

STORACLES OF PROPHECY

Cities of Ash

Genesis 19:1-29

The Story . . .

Abraham knew that his nephew was making a big mistake when Lot chose to move his family to Sodom. The cities of the lower Jordan valley were beautiful and lush, but they were also very corrupt. "The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly." Genesis 13:13. Finally, God decided to destroy these sinful cities for their abominations, but first He sent two angels to Sodom to rescue Lot and his family.

Before entering Sodom, these angels took on the appearance of two wayfaring men. Lot saw the two handsome strangers when they first entered the gates, and knowing that the streets of that wicked city were far from safe at night, he urged them to find refuge in his home. But wicked men were watching, and that evening they gathered about Lot's door and insisted that he bring out his guests so they might abuse them. Lot tried in vain to reason with the perverse mob gathered at his door. Their demonic obsession only intensified, and soon the crowd began to threaten Lot as well! At this point, the angels could no longer conceal their true identity. They pulled Lot inside the house to safety and struck the maddened mob at the door with blindness.

Early the next morning, the angels told Lot and his family, "Escape for your life! Do not look behind you. . . . Escape to the mountains, lest you be destroyed." Genesis 19:17, NKJV.* "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven." Genesis 19:24. Only Lot and his two unmarried daughters were spared, for his wife looked back to Sodom with longing and was turned into a pillar of salt. God's Word tells us that in the last days, world conditions will resemble that of Sodom—and so will the punishment!

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AMAZING FACTS

The Study

Fill in the blanks after reading each Bible text.

1. What two cities are given as an example for the destruction of the wicked?

2 Peter 2:6 And turning the cities of _____ and _____ into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.

NOTE: God destroyed those two cities with eternal fire—the same kind of fire that will destroy the wicked in hell.

2. When will the wicked be destroyed in hellfire?

2 Peter 2:9 The Lord knoweth how to ... reserve the unjust unto the day of _____ to be punished.

John 12:48 The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the _____.

Matthew 13:40-42 So shall it be in the _____ of this _____. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather ... them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire.

NOTE: In the above texts, the Bible clearly states that the wicked will be cast into the fire in the day of judgment at the end of the world—not when they die. This obviously means that no one is in hell now. It is only fair that no one should be punished until his case has been decided in the judgment. People are rewarded or punished at the second coming, and not before (Revelation 22:12).

3. If the wicked who have died are not in hell yet, where are they?

John 5:28, 29 The hour is coming, in the which all that are _____ the _____ shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; ... they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

Job 21:30, 32 The wicked is reserved to the day of destruction. ... Yet shall he be brought to the _____, and shall remain in the _____.

NOTE: The Bible assures us that the wicked who have died are reserved in the grave until the resurrection at the end of the world. They will hear Jesus' voice calling them and will come forth from the grave, not from hellfire.

4. What is the reward, or punishment, of sin?

Romans 6:23 The wages of sin is _____; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

NOTE: The punishment for sin is not everlasting life in hellfire, but the exact opposite—death. We all die the first death (Hebrews 9:27), but the Bible says that

the death the wicked will die in hell is the second death (Revelation 21:8). From the first death, all are raised for punishment or reward; but there is no resurrection from the second death. It is final. In addition, if the punishment for sin is everlasting torment in hellfire, then Jesus did not pay the penalty.

5. What are the only two choices for all men?

John 3:16 That whosoever believeth in him should not _____, but have _____.

NOTE: The concepts of limbo and purgatory are not found in Scripture. The Bible teaches only two choices—eternal life or eternal death (Deuteronomy 30:15).

6. What will happen to the wicked in hellfire?

Psalms 37:10, 20 For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be. ... But the wicked shall _____, ... into smoke shall they _____ away.

Malachi 4:1, 3 The day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; ... and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall _____ them _____. ... And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet.

NOTE: The wicked in hell will go up in smoke. Only ashes will remain.

7. Where will hellfire be located?

Revelation 20:9 They went up on the breadth of the _____, and compassed the camp of the saints about, ... and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

2 Peter 3:10 The elements shall melt with fervent heat, the _____ also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

NOTE: Hellfire will be here on earth, because it will be the earth on fire.

8. Will the devil be in charge of hellfire?

Revelation 20:10 And the devil that deceived them _____ into the lake of fire and brimstone.

NOTE: No! Far from being in charge of hellfire, the devil will be cast into the fire. It will finally turn him to "ashes upon the earth," and God says of Satan, "Never shalt thou be any more." Ezekiel 28:18, 19.

9. Will the fires of hell ever go out?

Isaiah 47:14 There shall _____ be a _____ to warm at, nor fire to sit before it.

NOTE: After sin, sinners, and everything on earth is destroyed, the fire will go out. It will not burn throughout the ages. An eternal hell of torment would make it impossible to ever get rid of sin. God's plan is to isolate sin and destroy it, not perpetuate it. Revelation 21:5 says, "Behold, I make all things new."

10. Are both soul and body destroyed in hell?

Matthew 10:28 *Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both _____ and _____ in hell.*

NOTE: Many believe that the soul never dies, but twice God says, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Ezekiel 18:4, 20. So according to Scripture, the wicked will be destroyed in hellfire—both soul and body.

11. For whom will hellfire be kindled?

Matthew 25:41 *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the _____ and his angels.*

NOTE: The purpose of the fire is to destroy Satan, his evil angels, and sin. If I refuse to turn loose of the plague of sin, I will have to be destroyed with it, because if sin is not destroyed, it would again contaminate the universe.

12. How does the Bible refer to God’s destruction of the wicked?

Isaiah 28:21 *The Lord ... shall be wroth ... that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his _____.*

NOTE: God can’t stand the thought of destroying those He loves. “The Lord is not ... willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” 2 Peter 3:9. He is constantly saying to them, “Turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die?” Ezekiel 33:11. Destroying people is so foreign to God’s ways that hellfire is called His “strange act.” God leaves nothing out in His desire to save people. Before they are destroyed, every wicked person will admit that God has been fair (Romans 14:11).

13. Doesn’t the Bible phrase “unquenchable fire” indicate that the fire never goes out?

Matthew 3:12 *He will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will _____ the chaff with unquenchable fire.*

NOTE: No! Unquenchable fire cannot be put out. However, when it has burned everything up, it goes out. For example, Jeremiah 17:27 warns that if God’s people were not faithful, He would kindle a fire in Jerusalem that “shall not be quenched.” And the Scriptures declare that this prophecy has already been fulfilled. “They burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire. ... To fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah.” 2 Chronicles 36:19, 21. That fire could not be put out until it had consumed everything; then it went out. It is not burning today, even though the Bible calls it “unquenchable.”

14. Doesn’t the phrase “everlasting fire” mean “unending”?

Jude 7 *Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, ... are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of _____.*

NOTE: We must let the Bible explain itself. We can see in this verse that Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed with everlasting fire as an example of hell, but those cities are not still burning. They were turned into ashes (2 Peter 2:6), which is what eternal fire does. It is eternal in its consequences. (See supplement entitled “The Rich Man and Lazarus.”)

15. When Revelation 20:10 states that the wicked will be tormented “for ever and ever,” doesn’t that indicate endless time?

Jonah 2:6 *The earth with her bars was about me _____.*

NOTE: No. Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights (Jonah 1:17), yet he said “for ever.” I’m sure that it felt like forever! The Greek word translated “for ever” in Revelation 20:10 is “aion,” from which we get our word “eon.” It often represents an unspecified period of time, limited or unlimited. The words “for ever” are used 56 times in the Bible referring to something already ended. In one instance, “for ever” describes the life of a faithful slave (Exodus 21:6), and in another place “for ever” means 10 generations (Deuteronomy 23:3). With man, “for ever” often means “as long as he liveth” (1 Samuel 1:22, 28).

16. After sin and sinners are destroyed, what will Jesus do for His people?

2 Peter 3:13 *Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a _____, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*

Revelation 21:4 *And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying,*

_____ shall there be any more _____: for the former things are passed away.

NOTE: On the ashes of this purified world, God will create new heavens and a new earth. He promises joy, peace, and indescribable happiness for all living creatures throughout eternity.

17. Will the sin problem ever rise again?

Nahum 1:9 *Affliction shall not _____ up the second time.*

NOTE: No! The promise is specific. Sin will never rise again.

Isaiah 65:17 *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.*

18. What penetrating question does Job ask?

Job 4:17 *Shall mortal man be more _____ than God?*

NOTE: If your son became a hardened murderer, would you feel that he should be punished? You probably would. But would you want him to burn alive in a fire, in terrible agony, for even one day? Of course not. You could not stand that. Neither could the loving Lord stand to see His children so tortured. That would

be worse than the very worst of all war atrocities. Is God like that? No indeed! An eternal hell of torment would be unbearable for God and diametrically against His character of love and justice.

Your Response

More than anything, Jesus wants you to dwell in His glorious new kingdom. He longs for you to occupy the mansion He has prepared for you. Will you decide now to accept His offer?

ANSWER: _____

Supplement

This section provides additional information for further study.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Many have used the parable of the rich man and Lazarus to try to prove that people go right to heaven or to hell at death. This was never Jesus’ intention in employing this story. The word Jesus used for “hell” was “Hades,” a place of torment in Greek mythology. All of the Jews listening to this discourse would have understood that Jesus was using a well-known myth to illustrate a point. If we take a closer look at Luke 16:19-31, we will quickly see that this parable is filled with symbols that Jesus never intended for us to take literally.

For example, do all the saved go to Abraham’s bosom? No.

Will the people in heaven and in hell talk to each other? No.

Would a drop of water cool the tongue of a person burning in hell? No.

Does Abraham decide who is saved and who is lost? No.

In the same way, this parable cannot be used to teach that people who die before the last judgment day at the end of the world will go right to heaven or to hell when they die. John 12:48 declares, “The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”

So what does this parable mean? The rich man was a symbol of the Jewish nation, feasting on the Scriptures, while the beggar at the gate—the Gentiles—were starving for the Word. Jesus concluded the parable with the observation that “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” Luke 16:31. Indeed, Jesus did later raise a man named Lazarus from the dead, and most of the Jewish leaders still did not believe (John 12:9-11).