presence of the Lord, while unbelievers are tormented by separation from the presence of God. This, however, is a relatively incomplete state when compared with the final destiny of each. Some groups, such as Seventh-Day Adventists, have held a belief in a type of “soul sleep,” or unconsciousness, between death and resurrection. Still others, notably Roman Catholics, believe in a place of purging in preparation for the future life.¹²

The question here is this: “What happens to men when they die?” This needs to be viewed from the perspective of the both the saved and the unsaved.

A. The intermediate state of the saved.

The Bible does speak about the intermediate state of the saved, although it does not do so with the kinds of detail that one would find in a book of systematic theology. From the Bible one can first of all think about the answer that Jesus gave in Matthew 22:29-32 when rebuking the Sadducees for their attempts to discredit him about a future resurrection. To prove the idea of resurrection, Jesus quoted from the Torah, saying, “I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB”? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.” The point to observe here is that the Bible uses present tense statements (“I am the God of the living”)

¹² Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 441.

when speaking about the dead. The natural inference is that the dead are still in a conscious state of life. He is the God of the living.

The idea that the saved continue in a conscious state of existence after physical death, even before resurrection, comes out in many other biblical texts. In Luke 23 Jesus assured the penitent thief that they would be together that day in the presence of God immediately after death: “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (v. 43). This statement naturally implies that they would both be together alive in conscious existence in the presence of God.

Paul had the assurance that absence from the body due to death would mean being in the presence of God, even before the resurrection of the body: “We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). That is, if this were God’s will, Paul preferred physical death over this life. Paul did not teach the idea of annihilation or soul sleep.

For Paul, this truth was a source of great comfort, knowing that it is supremely better to be in the presence of God than being in this fallen world. To the Philippians Paul wrote, “But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better.” (Phil. 1:23). Paul knew that physical death would usher him into the presence of God Himself, and that such bliss was supremely better than remaining in this present life.

The conscious existence of the saved can be seen again in Revelation 6:9-11. This passage describes how during the Tribulation Period martyred believers are crying out to God for a full vindication against those who took their lives: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on

those who dwell on the earth?” (6:10). As we see, these saints have been killed for their commitment to Christ, but contextually speaking, they are not yet in a state of resurrection (cf. Rev. 20:4 where resurrection comes at the end of the seven-year tribulation). Nevertheless, these saints are in a conscious state of existence.¹³

As noted above, the Bible gives abundant testimony to the conscious existence of believers after death and before resurrection.

B. The intermediate state of the unsaved.

The Bible does not make as many statements about the intermediate state of unbelievers as it does of believers, but it does make explicit statements to show that the unsaved do not experience annihilation or soul sleep. The Bible indicates that such people go immediately into a conscious state of existence in separation from God, in which they experience conscious torment.

Luke 16 is one passage that shows that unbelievers continue in conscious torment during the intermediate state. Some would debate whether Jesus is giving a parable or telling about two actual people. In either case, the theological truth is very clear that conscious torment comes to the unsaved at the time of death, and in this case, one that does not imply an eschatological age of resurrection. As the passage shows, the unsaved man is in a conscious state of torment as Luke 16:23 makes clear (“In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment.”). This truth is very clear.

¹³ Solomon’s statements in Ecclesiastes, when taken in their natural literary context, cannot rightly be interpreted to suggest the idea of “soul sleep,” for Solomon’s point of view in this discourse is dealing with this present world and life “under the sun” (cf. e.g., Ecc. 9:2-6, 10).

Strong cites the teaching of 2 Peter to show that unbelievers at the present time “are under punishment,”¹⁴ even before the eschatological resurrection and final judgment. As 2 Peter 2:9 makes clear, at the present time the unsaved are in a conscious state of torment and being *punished* for their sins (**κολάζω**: “*penalize, punish.*”¹⁵) even though the future day of resurrection and final judgment is still yet to come. As Peter puts it, “**the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.**” Peter knows that there is an eschatological day of resurrection when a formal judgment will come to the unsaved, but even at the present time these unsaved human beings are still alive and conscious and in a state of being punished.¹⁶

The Bible gives sufficient teaching to show that both believers and unbelievers remain in a conscious state of existence at death, all awaiting the day when their non-corporeal existence will end and they will be brought into a state of resurrection. Believers are in a conscious state of bliss in the presence of God, and unbelievers are in conscious state of torment and punishment.

III. What Does the Bible Say About Eternal Destinies?

In the opinion of this author, the Bible makes it clear that all men will live forever. That is, they do not experience annihilation and go out of existence. This section will address the

¹⁴ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 1000.

¹⁵ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 554-55.

¹⁶ As the Book of Revelation indicates, the Antichrist will be killed and go to “hell” (the “abyss”), but God, for His own purposes, will also allow him to come back from the dead and come up out of the abyss (Rev. 11:7; 17:8). The point to note is that physical death in hell does not bring his annihilation.

eternal destinies of both the saved and the unsaved and how it is that every man, saved or not, will live forever in a state of resurrection.

A. The eternal destiny of the saved.

The Bible says that the eternal destiny of the saved will be in resurrection glory in the presence of God. As 1 Corinthians 15 makes clear, all men will be raised, but not all at the same time (cf. 1 Cor. 15:22-23).

The first phase of resurrection will come for believers when Jesus Christ raptures His church and brings His bride into resurrection immediately before the beginning of the seven-year tribulation period. As one source puts it,

All who have died will come to life. This will be a bodily resurrection, a resumption of the bodily existence of each person. For believers, this will take place in connection with the second coming of Christ and will involve the transformation of the body of this present flesh into a new, perfected body (1 Cor. 15:35–56).¹⁷

Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4 make it clear that this rapture will only be for church saints who "have fallen asleep in Jesus" (4:14), that is, those who have died "in Christ" (4:16). Here in 1 Thessalonians, Paul uses the expression "sleep" with reference to death. As verse 16 makes clear, it is an expression that refers to physical death of the believer's body, and it cannot be taken to support the idea of "soul sleep" as some teach. As TDNT notes,

The notion of a soul-sleep is just as foreign to the NT as to Judaism; the image of the sleep is introduced (Mk. 5:39 and par.; 1 Th. 5:10; Jn. 11:11–12 etc. → -κοιμάω) simply as an euphemistic description of death. The soul is certainly separated from the body in death, but it experiences temporary retribution in the time between death and the resurrection.¹⁸

¹⁷ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale reference library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 441.

¹⁸ Vol. 1, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-), 148.

From 1 Thessalonians, Paul makes it very, very clear that Jesus Christ will rapture His church before the arrival of the eschatological wrath that Christ will bring to earth during the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9; cf. Rev. 3:10). Wrath is coming to this world during the Day of the Lord, but God's promise to His church is that she will not be part of this age of eschatological wrath.

Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians also makes it clear that this removal of the church must take place before the day of the Lord and the seven-tribulation period which commences with the seven-year peace covenant put in place by the man of lawlessness. There in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul says that the revealing of the man of lawlessness comes immediately after the removal of the personal restraining of evil that comes through the indwelling of the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit (vv. 6-7). As soon as the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit is removed through the rapture of the church, God will allow the Antichrist to rise and be revealed. The first phase of resurrection for believers comes with the resurrection of the church at the rapture.

As the Bible makes clear, resurrection comes to other saints at different points. According to Daniel, the resurrection of OT believers comes at the inception of the messianic kingdom at the end of the tribulation period (12:1-2). At the present time, OT believers are there in the presence of God, but when the kingdom comes, those saints will be raised to enter into God's time of eschatological blessing (Dan. 12:13).

According to John, the resurrection of tribulation martyrs comes at that same time as the resurrection for the OT saints, the inception of the messianic kingdom (Rev. 20:4). Those that got saved after the rapture and killed for their faith will be raised,

and that will be at the close of the Tribulation Period when Christ returns to establish His kingdom.

A final phase of resurrection will come at the close of the messianic kingdom leaving all saints in a glorified state of resurrection, dwelling in the immediate presence of God.¹⁹

In terms of eternity future, as Revelation 21-22 makes clear, God's millennial kingdom will be transformed into an eternal state with the creation of a new heavens and a new earth, and along with it a New Jerusalem. The Bible says that God's saints will dwell with Him in His immediate presence forever and ever (Rev. 21:3: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.>"). The Bible says that this eternal existence will be in a restored creation and that these believers will live forever in a paradise without curse (Rev. 22:3: "There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him.>").

B. The eternal destiny of the unsaved.

The Bible says that the eternal destiny of unsaved man will be eternal bodily torment in a place called The Lake of Fire.

The OT had already indicated the doctrine of eternal torment of the unsaved, even though many details of this would not be clearly explained until God gave further progressive revelation. Isaiah teaches the doctrine of conscious eternal torment when

¹⁹ Some would argue that there is no explicit explanation of this final phase of resurrection for the believers. Such direct proof may be found in 1 Cor. 15. Nevertheless, it does seem like a theological necessity that there would be a final phase of resurrection for those millennial saints.

he describes the unsaved as those who “worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched” (66:24). Daniel also teaches the idea of conscious eternal torment for the unsaved when he speaks about the wicked who will be raised to “disgrace *and* everlasting contempt.” (Dan. 12:2).

The NT gives further explanation of this eternal destiny of the unsaved. In John’s Gospel, Jesus made it clear that the wicked will be raised to “a resurrection of judgment” (John 5:29), although in this passage He did not give any details about the sequence of how these future events would unfold. One thing is certainly clear: there was no one who talked more about “hell” than Jesus Himself. Just as Jesus promised eternal blessing for the believer, He also promised eternal punishment for those who reject Him. In the Gospel of Mathew alone, Jesus speaks seven times about a place of eternal punishment called “hell” (5:22, 29, 39; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33).

Revelation 20:5 indicates that in the end, the resurrection of the unsaved will come at the end of the millennial, messianic kingdom. One sees this final judgment in 20:11-15 at what is commonly called The Great White Throne Judgment. John writes that those who were not saved, those not in “the book of life” (v. 15) were cast bodily into place called The Lake of Fire to be punished according to their deeds (vv. 12-13). In Revelation, John describes this judgment as one that is unending, conscious, eternal torment, saying that the unsaved will, “drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone 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; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever

receives the mark of his name” (Rev. 14:9-11). The Bible speaks clearly about the reality of conscious, eternal, bodily torment for all the unsaved.

The eternality of this punishment and the fact that the unsaved do not experience any kind of soul sleep or annihilation becomes even clearer when one considers the destiny of the Antichrist and the False Prophet (Rev. 19:20-21). In this passages, the Bible shows that these two wicked men are cast into the Lake of Fire at the beginning of the Millennium, 1,000 years before Satan and the rest of all unbelievers. At the end of the Millennium, though, when Satan is cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10), one sees that the Antichrist and the False Prophet are still there in a state of active torment and punishment. As God says, all of these wicked will be “tormented day and night forever and ever.” The Bible is clear: eternal punishment in hell is real. One must accept the clear testimony of Scripture on this issue, or simply say “I just don’t believe the Bible.”

IV. Summary

The Bible speaks quite clearly about the fact that all men will experience a resurrection. Believers will experience a resurrection of glory that will take them into eternal bliss in the presence of God. Unbelievers will experience a resurrection of judgment that will take them into a state of separation from God and eternal punishment.

The Bible does not support any idea of “soul sleep” or “annihilation” and it is an empty and unbiblical argument to say that such ideas come from western thinking. The doctrine of hell and eternal torment certainly is a harsh truth, but one cannot dismiss it without simply dismissing the Bible itself. God has revealed that He is not willing that any man would die in disbelief suffer this kind of eternal destiny (2 Pet. 3:9). For this

reason, He sent His Son to die for the sins of the world (John 3:16; 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 4:10; 1 John 2:2) so that men might repent and be saved from this terrible destiny. The deciding factor is whether or not they will turn from their sin to embrace God's offer of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. God's Word on this issue is clear: "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).