

Bible Cosmology 303B:

Immortality, Consciousness, Hell, Universal Salvation



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Objections Regarding Immortality

Now that we've established that scripture repeatedly and in diverse ways teaches that not only the saints but also the wicked and indeed the rest of mortal creation will one day be made immortal, we must take a moment to answer some possible objections to that conclusion.

In Genesis 3:22-24, God took steps to prevent Adam from eating of the tree of life, which in turn assured that Adam's mortal body would eventually die. And according to Genesis 5:5 Adam did eventually physically die at the age of 930, even if it was at least 800 years after the day he sinned. Therefore, the death of the body certainly is one aspect of the punishment for sin. But does that mean that the eternal punishment for sin must also involve bodily death, not solely exclusion from the relationship, presence, and provisions of God?

In answer to this question, there are several points worth noting.

First, as we have already mentioned, there is reason to think that the fires of Hell are designed to exert constant consuming forces on immortal angelic bodies which are inherently unyielding to such forces. Or, to put it another way, the fires of Hell provide a counterbalance to the vitality and healing power exuded by angelic bodies and this counterbalance is intended as a form of restraint by perpetually siphoning off their ever-replenishing, awesome strength and power. In that sense, whether angels or immortalized men, the bodies of those sentenced to the fires of Hell (the lake of fire, the second death) are subjected to forces of decay and corruption just as the mortal body is in bodily death. In both case, forces of corruption are applied to the body. In one case, those forces act upon an inanimate, mortal corpse reducing it to dust. In the other case, those forces act upon an immortalized, spiritual body siphoning off and consuming its perpetually replenished vitality and vigor. And in that way, the immortal beings in Hell would indeed experience the destruction of the body but with the critical difference being that unlike mortal bodies their immortal bodies don't ever actually break down or disappear as a result of those forces. As such, and because their immortal bodies cannot die, they do not experience the separation of the soul from the body, which occurs when a mortal body dies. Nevertheless, to the extent that physical death can be defined in terms of the forces of decay acting on the body, although their bodies cannot die, it is still accurate to say that even immortal beings in Hell experience physical death at least to the limited extent that it is possible for those forces to act on an immortal body. In other words, though an immortal body will not succumb to the forces of corruption exerted upon it, the beings themselves can still be subjected to those forces of corruption in the fires of Hell (the lake of fire, the second death.)

Second, as we have seen, when scripture refers to the Lake of Fire where wicked men and angels will be sent at the Final Judgment of God, it calls that Lake of Fire by the term "the second death." We see the term "second death" used in 4 verses in scripture, including Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, and 21:8. The Greek term for "second" is "deuteros" (Strong's Number 1208), which means either "the second" or "the other of two." One common interpretation of this phrase "second death" might be to assume that it means bodily death is repeated second time. However, as we can see, the Greek term does not necessitate a repetition of the same thing, but can just as easily convey a second of a particular type of thing. To illustrate, if we used the word "deuteros" to refer to an animal, we would not necessarily think it is a repetition of the same animal or even the same type of animal that was previously mentioned. Nor would we assume the second had all the same characteristics of the first. For example, Revelation 4:7 uses the word "deuteros" when John writes, "And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle." Clearly, the second beast is neither a repetition of the first, nor does it share the same characteristics of the first. It is a different kind of beast, yet it is referred to as "deuteros." The Greek work can simply convey a second in the same general category, in this case, two different forms of death. In short, the word "deuteros" does not necessitate a repetition of bodily death. To the extent

that the use of “deuteros” in Revelation means “second of two” in a category, the description of the final punishment of the wicked as “the second death” would naturally imply that the punishment of the wicked does not necessarily entail “the first death.” The language of Revelation could instead readily convey that instead of bodily death, the wicked will suffer another form of death after final judgment, one that does not entail a repetition of bodily death.

Here we should take a moment to consider a question about whether it would be appropriate for scripture to casually infer that bodily death could be thought of as “the first death.” Although Adam experienced expulsion from God and God’s provisions before he experienced the death of his body, over the course of history the form of death that is at the forefront of human experience is the anticipation of bodily death. When we see the terms “death” and “die” in scripture, the context predominantly indicates that the death of the body is in view. Therefore, given the prevalence of bodily death in human cultural experience, it would not be surprising that the “first death” would be a reference to physical death.

Third, it is not clear that the term “second” in Revelation is really intended to designate the two forms of death strictly in terms of which one occurred first in chronological order over the course of history. As we saw from the definition, “deuteros” can simply mean “the other,” and in that sense would convey simply “the other death” in which case it would not infer any chronological order at all. For example, 1 Corinthians uses “deuteros” when it refers to Adam and Jesus Christ and explains, “The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.” Here Jesus is referred to as the “second man” even though we know that the Person of Jesus Christ existed chronologically before Adam. And even though Jesus’ incarnation did occur after Adam’s creation, Paul refers to Jesus as a “heavenly man” not an “earthly man.” The “earthly” refers to the mortal man made from the corruptible soil of the earth to which his body would return upon physical death. If Jesus’ incarnation as a mortal man is what Paul had in view, then we might expect Paul to describe Jesus here as a “second earthy” man. Because Paul instead describes Jesus as the “second man” who “is the Lord from heaven,” it is difficult to insist that Paul has in mind a post-incarnation setting. Ultimately, 1 Corinthians provides an example in which it is not possible to demand that “deuteros” refers to something that is chronologically second. Likewise, the example of the four beasts in Revelation 4:7 demonstrates that “deuteros” can simply be used referentially to distinguish items in the order they are presented, without any connotation of chronological order of existence. In Revelation 4:7, John simply remarks about the beast that looks like a lion before he remarks about the beast that looks like a calf. It would be entirely unwarranted to infer that the term “deuteros” had anything to do with chronological existence of these beasts. It is simply part of a casual system of reference for presentation purposes. And that is all we can necessarily demand from the use of “deuteros” in the phrase “second death.”

Fourth, it is important to recognize that scripture does mandate physical death as part of the penalty for sin. For example, Romans 6:2 states that “the wages of sin

is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” So, how can it be that physical death would not be part of the punishment of the wicked at Final Judgment? There are several points worth noting here. Number one, the wicked have already suffered physical death prior to the final judgment, so it is fair to say that this particular component of the mandated punishment has indeed been fulfilled already and does not need to be imposed a second time at Final Judgment. Number two, passages like John 5:28-29 and Revelation 20:4-6, 11-15 make it clear that God has always intended to resurrect all men, including the wicked. So, when God expelled Adam from Eden so that Adam would not eat of the tree of life and his body would eventually die, at that same time God also intended to reverse the death of Adam’s body later in history. This presents a picture in which God’s prescription of physical death as a punishment for sinners was inherently intended to be a temporary punishment from the very beginning. And this, in turn, seriously undermines any basis for presuming that the death of the body was intended to be a permanent punishment for sinners.

Fifth, the example of Adam also informs us about the extent to which physical death is or is not a part of the “second death” and Final Judgment of the wicked. Here we have been arguing that the aspect of “eternal life” which the wicked are excluded from is **not immortality**, but from the relationship, presence, and provision of God just as Adam had in the garden before he sinned. And in this sense, the situation of the wicked in Hell is similar to Adam’s state in the 800 or more years between his expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the death of his body. Because of his sin, he was deprived of his relationship with God, from God’s presence, and from God’s provision and yet he continued to live bodily and consciously for a very long, long time. In other words, the other form of death that Adam experienced was to live for a very long time apart from God and God’s provision. Although Adam did not experience physical death for at least 800 years after God judged him for his sin, Adam’s long existence separated from God and from God’s provision actually provides a very accurate preview of the punishment that God would ultimately enact for the wicked at the Final Judgment: not the death of the physical body, but a lengthy, continued existence separated from a relationship with God, from God’s presence, and from God’s provision.

Consequently, even though the wicked are raised to immortality, they do not receive eternal life because “eternal life” inherently involves more than just immortality, but also the relationship with God, the access to God’s presence, and the participation in God’s provisions in the kingdom. Despite the fact that the wicked are immortal and no longer vulnerable to the death of the body, they do not participate in eternal life because they do not experience these other core components that constitute eternal life according to the scripture.

While physical death is a *historical* component of the punishment for sin, when it comes to the idea of separation from the body or the utter disintegration of the body through decay, physical death is not a component of the *eternal* punishment for sin. In other words, the death of the body as a punishment for sin ends at the Final Judgment at which point the second death remains the only punishment for sin that continue for eternity. Ultimately, if the “first” or “other” death is the death

of the body, then Revelation would suggest that the wicked do not suffer the death of the body as a part of the ultimate punishment for their sin. As we have seen, the “second death” is not a second experience of physical death. It is an experience of another kind of death. In other words, Hell is not a place where men experience the “first death,” which is the death of the body. Instead, Hell is a place where men suffer a different form of death. The only form of death that the wicked would experience in Hell is separation from a relationship with God, from God’s presence, and from God’s provisions and blessings, just as Adam experienced these things on the very same day he disobeyed God. That is the second death.

#2 – Is God Alone Immortal?

The next objection we want to address here is the notion whether scripture teaches that God alone is immortal. We want to address the objection early because it has implications that extend beyond the immortality of the wicked in Hell. If God is alone immortal, that might have implications regarding the extent to which even the resurrected saints or angels can be considered immortal. And it would also have implications regarding our conclusions that the human soul is immortal and continues to consciously exist after the death of the body.

The potential support for this objection comes from two passages in 1 Timothy, which we have placed below.

1 Timothy 1:16 Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first **Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting (166).** **17 Now unto the King eternal (165), immortal (862), invisible, the only wise God,** be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Timothy 6:13 I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, **and before Christ Jesus, who** before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; **14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: 15 Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; 16 Who only hath (2192) immortality (110), dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see:** to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

First, when placing these two passages side by side it is clear that they have a lot in common. Number one, both passages mention Jesus Christ early on. Number two, in both passages the mention of Jesus Christ is followed by a series of descriptive terms and phrases. Number three, chapter 1 contains the description, “the King eternal.” Chapter 6 includes similar descriptions, including, “only Potentate, the King of Kings, and Lord of lords.” Number four, both passages end similarly. Chapter 1:17 concludes with “be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Chapter 6:16 concludes with “to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.” Number five, chapter 1 uses the description “invisible” while chapter 6 similarly uses the phrases “whom no man hath seen, nor can see.” And number six, chapter 1 includes the term “immortal” in the phrase “the King eternal,

immortal” while chapter 6 includes the term “immortality” in the phrase “Who only hath immortality.”

Second, there might be some speculation as to whether the string of descriptive phrases refers to Jesus Christ, God the Father, or perhaps the entire Godhead. On this point, the fact that Jesus Christ is mentioned right before the list of descriptions in both passages strongly suggests that the descriptions are meant regarding Jesus. Several points are worth noting here.

Number one, 1 Timothy 6:13 and 14 clearly refer to Jesus Christ by name. Then verse 15 uses the title “King of kings and Lord of lords” to identify the person Paul has in view as he continues. In the New Testament the titles “King of kings and Lord of lords” are only applied to Jesus Christ (Revelation 17:14 and 19:16). Paul’s use of these titles coupled with his clear references to Christ in the two verses preceding verse 15 strongly demonstrates that the other phrases contained in 1 Timothy 6 are being applied to Jesus. And the similarity of 1 Timothy 1:16-17 to 1 Timothy 6:13-16 creates a strong basis for concluding that the descriptive phrases found in 1 Timothy 1 are also intended in reference to Jesus Christ.

Number two, even the terms “invisible,” “no man hath seen,” and “nor can see” are explicable as references to Jesus’ current location in the presence of the Father. It is true that John 1:18 and John 5:37 describe the Father himself, saying that “no man has seen God at any time.” However, Hebrews 1:3 explains that after his resurrection Jesus “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” In Revelation 3:21, Jesus says, “I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” Revelation 21:23 also describes the heavenly city and explains that “the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.” And, in an earlier section we examined numerous quotes from Dr. Benjamin Sommer explaining that the Hebrew concept of God’s glory entailed that God’s body is “stunningly bright or surrounded by an extraordinary radiance,” is “a substantial, blazing thing,” and “consists of unspeakably bright light.” (See pages 60-61, 68 of Dr. Sommer’s book *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*.) And even John 1:18, which declares that no man has seen God the Father at any time, also states that Jesus currently dwells “in the bosom of the Father,” which is another way of saying that Jesus resides at the Father’s side on the throne of God after his ascension.

In light of these factors, Paul’s descriptions that Jesus is “invisible” and is currently “in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see” most likely simply refers to Jesus sitting down on the throne of God in the presence of the exceedingly bright light of God’s glory in heaven far beyond what men can see and which no mortal man can endure seeing. Consequently, the terms “invisible,” “no man hath seen,” and “nor can see” would not switch the focus from Jesus Christ to the person of the Father. They would simply attest that Jesus currently dwells in the presence of the Father.

Number three, with regard to the phrase “no man hath seen, nor can see,” it is best to understand this specifically as a reference to mortal man in particular. In this sense, it would exclude the disembodied spirits of men and any men made immortal through resurrection. For instance, in Matthew 18:10 Jesus’ himself says that certain “angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” And we’ve already examined Jesus’ statement in Luke 20:35-36 in which he declares that resurrected men are “equal unto the angels” and “neither can they die any more.” From these facts emerges a simple picture. Mortal man is too frail to withstand the powerful radiance of God the Father. For this reason, no mortal man has ever seen or can ever see God’s radiant glory directly. To stand in God’s presence, men must be made equal to immortal angels who can and do behold the Father’s face regularly.

Third, for our current study it doesn’t particularly matter whether these descriptions refer to Jesus or the Father or the entire Godhead. The critical question for this portion of our investigation is whether the references to immortality are intended to convey that God alone is truly immortal.

Fourth, with regard to that particular question chapter 1 of 1 Timothy cannot really provide any insight. Although chapter 1 does describe God as “immortal” it doesn’t include any language that would exclude other beings from having that characteristic. Chapter 6, on the other hand, contains the critical word “only” in the phrase “Who only hath immortality.” The Greek word for “only” here is “monos” (Strong’s Number 3441), which means, “alone” or “only.” And it is the inclusion of this single term that itself raises the question of whether God alone is truly immortal.

Fifth, there are three lines of evidence, which demonstrate that 1 Timothy 6 is not intending to convey that God alone is truly immortal.

Number one, the same Greek term that 1 Timothy 6:16 uses for “immortality” with regard to God is applied to the saints in other scriptures. The Greek word used for “immortality” in 1 Timothy 6:16 is “athanasia” (Strong’s Number 110), which means “undying, immortality, everlasting.” This word appears three times in the New Testament, one of which is here in 1 Timothy 6. The other two occurrences are in 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; **We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,** 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and **the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.** 53 **For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (110).** 54 **So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality (110),** then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

We have already discussed this portion of 1 Corinthians 15 in depth earlier at which time we established that the passage is a description of what happens to our

mortal bodies when they are resurrected. As we can see, verse 51 begins by saying, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.” The end of verse 52 again affirms, “we shall be changed.” The specifics of this change are then described in verses 53-54 in which Paul twice states that we “must put on immortality.” Moreover, even if we include the terms from chapter 1 of 1 Timothy, the result is the same. 1 Timothy 1:16 uses a different word for “immortal.” In chapter 1, the Greek word for “immortal” is “aphthartos” (Strong’s Number 862), which means, “uncorrupted, not liable to corruption or decay, imperishable.” It occurs 7 times in the New Testament. Again, we find this word used in 1 Corinthians 15 where the resurrected bodies of the saints are described as “incorruptible.” Consequently, Paul cannot mean that God alone is immortal in 1 Timothy due to the fact that Paul elsewhere describes resurrected saints as “immortal” using the same Greek terms that are applied to God in 1 Timothy.

Number two, it could be theorized that perhaps 1 Timothy 6 is telling us that God is immortal in some way that resurrected saints are not. In other words, maybe God’s immortality exceeds the immortality of the saints in some way. In that scenario, 1 Timothy 6 could be declaring that ultimately God alone is “truly” or “permanently” or “irrevocably” immortal. But the problem with this interpretation is simply that none of these qualifying concepts are found anywhere in the text of 1 Timothy. Such concepts have to come from elsewhere outside the text of Timothy and then inserted into Timothy. However, the fact that the New Testament applies the same Greek word to the resurrected saints combined with the fact that 1 Timothy doesn’t include any qualifying or discriminating language means that any additional nuance must remain speculative at best if not outright contrary to the contextual and vocabulary evidence. In addition, with regard to the immortality of the saints we know that it involves unending existence.

Number three, it is still necessary to identify what the phrase “Who only hath immortality” actually means. If this phrase does not mean that God alone is immortal, then what was it intended to convey? The answer to this question is fairly straightforward.

The first line of evidence comes from the fact that the phrase “Who only hath immortality” actually employs the word “hath.” The Greek word for “hath” here is “echo” (Strong’s Number 2192), which means “to have, to hold.” The definition provided by the Online Bible Greek Lexicon even includes “external things such as pertain to property or riches.” It is interesting that Paul chose to say that God alone “has” or “possesses” or “holds” immortality rather than saying that God alone “is” immortal. The relevance of this choice will become more apparent as we explore the next piece of evidence below.

The second line of evidence regarding the phrase “Who only hath immortality” comes from the numerous times that the New Testament describes Jesus Christ as the only source by which men can obtain immortality. Perhaps the preeminent example is found in John 10:28 where Jesus declares, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” This declaration describes Jesus Christ as the only source for men to receive life. But this

statement in John 14 should not be read in isolation. It is merely one iteration of a theme that is repeated often in John's Gospel. Let's start with John 5.

John 5:21 For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. 22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son...25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. 26 For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; 27 And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. 28 Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

John 5 begins in verses 21-22 with a declaration regarding the Father's unique power to raise the dead. The verse continues by describing how the role of judging and giving resurrection has been delegated to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Then in verses 25, 28-29, Jesus declares that "the dead shall hear" his voice and "they that hear shall live." But in the middle of these verses, in verses 26-27 Jesus explains that "the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." This language again suggests that Jesus has been appointed the source of life and resurrection for all men.

In John 4, Jesus again depicts himself as the source of everlasting life when he describes that he will give "water" that will "spring up into everlasting life."

John 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

In John 6, Jesus once again states that "everlasting life" is something that "the Son of man shall give."

John 6:27 Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.

In John 10, Jesus plainly states, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish."

John 10:28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.

And finally, in John 17 Jesus describes his role as the Son of man in a prayer to the Father, saying, "thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him."

John 17:1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: **2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.**

And, of course, similar assertions that Jesus will resurrect men to immortality are found elsewhere in the New Testament, including Philippians 3:21 which we already examined earlier. Ultimately, these passages from John are just a sample of the statements in the New Testament describing Jesus as the only source of receiving eternal life. Given the use of the Greek word for “has” or “holds” in 1 Timothy 6 and the fact that the New Testament describes resurrected saints with the same word for “immortal” as 1 Timothy 6 uses, we must conclude that 1 Timothy 6 was not intended to convey that Jesus Christ alone, or God alone, is immortal. Instead, this verse was clearly intended simply as a reiteration of the common New Testament notion that Jesus Christ alone has the immortality to distribute to men. There is no other source from which men can obtain immortality other than Jesus Christ.

#3 – What Was the Devil’s Lie to Eve?

One argument that has been raised regarding immortality relates to what the serpent told Eve in the Garden of Eden. Of course, we also know from passages like Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 that scripture clearly identifies the devil as the serpent who deceived Eve. With regard to the devil’s words to Eve, any argument against the immortality of the soul hinges on two essential components.

The first component is that the devil’s statement to Eve would have to be a lie in the most basic, straightforward sense. In other words, the truth is one thing and the devil simply asserts the opposite. The truth is white, but the devil says it is black. In Genesis 2:17, God warns, “thou shalt surely die” and in Genesis 3:4 the devil says, “thou shall not surely die.” But there is nothing more sophisticated or subtle about his deception. Here we arrive at the first hint of danger for such arguments against immortality. Such a characterization of the devil’s tactics seems to run contrary to not only Genesis 3:1, but passages like 2 Corinthians 11:3 plainly state that the devil’s method of deception was not an obvious, outright contradiction of God’s word, but instead it involved some particularly noteworthy craftiness and subtlety.

Genesis 3:1 Now **the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field** which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

2 Corinthians 11:3 But I fear, lest by any means, as **the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty**, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

This leads us to the second component that must be assumed whenever the devil's statement to Eve is appealed to as a proof against immortality of the human spirit and soul.

The second component is that the devil's statement to Eve specifically entails an assertion that the human soul is immortal. God says that man is mortal and can die and the devil asserts that man is immortal and will not die. Under such circumstances, the devil's lie would be that the soul is immortal. If this is the case, then the immortality of the human soul would not be based on the word of God, but on a lie from the devil. In other words, arguments against immortality, which are based on Genesis 3, tend to center on the idea that immortality is a doctrine that originates with the devil.

However, a scriptural analysis of the devil's statements to Eve shows that such arguments against the immortality of the soul are not well-founded. Below is the text of Genesis 3, which provides the most detailed account of that encounter. In fact, this is the only passage in scripture that records the devil's actual words to Eve.

Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. **And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? 2 And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: 3 But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. 4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: 5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. 6** And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

First, let's examine the basics. What exactly did the devil say to Eve?

Number one, we should note that the devil's comments here are not very lengthy.

Number two, his first remark appears in verse 1, in which he asks Eve, "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" With this comment, the devil does not make any positive assertions about what is or is not true. He isn't lying to Eve about anything, at least not at this point. He simply asks a question. Moreover, it is clear from the content of that question that it has nothing to do with the idea of the soul at all, let alone whether the soul is immortal or not. Put simply, the devil's statement in verse 1 doesn't involve a lie or any assertion about the immortality of the soul.

Number three, the devil's next and only other remarks appear in verses 4-5. In verse 3, Eve has just recounted God's command that if she ate from the tree of knowledge she would die. Unlike his question in verse 1, here the devil makes

two positive assertions. One, in response to Eve's statement that she would die if she ate of the tree of knowledge, in verse 4 the devil replies by telling her, "Ye shall not surely die." Two, in verse 5 the devil describes to Eve what will happen if she eats from the tree of knowledge, saying "God doth know that in the day yet eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

This is the total of the record of the devil's words to Eve. So, if the devil did make a remark to Eve about the soul or the immortality of the soul, it will need to be found in these two statements in verses 4 and 5.

Second, let's analyze the devil's statements to determine which words, if any, could theoretically constitute the origin of the doctrine that the soul is immortal? We will begin with the devil's remarks in verse 5 and then turn our attention to the phrase "Thou shalt not surely die" in verse 4, which is sure to be the most critical statement.

Number one, it is worth noting that there is no wording in verse 5 that even hints at a reference to the soul or to the human spirit or to immortality. If we breakdown verse 5, we see there are three components of the devil's assertion.

One, the devil asserts that God knows that in the day Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge their eyes will be opened and they will be as gods. The phrase "God knows" does not convey anything about the soul or immortality. Two, the phrase "your eyes will be opened" also does not convey anything about the soul or immortality. Three, it could be speculated that the phrase "you will be as gods" relates to immortality if we assume that Eve immediately would have perceived the term "gods" was necessarily intended to invoke the idea of immortality. But instead of making assumptions about how Eve would have understood the devil's reference to "gods," we can simply look to the phrases on either side of the phrase "ye shall be as gods" to see what the devil meant. Before the phrase "ye shall be as gods," the devil says, "your eyes shall be opened." Right after the phrase "ye shall be as gods," the devil says, "knowing good and evil." In other words, there is no need to speculate that immortality is in view because the text already tells us specifically what is being compared to the gods. The two phrases on either side of "ye shall be as gods" demonstrate that the comparison to "gods" is limited to having opened eyes and knowing good and evil.

Ultimately, as we can see, nothing in the devil's actual words in verse 5 pertains to the immortality of the soul.

Number two, this leaves us only with the devil's words in verse 4. For review, in verse 3 Eve reiterates that if she eats of the tree of knowledge she will die. In response, in verse 4 the devil tells Eve "You will not surely die."

One, there is the issue of the immediate contextual relationship of the devil's remark in verse 4 to the statements that precede it. We can learn what the passage intends to tell us about the devil's meaning by looking at the statements that lead

up to it. When we examine the passage along those lines, we see that the devil's statement "Ye shall not surely die" in verse 4 is not actually a denial of the idea that Eve would die or could die in general. Instead, in the context of the preceding statement in verse 3, the devil's response in verse 4 is primarily a specific denial of the idea that Eve would die as a result of eating of the tree of knowledge in particular. And because the devil's statement is so specifically related to death as a consequence of eating from the tree of knowledge, there is nothing that demands interpreting his statement as a broader declaration about the soul or its immortality in general.

Two, there is the issue of the limited scope of the words themselves. It is theoretically possible that the devil intended to convey, "Ye won't die after eating from the tree because you are immortal and won't ever die." But the actual words in the verse don't require such an elaborate rendition of the devil's meaning. The specific words do not contain any promises that Eve will never die or that nothing can kill her. On their own, the actual words are minimalist and only require the devil to mean, "You won't die after eating from the tree." Essentially, anything beyond that is a speculative interpolation without warrant from the text. There is simply nothing in this statement which conveys a positive assertion to Eve that she is immortal or even that she will become immortal in some sense when she eats of the tree of knowledge. The text only requires that the devil denied that Eve would die as a direct result of eating from the tree of knowledge.

But there are several more problems with suggesting that the devil's remarks involved telling Eve that the soul is immortal and survives the death of the body.

Three, we've already examined chapter 2, 3, and 5 of Genesis and demonstrated not only that God did indeed mandate that Adam and Eve would definitely die the same day that they sinned, but that Adam and Eve did not physically die for at least another 800 years. As such, the only way that God's mandate for them to die on the same day that they ate from the tree of knowledge could be true is if God had in mind another kind of death apart from the death of the body. When we investigate the consequences which God decreed would begin the very day Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge, we see that they lose their good relationship with God, are expelled from his physical presence in the garden, and cease to have access to God's material provisions for them in the garden. If anyone is inclined to speculate about additional inferences based on the devil's deception of Eve, these factors from Genesis 2, 3, and 5 need to be taken into account. Most prominently, how it is possible that Adam did not die for another eight hundred years if the death penalty imposed by God referred solely to the death of the body or was intended to encompass the annihilation of both body and soul? In other words, based on the fact that Adam and Eve did not experience bodily death or annihilation on the day that they ate of the tree of knowledge, we must conclude that the penalty of death which God decreed necessarily included their expulsion from God's presence, from their relationship with him, and from his provision in the garden.

Four, since the death penalty that God proclaimed necessarily included expulsion from his presence, relationship, and provision, we are forced to reconsider the implications of the devil's deception in that light.

The first implication is somewhat obvious. If God didn't intend to cause Adam and Eve to experience bodily death or annihilation on the day that they ate of the tree of knowledge, then what exactly is the devil's deception? This cannot simply be a case in which God says, "you will physically die or be annihilated that same day" and the devil says, "no you won't physically die or be annihilated that same day" because God never intended for Adam and Eve to physically die or be annihilated that same day. In some sense, the devil would be accurately describing to Eve that God did not intend to kill her body or annihilate her the same day she ate of the tree of knowledge. This leads us to the next implication.

The second implication is perhaps less obvious. As we have seen, it would not be a lie for the devil to report to Eve that she wouldn't physically die or get annihilated on the day that she ate from the tree of knowledge. We also know that on the very day Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge, they were expelled from God's presence, from a relationship with God, and from God's provision for them in the garden. This was the type of death that Adam and Eve experienced the very same day that they ate of the tree of knowledge. And the devil's statement "ye shall not surely die" either deliberately ignores the existence of this type of death or fundamentally denies the existence of this type of death. In either case, we finally arrive at the only real possibility for how to understand the devil's deception. The devil alleviated Eve's hesitation about eating from the tree of knowledge by conveying to her that there was no other type of death that she needed to worry about experiencing that very same day other than the death of the body. In a more basic sense, the devil's lie was to convey that there was only one type of death that Eve needed to worry about and that singular type of death wouldn't happen that day. He put all of her focus on one type of death when in reality there were two types of death. At the heart of the devil's deception was not a positive assertion that the human soul was immortal but a denial that there are two types of death, the death of the body and another kind of death that involves separation from God's presence, from his relationship, and his provisions for us.

Five, here we're forced to question exactly how indirect implications can be stuffed into the devil's brief, unexplanatory remarks to Eve in Genesis 3. The only indirect inference that is suggested by the text regarding the devil's statement to Eve in verse 4 would be that the devil is either subtly denying that separation from God is its own form of death or that he's simply assuring Eve that she wouldn't immediately physically die if she ate from the tree of knowledge. Either of these inferences would satisfy any potential for larger implications from the devil's crafty language. There is simply no comparable textual evidence to suggest that the devil's remarks involved a lie introducing the concept that the soul was immortal.

Third, we can turn our attention to whether or not it's even circumstantially possible for the devil to introduce a concept like the immortality of the soul. At

the heart of attempts to use the devil's comments in Genesis 3 as an argument against the immortality of the soul is the idea that the devil is introducing a distinction between the life of the body and the life of the soul when, in reality, no such distinction really exists. To be clear, our point here is not to argue that the body and soul are the same. To the contrary, in previous sections we have already examined the scriptural evidence that proves they are distinct. The question is whether or not there is any basis for crediting the devil as the originator of the idea that the body and soul are distinct. There are several points that need to be mentioned here.

Number one, it is also noteworthy that nothing in the devil's statements indicates that he is differentiating between the body and the soul or suggesting to Eve that even if her body dies, her soul will continue to exist. But here another question arises. Should we interpret the devil's failure to distinguish between the death of the body and the death of the soul as positive evidence that the death of the body and the death of the soul are one and the same, that both die simultaneously? There are two problems with such a line of evidence.

One, since we know that the devil is not only deceptive but exceptionally subtle, how could we insist that anything stated or implied by the devil's remarks is reliably true? In other words, if the devil's failure to deny the distinction of the body and soul is proof of anything, it is just as much proof that the devil intended to be deceptive when he denied the distinction of the body and soul.

Two, as we have already seen, in Matthew 10:28, Jesus himself clearly demonstrates that the death of the body and the death of the soul are separate things. So, not only are the devil's remarks devoid of any actual comment whatsoever regarding whether the body and the soul are distinct, but even if we want to assume his remarks carry some unstated implication that they are distinct, Jesus' own comments prove any such implication to be inaccurate.

Number two, at the heart of the suggestion that the devil is the originator of the idea that body and soul are distinct, lies a fundamental impossibility. There is simply no plausible explanation for how the devil could be the one who introduces Eve to a distinction between the life of the body and the life of the soul.

One, since we have examined the devil's remarks one by one, we know that his words do not contain any language that would even come close to an explanation, assertion, or requirement that there is such a difference between soul and body. The devil doesn't say anything along the lines that, "there is a distinction between the body and the soul and your soul will live on even if you eat of the tree." He simply tells her that she won't die as a result of eating from the tree of knowledge. And he tells her that eating from that tree will open her eyes and make her wise. But he doesn't utter a single word or phrase that would introduce her to or require her to form a conceptual distinction between her soul and her body. If the devil's words don't indicate or require a distinction between the soul and body, then the

notion that the body and the soul are distinct cannot be regarded as a concept that originates from the devil in Genesis 3.

Two, since the devil's words don't introduce or mention such a distinction, the only way that Eve could possibly have understood the devil's remarks in terms of a specific distinction between soul and body is if Eve came into the conversation already having an understanding of the distinction between the life of the soul as distinct from the life of the body. Therefore, in that scenario, the devil only has to hint that the soul would survive the death of the body and Eve, already being aware of such a distinction, would take the bait and interpret his elusive words as an affirmation that her soul was immortal. Conversely, if we assume that Eve didn't know anything about a distinction between the life of the body and the soul prior to this conversation in which the devil allegedly originates that idea, then there is simply no way to explain how such a critical conceptual distinction ever entered into the devil and Eve's conversation.

Herein lies the difficulty for those who wish to credit the devil with the idea of the immortality of the soul. On the one hand, if Eve didn't already possess a conceptual distinction between the death of the body and the death of the soul, then the devil's words are too minimalist to have introduced her to such a concept. Therefore, the devil's words can't be taken as sufficient to credit him as the author of the idea that the soul is immortal or the idea that the body and soul are distinct. On the other hand, if Eve already understood the distinction between the life of the body and the life of the soul, then the devil can't be credited as the source of that idea. So, again the devil cannot be the author of the idea that the death of the body and the death of the soul are distinct ideas. Simply put, the devil's words don't articulate such a distinction between the life of the body and the soul. And if Eve was already familiar with such a distinction, then we cannot credit the devil as the author of such an idea. Therefore, it cannot be concluded that in Genesis 3:5 the devil is introducing a lie about the distinction between body and soul or a lie introducing the contrast between the immortality of the soul and the death of the body.

Fourth, having dismissed the possibility that the devil's words to Eve introduce the immortality of the soul, it is necessary provide a sufficient explanation of the devil's deception and how it works to persuade Eve to disobey God's command not to eat from the tree of knowledge.

Number one, Genesis 3 does not provide definitive evidence regarding whether Eve understood God's statement to refer to physical death or to separation from God and God's provisions, or both. But whatever the case was, it is clear Eve's initial deterrent to eating from the tree of knowledge was her Eve's conviction to avoid the death that God warned about. That is the critical point. Eve was initially motivated not to eat of the tree of knowledge out of a desire to avoid death. This leads to our next point.

Number two, the text shows that the devil's goal was to get Eve to eat the fruit. In terms of pragmatism, the devil didn't need to get her to accept some false

teaching about immortality in order to get Eve to eat the fruit. He simply needed to alleviate her concerns about dying an immediate, punitive death for breaking God's commands. There is no indication whatsoever that aside from getting her to disobey God's command, he was also interested in introducing a false belief in immortality. And, as we have seen, the devil's remarks don't contain anything that would introduce or require a conceptual distinction between the life of the body and the life of the soul.

Number three, the devil doesn't offer Eve an explanation for why she won't die. His remarks to Eve are minimalist with regard to the notion that she would not die. He simply asserts that she won't die. Do his minimal remarks demand some connotation about immortality in order to function? On this point, there are simply other satisfactory explanations that don't require interpolating that the devil is making a comment about immortality. The devil's assurances could have been a blanket statement openly denying that Eve wouldn't die in any way as a result of eating from the tree of knowledge. Or, his remarks could have been crafted more specifically to assure Eve that she wouldn't die immediately if she ate the forbidden fruit. In either case, there is no need to conclude that the devil must have been conveying implications about immortality.

Number four, the text of Genesis suggests that the devil didn't feel it was necessary or useful to offer Eve further explanation as to why she wouldn't die. Rather than giving Eve a conceptual basis for why she should accept his brief reassurance that she wouldn't die, at this point the devil tactically chooses to switch Eve's focus from the consequences of disobedience to the benefits of eating from the tree of knowledge. Based on the fact that the devil switched tactics, we must conclude that the devil perceived his previous remarks had sufficiently undermined Eve's conviction even without providing her with specific explanations about immortality.

Ultimately, based on the actual words of Genesis 3, there is simply no working textual or logistical model in which the devil could be credited with introducing the idea that the human soul is immortal or that the life of the soul is distinct from the life of the body. Therefore, the idea that the soul is immortal cannot be identified as part of the devil's lie to Eve. Consequently, the notion that the soul is immortal cannot be disproved by virtue of associating it with the devil's deception of Eve.

#4 – Does Hell Annihilate the Soul?

In Matthew 10, Jesus issues a warning. In verse 28, he proclaims, "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 soul and body in hell."

We have already examined this verse earlier in our study with regard to the immortality of the soul. At that time, we demonstrated that Matthew 10:28 provides proof that the death of the body does not result in the annihilation of the soul. After all, if the death of the body resulted in the cessation of the soul's

existence also, then we would have just as much to fear from men as God, since both could cause our soul to cease to exist simply by killing the body. However, at this point we need to return to Matthew 10 in order to investigate it with regard to a different question. Does Hell annihilate the soul? At first glance, the phrase “destroy both soul and body in hell” might seem to suggest that the answer is “yes.” But that is not the case.

First, let’s start with some basic vocabulary. Even in the English, we can see that the first half of the verse uses the verb “kill” while the second half of the verse uses the verb “destroy.” It turns out that this change in verbs reflects the underlying Greek. The Greek word translated as “kill” is “apokteino” (Strong’s Number 615), which occurs twice in the first half of the verse in the phrases “kill the body” and “not able to kill the soul.” “Apokteino” has a range of meaning, including, “to kill in any way whatever, to destroy, to allow to perish, to extinguish, to abolish.” The Greek word translated as “destroy” is “apollumi” (Strong’s Number 622). Its definition overlaps “apokteino” significantly and also conveys a range of meaning, including, “to destroy, to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to ruin, to render useless, to kill.” Several items are worth noting here.

Number one, although the words overlap in meaning, it is important to note that the word “apollumi” can mean simply “to render useless,” rather than to terminate from existence.

Number two, “to render useless” is not part of the definition of “apokteino,” and consequently it might be argued that “apokteino” would favor the idea of annihilation, especially given that its definition includes the concept of “extinguishing.” However, the fact that Jesus chose to use “apollumi” instead of “apokteino” in the second half of the verse with regard to the body and soul may very well indicate that Jesus intended some manner of distinction between what men could do to the body and what God would do to body and soul in Hell. We’ll have more to say about this as we move forward.

Number three, several factors prevent “apokteino” from necessarily conveying annihilation of the soul.

One, the verb can simply mean “to kill” and in that sense it would only denote that the body ceases to function.

Two, we must keep in mind that the vast majority of the time the body is not absolutely obliterated or annihilated when it dies or is killed. Instead, it simply ceases to function. It ceases to be animated. But it typically takes years for the body to decompose into soil. And bones also constitute remnants of the body, which last much, much longer. We’ll talk more about this consideration in a moment.

Three, the text of Matthew 10:28 never describes the soul as experiencing “apokteino.” Jesus could have indicated that in Hell the soul experiences

“apokteino,” but he does not. Rather, the verse states that God can cause soul to undergo “apollumi” in Hell, but with regard to “apokteino” the text only states that men are not able to cause the soul to undergo “apokteino.” Consequently, any argument in favor of annihilation based on Matthew 10:28 depends entirely on the meaning of the Greek word “apollumi.” Moreover, if “apokteino” can convey to “extinguish” in the sense of “annihilation” but “apollumi” does not, then Jesus’ choice not to use “apollumi” instead of “apokteino” with regard to the body and soul in Hell would suggest that neither the body nor the soul are annihilated in Hell.

Four, it might be argued that Jesus used two different words in order to convey a difference in degree, as though one were worse than the other. However, given the similar definitions of these Greek words, it would be difficult to establish a difference in degree based on the terminology alone. To be clear, Jesus is intending to indicate that one of these things is worse than the other, but that degree of difference is not necessarily conveyed by these two words he uses.

Five, there certainly seems to be a degree of difference between the two actions Jesus is discussing, but at least in part this difference is created by the object to which the action is applied. Put simply, Jesus intends to communicate that what God can do is worse and more fearful than what men can do. But, it is equally clear that what makes it worse is that God can affect the soul, whereas men can only affect the body. It is the inclusion of the soul that makes God more worthy of fear. God can affect the soul, whereas men can only affect the body. In other words, Jesus does not say “men can only kill the body and soul, but God can destroy the body and soul in Hell.” By including the soul in both parts of the verse, the emphasis would have been on the degree of difference between “killing” and “destroying.” However, what Jesus says instead is that men can only kill the body, but God is able to destroy both the body and the soul in Hell. The contrast and degree of difference is focused on the inclusion of God’s ability to affect the soul while men can only harm the body. As such, there is nothing in Jesus’ statement which would necessitate that what God does to the soul or to the body is also worse than what man can do to the body.

Six, while the parallel structure of the first half and second half of Jesus’ statement does indicate that Jesus intended to portray some similarity and some distinction between “kill” and “destroy,” the significant overlap their definitions ultimately makes it difficult to be definitive about exactly how Jesus may have intended different meanings by employing these two different Greek verbs.

Number four, there is more to be said regarding what actually happens to the body in death.

One, it is necessary to address what might be a common misconception regarding the death of the body. Consider that Jesus begins this statement with a reference to how men can kill each other’s bodies. It is very important to realize that when a man is put to death, his body is not annihilated by that act. Of course, a bomb blast might theoretically disintegrate the body when it kills, but bombs weren’t

available to the audience Jesus was addressing in Matthew 10. The forms of killing that they would have been most familiar with left the body physically intact, retaining its shape and organs, etc. The fact that the body is not “destroyed” in the sense of annihilation is also proven by the common practice of burial, which would not be necessary if the body ceased to exist when it died. If we want to be accurate, when men kill each other what they really do is begin a process of decay that will eventually breakdown the body and reduce it to soil. But, when men kill the body, that act doesn’t make the body non-existent.

Two, it also important to say a few words about how long this process lasts. Although some of the information below is morbid, it is important to realize how complex the process of annihilating a body truly is.

“Between 20 to 50 days after death, the body begins to dry out as all of the remaining flesh is consumed by insects. Maggots can no longer feed on the dry body because they can’t chew through the tough tissue. This is where the beetles take over. They can chew through the remaining tendons and ligaments, until all that is left is bone and hair. Between 50 to 365 days after death, moths and bacteria consume the hair. All that is left is bone; it can last indefinitely as long as there are no predators around. This whole process can be hastened or slowed depending upon what happens to the body after death. Bodies last longer in cold and dry environments and are consumed quicker in the heat.”
- <http://www.wereyouwondering.com/how-long-does-it-take-for-a-body-to-decompose/>

“Some many things can cause it to vary, but lets assume that under optimal conditions (unclothed body, acidic soils, exposure to the elements, animal predations, etc.) inside of 1-3 years a body can disappear or be reduced to such fine components that it cannot be easily discovered. Greater than five years and a body won't be discovered by anyone but an archaeologist/anthropologist with experience at turning minute findings into larger clues.” - <https://www.quora.com/How-long-does-it-take-for-a-human-body-to-completely-decompose>

“Insects – Although an exposed human body in optimum conditions can be reduced to bone in 10 days, a body that is buried 1.2 m under the ground retains most of its tissue for a year...Time is variable – The time taken for a body to decompose depends on climatic conditions, like temperature and moisture, as well as the accessibility to insects. In summer, a human body in an exposed location can be reduced to bones alone in just nine days.” – <http://australianmuseum.net.au/decomposition-body-changes>

“The duration it takes for a dead body to decompose depends on various factors, any of which may affect the necessary time it takes to break the body down. If a dead body is inside a coffin and buried deep underground for instance, the body could even take 50 years for every tissue of the body to disappear. However, if the body is exposed to the elements, the decaying process will be very fast...How long does it take for a body to decompose? The exact time

differs. When a person's heart stops pumping blood to the body, the cells and tissues are denied oxygen and rapidly start dying. **Substantial decomposition mostly occurs in the course of two weeks, and the body's soft tissues start disintegrating even with preservation. If the body does not get enough protection from the elements, it can even skeletonize in a space of a year. However, the teeth and bones can last even for a hundred years if the soil is not highly acidic and warm.**" – <http://www.enkivillage.com/how-long-does-it-take-for-a-body-to-decompose.html>

“SUMMARY – It can takes decades for a body to decay, as there are many factors that affect the rate of decomposition, such as how well the person was embalmed, what type of casket and vault they were placed in, **humidity, heat, cold, soil type, water level, depth of burial, the availability of oxygen, accessible by insects or scavengers, body size and weight, clothing, the surface on which a body rests - all determine how fast a fresh body will skeletonize or mummify.** Aa basic guide for the effect of environment on decomposition is given as 'Casper's Law' which determined that where there is free access of air a body decomposes twice as fast than if immersed in water and eight times faster than if buried in earth. **People who have been dead for decades could still look fine whilst others of the same era are completely decomposed.** There are just too many factors that affect the rate of decomposition to give a definitive answer.” – <http://www.memorialpages.co.uk/articles/decomposition.php>

Several facts can be summarized from the excerpts above. First, the decomposition of the body is a process with different stages. Second, although the amount of time differs based on specific conditions, “in optimum conditions” it takes a minimum of about 10 days after the death to reduce a body to nothing but bone. Still, the bones remain. The body is not annihilated in 10 days even under “optimum conditions.” Third, under more average conditions, it typically takes a matter of weeks or even months for the body to dry out and at least around a year for a body to be reduced to bones. Fourth, even under “optimal conditions,” it still takes “1-3 years” before “a body can disappear” altogether including the bones and “be reduced to such fine components that it cannot be easily discovered.” Under less than optimal conditions, it can take decades even up to 50 years for the body to completely disappear. Fifth, “teeth and bones” can “last even for a hundred years if the soil is not highly acidic and warm.” One website even stated that the bone “can last indefinitely as long as there are no predators around.” Sixth, the processes that actually work to annihilate the body down to “fine components” include animals, insects, bacteria, weather, and other factors of the physical environment, etc. All these facts lead us to the next important point.

Three, the case of Lazarus also corroborates the basic fact regarding the existence of the body after death. In John 11:39, Jesus calls for the stone to be taken away from the door of Lazarus' tomb and Lazarus' sister Mary responds, “Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.” Notice, of course, that she doesn't say, “Lord, he's dead. His body doesn't exist anymore.” In fact, it's been four days since Lazarus died and no one is concerned that there won't be a body

left in the tomb. Marth is concerned, however, the body will stink, which indicates that the processes of decay have set in, but not that those processes have completed and reduced the body to nothing. Consequently, here again we see that the decomposition of a body is a process that takes time and that the death of the body most certainly does not result in the annihilation of the body.

Four, as a result of these factors it is clear that when men kill they do not annihilate the body. That particular feat is accomplished by animals, insects, bacteria, weather, and other factors of the physical environment, etc. We have also established from scripture that the human soul continues to consciously exist after the body dies. Even Jesus' words in Matthew 10:28 affirm this directly. Therefore, when men kill, what they are really doing is to end the healthy, normal functioning of the body and reduce the body to a non-functional, inactive state so that it is susceptible to the processes of decay that could eventually annihilated, typically after years or decades. But the vast majority of killings that would have been familiar to Jesus' audience would not have in any way entailed any form of annihilation or causing the body to cease to exist.

Consequently, if Jesus' intention here in Matthew 10:28 is to communicate that what God does to the soul is the same as what men can do merely to the body, then Jesus would not be asserting that God will annihilate the soul or the body because, in fact, men cannot and do not annihilate the body when they kill another man. Men simply do not annihilate the body when they put another man to death. This is supported by the reality of what happens to a corpse. It takes a long time to decompose. It is not immediately annihilated. Therefore, since the body is not annihilated when a man is killed by another man, Jesus cannot be claiming, by comparison, that God annihilates the body or the soul in Hell. Moreover, if Jesus' reference to the "destruction of the body and soul" in Hell is at all intended to borrow imagery from the process of decay that occur after men kill the body, then we would have to include that the destruction God imposes is something that takes place for an extended period of time, not just for the body, but also for the soul. This is beginning to look more and more like Matthew 10:28 might just describe subjecting the wicked eternally to forces of consumption that are capable of perpetually siphoning off the inherent vigor of their immortal bodies and spirits.

Number five, at this point perhaps an obvious question might arise. What about cremation? After all, Hell is a fiery place. Perhaps any analysis about the nature of destruction in Hell should begin with the imagery of cremation. According to Wikipedia.org, cremation "in modern furnaces, the process may be as fast as one hour per 50 kg (100 lb) of body weight." Of course, the main point of comparing Hell to cremation would be that cremation annihilates the body at a much faster rate than the normal processes of decay. So, if we conceptualize Hell in Matthew 10:28 as analogous to cremation, then perhaps the possibility annihilation could resurface.

While an analogy to cremation might initially seem appealing, perhaps even obvious to modern audiences, there are a few practical and historical challenges facing this notion.

One, it is worth mentioning that even the highly efficient modern process of cremation does not reduce the body entirely to ashes. Wikipedia's article on cremation even explains, "Contrary to popular belief, the cremated remains are not ashes in the usual sense." To the contrary, the heat does not actually incinerate the body to virtual dust, as we can see in the quote below.

"Cremation – Contrary to popular belief, the cremated remains are not ashes in the usual sense. After the incineration is completed, the dry bone fragments are swept out of the retort and pulverised by a machine called a Cremulator — essentially a high-capacity, high-speed blender — to process them into 'ashes' or 'cremated remains',[42][43] although pulverisation may also be performed by hand. This leaves the bone with a fine sand like texture..." – Wikipedia

In short, even cremation itself does not annihilate the body. In light of this, cremation itself may fall short of providing an adequate comparison upon which to assert annihilation.

Two, perhaps one reason that cremation may seem like a potentially viable analogy to annihilation in Hell is precisely because modern western society is familiar with the practice of dispose of dead bodies through cremation. However, as we can see from the quotes below, although the ancient Jewish culture was familiar with burning as a means of putting someone to death (or perhaps on occasion even post-execution ritual or memorial as seen in Joshua 7:15, 24-25), cremation is not a means of execution or a memorial ritual. Cremation is a means of disposing of a dead body, regardless of how the person died. And the Jews did not practice cremation. They did not use fire as a means to dispose of dead bodies. Instead, the Jewish people had a cultural preference for burial. The lack of cremation as a common practice in Israel makes it less likely that Jesus' reference to Gehenna would have immediately invoked the idea of annihilation by means of using fire to reduce a body to ash.

"While there is no New Testament passage that actually forbids cremation, it seems clear that **neither the Old Testament Jews nor the New Testament Christians cremated their dead**. Rather, they washed the body, wrapped it in clean cloths with spices, and placed it in the ground or in a tomb...**In Old Testament times, burning the body was a punishment fit for a criminal (Lev 20:14; 21:9; Josh 7:25). To show the attitude of Jews toward cremation, the Mishna forbade cremation as idolatry ('Abodah Zarah I.3).**" – <https://bible.org/question/what-does-bible-say-about-cremation>

"CREMATION, By: Emil G. Hirsch, Max Schloessinger, Cyrus Adler, Richard Gottheil, Biblical Data: The act of burning the dead. Cremation was not the prevailing custom among the ancient Hebrews, as it was among other

contemporary nations (see J. Grimm, 'Kleine Schriften,' ii. 226). It was, however, **not unknown to them**, and was occasionally practised. **The Pentateuch prescribes burning as the punishment in certain cases of unchastity** (Lev. xx. 14, xxi. 9; Gen. xxxviii. 24). In Josh. vii. 15, 25, and perhaps I Kings xiii. 2, and II Kings xxiii. 20, **the burning of the corpse is added to the death penalty.**" – <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4740-cremation>

"Death & Bereavement in Judaism: Ancient Burial Practices – **Cremation was not practiced by the ancient Israelites. There is no archaeological evidence that this was their practice**, and the references to "burnings" at the funeral of certain kings (Jer. 34:5; II Chron. 16:14; 21:19) presumably refer to the burning of incense or some of the king's possessions, not the body... **The references to burning of certain criminals, often cited in this connection, refer to a mode of execution, not to a mode of burial** (Gen. 38:24; Lev. 20:14; 21:9), and note the remarkable way in which the Mishnah (Sanh. 7:2) prescribes that this be carried out – **burning of the corpse is not involved... The New Testament sheds some light on Jewish burial practices of the first century C.E. Jesus' disciples took his body, bought a great quantity of myrrh and aloes, 'and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury'** (John 19:40)." – <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/ancientburial.html>

Three, because we have argued that the Jewish people did sometimes utilize fire as a means of execution but not for the disposal of corpses, it is important to highlight that there is a difference between the method of burning and the heat necessary for execution in contrast to cremation. As can be seen in the excerpts below, fire sufficient for the execution is not sufficient for the cremation.

"Cremation – The box containing the body is placed in the retort and incinerated at a temperature of 760 to 1150 °C (1400 to 2100 °F). During the cremation process, the greater portion of the body (especially the organs and other soft tissues) is vaporized and oxidized by the intense heat; gases released are discharged through the exhaust system. The process usually takes 90 minutes to two hours, with larger bodies taking longer time..." - Wikipedia.org

"How hot is a wood fire? A: **Quick Answer - Depending on the type of wood and the conditions involved, a wood fire can begin to burn at approximately 300 degrees Fahrenheit, but full flames typically require a heat of 500 degrees Fahrenheit. Some wood fires reach heats as high as 1600 degrees Fahrenheit.** Variables that determine the temperature of a wood fire include the wood species and the water content of the wood before being lighted. According to Ecofire, oak has been measured burning at temperatures ranging from 900 to 1200 degrees Fahrenheit, with the gases surrounding the fuels reaching up to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Open fires flamed by wind and in close proximity to other timber reach the highest temperatures." - <https://www.reference.com/science/hot-wood-fire-902305ee9dfd05a4>

"How Hot Is a Bonfire? by J.T. Barrett, Demand Media – **A well-stoked wood bonfire can exceed temperatures of about 1,100 degrees Celsius (2,012**

degrees Fahrenheit), which easily melts aluminum...The final stage in a wood fire, charcoal, burns the hottest. First Stages – When a fire heats wood to 100 degrees Celsius (212 degrees Fahrenheit), the water inside the wood boils and escapes as steam. **As the wood dries, at 300 degrees Celsius (572 degrees Fahrenheit), it begins to release combustible gases that ignite when they contact an open flame. The gases burn, gradually raising the temperature of the wood to 593 degrees Celsius (1,100 degrees Fahrenheit). Eventually, the wood has released all its gases, leaving charcoal and ashes. Burning Charcoal – Charcoal, which is nearly all carbon, can burn at temperatures exceeding 1,100 degrees Celsius (2,012 degrees Fahrenheit). The determining factor is the amount of oxygen reaching the charcoal; a freestanding bonfire has access to plenty of oxygen...** - <http://classroom.synonym.com/hot-bonfire-8770.html>

“Charcoal - Charcoal is usually produced by slow pyrolysis, the heating of wood or other substances in the absence of oxygen (see char and biochar).”
– <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charcoal>

As the references above indicate, the temperatures required for cremation are higher than would likely have been achieved by Israelite in the open air environment in Gehenna. Wood fires typically have a temperature of 600 C (1,100 F) with some reaching as high as 1,600 F. This is far below the temperature of cremation. Beyond that, with wood fires, the higher temperatures require producing charcoal from the wood, which can reach 1,100 C or even 2012 F. But to produce charcoal requires the absence of oxygen, which can be reduced by the fire itself, a freestanding fire like Gehenna has access to plenty of oxygen. Certainly, God could create a fire that produced exceedingly high temperature, but in terms of what the Jews of Jesus’ day would have conceptualized, Jesus’ reference to Gehenna could only have necessarily invoked a type of fire that would have badly charred the body while retaining its essential form without reducing it to ash. This begs the question whether Jesus’ Jewish audience would have or even could have assumed or imagined a more powerful fire than they had seen in Gehenna.

Four, there is precedent in Jewish culture for fires that reduce the body to ash. We find such precedent in Malachi 4:1-3, which we will examine in more detail later. (On a related note, although the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were ruined/made uninhabitable and their people killed, it is not clear from biblical texts whether the cities were reduced to ash or annihilated.) Yet despite the presence of Malachi 4, the Jews were also familiar with divine fire that did not reduce the body to ash. We find this in a landmark event that occurs in the early period of the Levitical priesthood as recorded in Leviticus 10:1-4. In this chapter, Aaron’s two sons are killed by fire from God but their dead bodies then have to be carried out of the Israelite camp afterward. Since Jewish scripture contains potential references to fire that could reduce a body to ash and fire that did not, how do we know which kind of fire the Jews would have associated with Gehenna? This fact once again makes the connection to cremation in the minds of a first-century Jewish audience far from certain or reliable.

Five, since Jesus describes the fire's impact on the body and soul collectively in Matthew 10:28, if Jesus' reference to Gehenna would not be sufficient to convey to his Jewish audience that the body is reduced to ash and annihilated, then would Jesus' comments be insufficient to indicate to his Jewish audience that the soul is annihilated by the fires. In short, the impact of the fires on the soul is limited by the impact of the fires on the body and it is at best unclear as to whether Jesus' Jewish audience would have thought of the fires as having an annihilating or even crematory affect on the bodies of the damned.

In summary, given the cultural understanding of the Jewish people in Jesus' day and the higher temperatures required to reduce a body to ash, it is not fair to presume that Jesus' mention of Gehenna would have invoked cremation, reducing the body to ash, or annihilation, neither regarding the body itself, nor regarding the soul. Instead, Jesus' audience may have simply understood Jesus to be referring to the placement of living wicked men (AND immortal angels – Matthew 25:41) into the fires of Gehenna as a punishment, not as a means of disposal of their bodies. Jesus' inclusion of angels in Matthew 25:41 likewise makes it impossible to simply assume this fire would result in death or annihilation. It is equally unclear that the Jews of Jesus' day would have readily thought of the angels as capable of being put to death by fire as men could, let alone annihilated by it. We should be careful not to retroactively assert modern cultural understanding regarding cremation back into the minds of the Jewish audience that Jesus spoke to regarding the fires of Gehenna. Unless a reasonable historical basis can be provided to corroborate that Jesus' original audience was familiar enough with the use of fire to dispose of corpses by reducing them to ash, then we should refrain from inserting such notions into our interpretation of Jesus' statements to them about Gehenna. It is, after all, an established principle of scriptural interpretation that we must interpret the text in accordance with understanding available to the original audience. As such, the question of the impact of the fire on resurrected wicked men and angels will have to be further investigated.

In addition to the practical and historical challenges regarding cremation, there are also a few scriptural points worth noting in response to the analogy of cremation and how it might relate to the idea that God could use the fires of Hell to annihilate body and soul in the fires of Hell.

One, although it is conceivable that the fires of Hell could speed up the process of the destruction of the body, the fact that Jesus starts this statement with a reference to men killing each other indicates that he probably didn't have cremation (or burning in general) in mind here leading into his comments about God destroying the body and the soul. Although mankind has been known to kill one another through fire and burning, that practice was not so widespread that it would have likely been the primary thing to pop into his audience's mind when he mentioned the idea of men killing each other. Nevertheless, we know that Hell is a fiery place according to scripture, so we should take time to consider whether

the fires of Hell result in a speedy annihilation akin to cremation, or perhaps even more rapid.

Two, it is possible that Isaiah 66 provides some insight regarding the state of the wicked in the fires of Hell and whether or not Hell results in a quick annihilation of the body that might be akin to cremation.

Isaiah 66:21 And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the LORD. **22** For as **the new heavens and the new earth**, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain. **23** And it shall come to pass, that **from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me**, saith the LORD. **24** **And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.**

This passage describes the “new heavens and the new earth,” as we see in verse 22. Verse 23 then describes those who worship the Lord at that time. Then verse 24 explains that those who worship the Lord “shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me.” Verse 24 also explains that these “carcasses” are subjected to fire that is never quenched. Now that we’ve covered the basics, we can move on to analyze the implications.

First, the phrase “new heavens and new earth” combined with “all flesh” worshipping the Lord in Jerusalem, suggests a setting in either the millennium or afterward. In addition, the presence of numerous carcasses in unquenchable fire that are visible to bystanders indicates this is after the fires of Hell have broken through to create the Lake of Fire in the valley of Hinnom. Since a mass of mankind is not thrown (with bodies) into the Lake of Fire until after the millennium, it is possible that Isaiah is describing a setting AFTER final judgment NOT during the millennium. In any case, Isaiah’s description leaves little doubt that this is the Lake of Fire of Revelation.

Second, we should address the use of the word “carcasses” in Isaiah 66. In fact, at first glance the use of the word “carcasses” might seem helpful the doctrine of annihilation, particularly because it tends to convey the idea of a lifeless body. If Isaiah is talking about lifeless bodies, then that would seem to rule out the possibility that the wicked remain consciously alive in Hell. In order to investigate this point, we need to look at the vocabulary of Isaiah 66. And we should start by noting that the Hebrew word translated here as “carcasses” is “peger” (Strong’s Number 06297).

Number one, “peger” can indeed refer to a dead body or corpse.

One, we see it used to refer to dead bodies in Genesis 15. In Genesis 15:9-11 Abraham sacrifices a heifer, a goat, a ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon and then “when the fowls came down upon the carcasses (06297)” Abram has to drive the birds away so they don’t eat the bodies of his sacrifice. Likewise, in 1 Samuel

17:46, David tells Goliath, “I will give the carcasses (06297) of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air.” Admittedly, for all previous historical precedent whenever a human being sees a corpse, the soul has certainly departed and ceased to function as the animating force of the body. As such, it is definitely no longer a living being.

Two, it must also be admitted, however, that in all of the historical precedent, the corpses were invariably mortal bodies, not immortal bodies.

Three, it is possible that the term “corpse” simple refers to the decomposing body itself, a body undergoing the processes of decay and consumption, without in any way necessarily making a claim about the presence of an invigorating soul or the living status of the being. Because of the overwhelming amount of historical precedent, it is natural to think of a corpse as inherently entailing a soulless, non-living body. But in doing so we may be mistakenly associating a particular byproduct with the actual, general definition. Simply put, as long as the term “peger” or “carcass” merely refers to a body undergoing consumption, then the use of the word “carcasses” in Isaiah would not necessarily raise any particular challenge to the conclusion that the wicked remain consciously alive in hell. We have already posited that the wicked are immortal beings subjected to constant forces of consumption in order to siphon off the inherent, unrelenting vitality of their immortal bodies. Within such a scenario, it would be perfectly accurate to describe the bodies of the wicked as “carcasses,” so long as the term was solely intended to denote a body that is undergoing the processes of consumption or decay. In short, a minimalist definition of “peger” really doesn’t pose a problem to the notion that the wicked consciously endure in Hell forever as immortal beings whose bodies are perpetually subjected to corrosive forces.

Number two, “peger” can also mean monument, without denoting a dead body in any sense.

One, the primary definition for “peger” in the Online Bible Hebrew Lexicon is “corpse, carcass, monument, stela.” Encyclopedia Britannica defines a “stela” as a “standing stone slab used in the ancient world primarily as a grave marker but also for dedication, commemoration, and demarcation...Dedicatory stelae can be traced through the Late Bronze Age Canaanite religion from miniature stelae at Hagar to immense numbers of stelae found in Carthaginian temples and sanctuaries.” We see “peger” used this way in Leviticus 26:30 in which God declares, “I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcasses upon the carcasses of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you.” Like Isaiah, the word “carcasses” is a translation of “peger.”

Two, the first use of “carcasses” in verse 30 of Leviticus 26 is likely a reference to the dead bodies of the idolaters themselves who God promised to kill. But the second use of “carcasses” here undoubtedly refers to the monuments dedicated for “the idols.” Clearly, the idols do not have dead bodies. Like the altars found at high places and the images of the false gods, the “carcasses of the idols” referred to the physical objects used in worship. There is no doubt God intended a play on

words that hinges on the dual use of “peger” to refer sometimes to a dead body and at other times to a “monument” of some sort. But ultimately, if Isaiah intended “peger” in this case to denote a monument or memorial object of some kind, then the concept of a dead body disappears altogether from Isaiah 66. At that point, nothing about Isaiah 66 would pose any problem for the notion that the wicked endure immortally in perpetual consumption in Hell.

Three, if “peger” does refer to a “monument” rather than a lifeless corpse, Isaiah would still be relevant to the question about cremation. Translating “peger” as “monument” would remove any connotations that the bodies are soulless and dead, but verse 24 still contains the word “men” in the phrase “carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me.” The Hebrew word for “men” in verse 24 is “enowsh” (Strong’s Number 0582), which means simply “man” or even more generically “person.” In fact, the closely related Hebrew word “iysh” (Strong’s Number 0376), which is actually a contracted form of “enowsh,” is even used to refer to the angel Gabriel in Daniel 9:21, 10:5, 11, and 12:6-7. Consequently, the vocabulary of Isaiah 66 can be translated as “the monument of the men that have transgressed.” And when translated as such, the passage would lose any connotation that Isaiah is merely discussing dead bodies rather than conscious, living beings. Ultimately, it is impossible to insist that Isaiah is referring to lifeless corpses. And if Isaiah is talking about wicked men in Hell without conveying that they are lifeless corpses, we can continue to explore what impact Isaiah 66 might have on the question of annihilation in the fires of Hell.

Third, let’s assume that “peger” does refer to the “bodies” of wicked men in Hell. It is important to note that the phrase “they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses” occurs sandwiched between three other critical phrases that inform us about the timeframe covered in this passage. In order to see the significance of these phrases, one simply has to ask, “When will they go forth to see these carcasses?”

Number one, verse 23 provides the answer. The pronoun “they” in verse 24 clearly refers back to those who worship the Lord every new moon and every Sabbath in verse 23. Consequently, the worshippers will see these “carcasses” every new moon and Sabbath. Under the Law of Moses God had set up specific times for the people to worship him in special ways. The following two quotes from Smith’s Bible Dictionary outline some basic facts about these special worship times. Below the quotations from Smith’s Bible Dictionary, we have also included Leviticus 23, which details the requirements for the feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. As we can see, Leviticus 23 uses the same Hebrew term “shabbath” (Strong’s Number 07676) in reference to the critical days in those annual festivals as Leviticus 23:1-3 uses to identify the weekly Sabbath.

“Festivals. I. The religious times ordained in the law fall under three heads: 1. Those formally connected with the institution of the Sabbath; 2. The historical or great festivals; 3. The day of atonement...2. The great fasts are—
a. The Passover. b. The feast of Pentecost, of weeks, of wheat-harvested or of the first-fruits. c. The feast of tabernacles or of ingathering. One each of these occasions

every male Israelite was commanded to “appear before the Lord,” that is, to attend in the court of the tabernacle or the temple, and to make his offering with a joyful heart. Deut. 27:7; Neh. 8:9-12.” – Smith’s Bible Dictionary, page 192

“New Moon. The first day of the lunar month was observed as a holy day. As on the Sabbath, trade and handicraft work were stopped, Amos 8:5, and the temple was opened for public worship... The new moons are generally mentioned so as to show that they were regarded as a peculiar class of holy days, distinguished from the solemn feasts and the Sabbaths. 1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4, 8:13, 31:3; Ezra 3:5; Neh. 10:33, Ezek. 43:17.” – Smith’s Bible Dictionary, page 443

Leviticus 23:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **2** Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, **Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts. 3** Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath (07676) of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath (07676) of the LORD in all your dwellings. **4** These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. **5** In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD’S passover. **6** And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. **7** In the first day ye shall have an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. **8** But ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD seven days: in the seventh day is an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein... **11** And he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath (07676) the priest shall wave it... **15** And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath (07676), from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths (07676) shall be complete: **16** Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath (07676) shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD... **21** And ye shall proclaim on the selfsame day, that it may be an holy convocation unto you: ye shall do no servile work therein: it shall be a statute for ever in all your dwellings throughout your generations... **24** Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, **In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. 25** Ye shall do no servile work therein: but ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. **26** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **27** Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD... **32** It shall be unto you a sabbath (07676) of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath (07676)... **37** These are the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: **38** Beside the sabbaths (07676) of the LORD, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows,

and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the LORD. 39 Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the LORD seven days: on the first day shall be a **sabbath (07677 – shabbathown, which means “sabbath observance”)**, and on the eighth day shall be a **sabbath (07677 - shabbathown)**...42 **Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths.**

As the quotes above from Smith’s Bible Dictionary and Leviticus 23 establish, specific times included the weekly Sabbath, the monthly new moons, and a set of three annual festivals. While it is possible that the word “Sabbath” in Isaiah 66 is intended to refer to the weekly Sabbath, there are hints that this is actually a reference to the annual festivals. One, the same Hebrew word that was used to refer to the weekly Sabbath was also used to refer to the annual festivals. Two, Isaiah 66 is describing that all flesh will “come to worship before God.” Of the weekly Sabbaths, monthly new moons, and annual festivals, only on the three annual festivals was every male required to go up to Jerusalem “to come to worship before God.” Three, Zechariah 14 contains a very similar statement to Isaiah 66.

Zechariah 14:16 And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. 17 And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. 18 And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. 19 This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

Every single verse in this passage mentions the nations coming up to worship the Lord, just like Isaiah 66. However, unlike Isaiah, Zechariah specifies that these worshippers will come up “year to year.” That is the first hint that the word “Sabbath” in Isaiah 66 is meant to refer to the yearly festival Sabbaths, not the weekly Sabbaths. In addition, verses 16, 18, and 19 all describe the nations coming up to worship the Lord in Jerusalem during the feast of tabernacles. The feast of tabernacles was one of the three annual feasts in which the people of Israel were required to come up to Jerusalem. Consequently, a comparison to Zechariah shows that Isaiah is talking about a recurring visit to worship the Lord that occurs year after year.

So, why is this significant to the question of cremation? The answer is simple. If these “carcasses” are the corpses of all the wicked dead who were sent to the Lake of Fire at the Final Judgment, then Isaiah is absolutely clear that these corpses do not get annihilated in the fire. To the contrary, these corpses remain “from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another,” year after year as the worshippers of God go up to Jerusalem for annual sabbaths associated with festivals like the feast of tabernacles. In other words, the fires of Hell do not

cremate these bodies in a matter of minutes or hours or even days. That would make the fires of Hell considerably less effective at cremation than modern methods, which take only a matter of a few hours. Even if the wicked were only around for the first year or a few years before being annihilated, if we imagine their time in the fire to be unbearably painful (as proponents of annihilation often suppose), then the argument that annihilation is humane because it avoids such pain is becoming simply untenable. But the picture gets worse for the theory of annihilation.

Number two, since Isaiah states that the worshippers of God see the wicked when they go up to worship before the Lord in Jerusalem, we can further ask, “For how many years do the nations come up to worship the Lord in Jerusalem according to Isaiah 66?” The answer comes in Isaiah 66:22, which states, “as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.” In other words, these worshippers will come up before the Lord for as long as the new heavens and new earth remain, which is to say forever. And every year forever as they come up to worship the Lord, they will see these corpses in the unquenchable fire. This isn’t just inefficient cremation. The fire appears to never actually annihilate the corpses, but instead the corpses remain year after year.

Number three, as Isaiah explains why the worshippers will see the “carcasses” year after year, he concludes verse 24, saying, “for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched.” It is also worth noting that Jesus uses this same phrase three times in Mark 9:44, 46, and 48 when describing the final state of the wicked. (Incidentally, notice that the phrase “enter life” in verses 43 and 45 is paralleled in verse 47 by the phrase “enter into the kingdom.” This conforms to our earlier assertions that scripture defines eternal life not solely as immortal existence but also as participating in the kingdom and God’s provisions in the kingdom, having a relationship with God, and being able to enter God’s presence.)

Mark 9:43 And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands **to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:** **44 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.** **45** And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet **to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:** **46 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.** **47** And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes **to be cast into hell fire:** **48 Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.**

In both Isaiah and Mark, the phrases “the worm shall not die” and the “fires shall not be quenched” both refer to forces of consumption and decay. According to Isaiah and Jesus, those forces will never cease to act on these corpses. It is clear that Jesus’ comments in Mark 9 are intended to indicate the longevity or enduring duration of the corruptive forces of Hell in contrast to the comparatively short-term duration of those corruptive forces which affect the mortal body after death.

In fact, Matthew 18:8-9 records a parallel account of Jesus' statement in Mark 9, but instead of the phrase "fire is not quenched," Jesus simply says "everlasting fire," which again affirms that these forces of consumption never cease to act upon those they are applied to.

Now, if the corpses were completely consumed by the worms or completely disintegrated by the fire, then at some point the worms would run out of food and the fire would run out of fuel. We might also consider why the fire has to last forever if the wicked are annihilated within a relatively short amount of time. At this point, it should be noted that it really doesn't matter whether the worms or the fire are metaphorical or real. One way or another this is a reference to forces of consumption and both Isaiah and Jesus are saying that those forces of consumption never stop acting on these corpses. There is no point when the "worms" cease to eat way that these corpses. There is no point when the "fire" ceases to consume them. Their consumption is ongoing forever. Likewise, we know that the Lake of Fire is simply the surface of the subterranean fires of Hell. Therefore, since the fires of Hell don't annihilate these bodies, neither then does the Lake of Fire. Instead, the bodies are subjected to corruptive forces for as long as the righteous continue to come up to worship before the Lord.

Number four, if the term "peger" is referring to a monument, would that remove any connotation that Isaiah is describing wicked men being subjected to Hellfire? As it turns out, even if we translate "peger" to mean "monument" rather than "carcasses," the problem still remains.

One, even if "peger" does not refer to the men themselves, Isaiah is clearly using the Hebrew word "enowsh" (Strong's Number 0582) to refer to men who are subjected to forces of consumption that never cease acting on those men.

Two, as we have noted, Isaiah also uses the phrases, "The worm never dies" and "The fire is never quenched." Such language describing processes of decay or consumption clearly do not apply to monuments, but to flesh. Monuments don't feed worms or fuel fire.

Three, the worshippers of God go up year after year and continue to see these wicked men for as long as the new heavens and new earth exist. There is never a point when worshippers could go up and be unable to see the wicked in this situation due to the wicked have disintegrated in the flames.

So, while "peger" itself might refer to a landscape features (such as the Lake of Fire) acting as a commemorative monument to God's judgment of wickedness, the inclusion of the terms "enowsh," "worm," and "fire" indicate that the men themselves are being subjected to the forces of corruption. However, without the term "peger" itself referring to a lifeless body, any potential proof against the wicked remaining immortal vanishes. Consequently, even if "peger" is translated as "monument," Isaiah 66 still provides evidence that the fires of Hell do not result in the relatively quick cremation or the annihilation of the wicked.

As we finish this section on Matthew 10, it is important to summarize the fascinating points that we have uncovered. And there are also a few additional points worth making before we move on.

First, the fact that the corpses remain in spite of their perpetual subjection to forces of consumption is utterly impossible to account for if these bodies are mortal and corruptible. Here we are forced to ponder an obvious question. What kind of body can endure fire year after year without being disintegrated? Certainly not a mortal body. This suggests that these corpses are actually immortal, which is a point we'll touch on more momentarily.

Second, ordinarily the presumed purpose of subjecting anything to such forces of consumption would be to annihilate it. However, the textual details indicate that annihilation is not the result since the corpses remain year after year for as long as the new heavens and new earth remain. So, either Hell is unable to accomplish the desired purpose of annihilation or annihilation is not the purpose of the perpetual consumption that is enacted on these corpses. This leads us back to the suggestion that the bodies in Isaiah 66 are immortal. Since God made Hell and God is not incompetent, then the purpose of the perpetual consumption must be something other than annihilation. In fact, the same passage which tells us that God made Hell also tells us that He made Hell for angelic beings. We examined Matthew 25:41 earlier in conjunction with other scriptural proofs that all resurrected men will be made immortal like angels and no longer able to die. And while Isaiah clearly shows that annihilation is not the goal of these consumptive forces, the perpetual existence of these corpses affirms our earlier assertion that the purpose of the fires of Hell is to restrict the movement of immortal angelic beings by constantly consuming and siphoning of the inherent vigor and vitality of their bodies.

Third, as we noted earlier the word "apollumi," which is used in Matthew 10:28 with regard to God destroying the body and soul in Hell, can mean simply to "render useless" and in that sense it would fit very well with the notion that the fires of Hell are intended primarily as a restraining force to counteract the inherent vigor of immortal spirits.

Fourth, as we also noted earlier the Greek terms used for "kill" and "destroy" in Matthew 10 overlap substantially in meaning. This overlap makes it difficult to insist that the destruction of the body and soul by God are in some sense "more destructive" ("annihilating") than the men killing each other's bodies. However, we should note that verses 45 and 47 of Mark 9 both include the phrase "into hell" using the Greek word "gehenna" (Strong's Number 1069), which is the same word for "Hell" used by Jesus in Matthew 10:28. Therefore, whatever Mark 9 and Isaiah 66 are saying about Hell is also true of Matthew 10:28. If Mark 9 and Isaiah 66 show that Hell does not annihilate bodies from existence, then neither does Matthew 10:28.

Fifth, even if Jesus' does intend some degree of difference between "killing" and "destroying," Jesus statement in Matthew 10:28 does invoke a basic, rough

comparison between when men kill the body and when God destroys the soul and body in Hell. However, when men kill a body it does not annihilate the body. The body continues to exist. Killing the body simply prevents the immortal soul from continuing to animate the body. In other words, when men kill the body they are essentially rendering the body inanimate and non-functional and killing the body initiates the point when the forces of consumption begin to act on the body in a substantial scale.

Sixth, the fires of Hell do not annihilate the body in a process conceptually akin to cremation. To the contrary, both Isaiah and Jesus inform us that the forces of consumption that are at work in Hell never cease to be exerted on those in Hell and that year after year for all eternity the wicked in Hell will remain to be seen by all who go up to worship the Lord in Jerusalem.

Beyond these six summary items, there are a three additional points worth noting as we conclude our analysis of Matthew 10.

First, in addition to the analysis that we've outlined above, it would seem that at the heart of the misperception surrounding Matthew 10:28 lies a case of mistaken identity. Here it is worth noting once again that although God used fire to "devour" the bodies of Aaron's sons in Leviticus 10:1-5, their bodies were not annihilated or reduced to ash by the divine fire but instead their bodies had to be carried out of the camp after their deaths. Interestingly, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew word "devour" in Leviticus 10:2 into the Greek word "katesthio," Strong's Number 2719, which is used in Revelation 11:5 and 20:9 to describe divine fire that consumes God's enemies within the setting of the last times. This connection from the Septuagint would suggest that Jews would not have conceived of God's devouring fire as reducing the body to nothingness in Revelation any more than it had in Leviticus 10. In short, these linguistic considerations are important because it informs us that in the minds of the ancient Jews, a thing could be "devoured" or "destroyed" without being annihilated from existence. And we should keep this fact in mind when we examine the Greek wording found in the New Testament.

The Greek word destroy is "apollumi," which is a verb, not a noun and not an adjective. Like all verbs, it denotes an action. But instead of reading the word "destroy" and thinking of consuming forces actively working on the body and soul, we often mistakenly interpret this word in reference to a state or condition. This might be fitting if "apollumi" were rendered as a participle, in which case the English equivalent would be "destroyed" used as an adjective to describe the body and soul. But Jesus does not use a participle. In fact, in Matthew 10:28, the verb "apollumi" is in the "active voice" and the "aorist tense." The Online Bible Greek Lexicon explains that in the aorist tense, "the concept of the verb is considered without regard for past, present, or future time." This tells us that Jesus did not intend to convey the idea of a destroyed body or destroyed soul, in the sense of something that has reached or will eventually reach the state of being annihilated. Instead, he use the active voice of a verb to describe bodies and souls that are experiencing the action of destruction or consumption.

This common error of mistaking an action for a final state produced by that action is further compounded by the fact that we presume the action is being exerted on mortal human bodies that are, by their nature, susceptible to annihilation by the processes and forces of destruction and decay. However, as we have shown angels are immortal, Hell was prepared for angels, and resurrected men will be made equal to angels particularly in the sense that they will no longer have the capacity to die. Consequently, while Jesus certainly states in Matthew 10 that the forces of destruction will act on the wicked, it is a mistake to presume that Jesus' words suppose an end result that is associated strictly with a mortal condition, which resurrected wicked men will no longer be in. Instead, we should simply understand Jesus' statement as an assertion that the forces of destruction will act on immortal, wicked men without unnecessarily inferring anything about there being a particular final result of that action.

Second, Jesus' statement in Matthew 10:28 can also be compared to Jesus' depiction of the rich man who dies and is taken to Hell in Luke 16, which we discussed earlier. In our previous discussion, we noted that Jesus describes the rich man as being consciously alive in flames in Hell. Of course, we pointed out that within the context of Luke 16, the rich man's body is not in Hell, but only his immortal soul. His body was buried. But the point is that Jesus' parable portrays an immortal being continually subjected to the consuming action of the fire without being annihilated or apparently even in the process of being annihilated. Consequently, our conclusion that the word "destroy" in Matthew 10 refers to ongoing, but non-annihilating, fire is entirely confirmed by Jesus' own depiction of how immortal beings are effected by the fires of Hell in Luke 16. This is consistent with Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4 and 17, and Jude 1:6 and 13, which all discuss men and angels continuing to endure the fires and darkness of Hell forever. We have already seen many of these verses in our study and in a later section we will take a closer look at the extent to which they attest to long durations in the fires of Hell.

Third, Revelation 19-20 provides additional affirmation that the fires of Hell do not annihilate the wicked. Number one, verses 11-16 detail the return of Jesus Christ. Verse 11 describes a rider on a white horse.

Revelation 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. 12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. 13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. 14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Verse 13 gives the clearest identification that the rider on the white horse is Jesus when it says “his name is called The Word of God.” This segment of the chapter also explains that Jesus is returning to wage war and begin his reign over the earth. We see this in verse 11, which states that “in righteousness he doth judge and make war.” And we see it in verse 14, which says that “the armies which were in heaven followed him.” Verse 15 goes on to state, he will “smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron.” And lastly, verse 16 gives him the title “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.” All of this language depicts Jesus as a conquering king who will begin a very tangibly enforced rule over the nations.

Number two, using the title “the beast” to refer to the antichrist, verse 20 describes that the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies will “gather together to make war” against Jesus and his army. The critical statement comes in verse 20, which states that the antichrist and the false prophet “were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

Revelation 19:17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; **18** That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great. **19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. 20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him,** with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. **These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.** **21** And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

From our previous examination of Revelation 20:14, we already know that the lake of fire is the second death. We have also noted earlier that the lake of fire is refers to a location on the earth in the valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem where the fires of Hell will break through to the surface of the earth. But the key question here concerns what happens to the beast and the false prophet once they are thrown into the lake of fire. Specifically, are they annihilated by the flames? We will find the answer to this question as we continue the narrative into chapter 20.

Number three, verses 1-5 of chapter 20 continue immediately from Revelation 19:21 and describe what happens after the antichrist and the false prophet are thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. **2** And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, **3** And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, **that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand**

years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. 4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: **and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God,** and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and **they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5** But **the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.** This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and **shall reign with him a thousand years.**

As we can see, verse 1 states that an angel chains Satan in the bottomless pit for a thousand years. Of course, the bottomless pit refers to the deeper parts of Hell far below the surface of the earth. It is also relevant to note that Revelation 9:2 attests to the presence of fire in the bottomless pit when it describes smoke coming out of the pit like “the smoke of a great furnace.” Regarding the timeframe of these events, the phrase “thousand years” is repeated five times in verses 1-7, making it a definitive timeframe marker for the narrative. As we can see from verses 2 and 4-5, the thousand years starts with Satan being chained in the bottomless pit and with the resurrection of the saints to rule with Christ. In addition, verses 2-3 and 5 inform us that after the thousand years, Satan will be loosed from the bottomless pit and there will be another resurrection of the dead.

Number four, verse 7 begins to describe the events that transpire after the thousand years.

Revelation 20:7 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, 8 And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. 9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. 10 **And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.** 11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

As we can see, the first thing that happens is that Satan is released from the bottomless pit, just as verses 2-3 already told us would happen. He has not been annihilated, but as verses 8-9 explain, Satan will deceive the nations once more

and gather them to battle against the saints. Verse 9 concludes by noting that God will stop the armies of the nations by sending forth a fire to devour them. We'll talk more about this fire in a later section below when we examine Malachi 4. But for now, our interest is in verse 10.

Number five, chapter 20:10 provides another piece of critical information. It states that after the thousand years when God defeats Satan's army, then the devil will be "cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are." Although the word "are" is not present in the underlying Greek, this verse depicts the beast and the false prophet as in the lake of fire at the time when the devil is cast into the lake of fire as well. As we've already noted, the beast and the false prophet were cast into the lake of fire by Jesus when he returned and conquered the earth at the start of the thousand years. Despite the absence of a Greek counterpart for the English word "are," this statement simply could not be made at all if the beast and the false prophet had ceased to exist in the Lake of Fire hundreds of years earlier due to the fires. As such, this passage teaches that after a thousand years the beast and the false prophet are still in the lake of fire and not been annihilated by the fires. This depiction that lake of fire is the final location for the beast, false prophet, and the devil is consistent with Matthew 25:41, which explains that, upon his return, Jesus will separate the wicked out of his kingdom and confine them to the fires of Hell that have been prepared for the devil and his angels.

Number six, we should note that Revelation 19:20 states that the beast and the false prophet are "cast alive" into the lake of fire. Certainly, such language could simply indicate that they were not killed in battle by Christ when he returned, but that they were thrown alive in their physical, mortal bodies into the Lake of Fire. However, the Greek word translated as "alive" in the phrase "cast alive" is the verb "zao" (Strong's number 2198). Even more specifically, here in Revelation 19:20, "zao" is used in the "present tense, active voice, participle mood." In other words, these men are throwing "living" into the Lake of Fire. This same word "zao" is used in the exact same rendering (present tense, active voice, participle mood) in Revelation 1:18 where it refers to Jesus as immortalized through his resurrection. Likewise, Revelation 20:4 uses "zao" in the aorist tense, active mood, indicative voice to refer to the saints who are resurrected at the beginning of the millennium. Uses such as these provide us with good reason to conclude that at the beginning of the millennium the beast and the false prophet are immortalized before they are thrown into the Lake of Fire, which is why they endure the fires of Hell throughout the thousand years and remain there a thousand years later when the devil is also cast into the lake of fire in Revelation 20:10.

Consequently, the fact that the beast and the false prophet are still in the lake of fire after a thousand years demonstrates that the fire does not annihilate those who are cast into it. This corroborates our conclusions regarding Matthew 10:28, in which we stated that the consuming properties of the fires of Hell do not result in annihilation, but rather as a restraint upon the inherent vigor of the immortal beings that are sent there. This also confirms our interpretation of Isaiah, in which

we states that the details of Isaiah 66 demonstrate that the wicked continue to reside in the fire near Jerusalem where they are seen year after year by those who go up to worship God in Jerusalem for as long as the new heavens and earth remain, which ultimately means forever. Like Isaiah 66, the fact that the beast and the false prophet still exist in the lake of fire after one thousand years also demonstrates that their bodies must have been made immortal (equivalent to those of angels) when they are sent into the lake of fire. After all, there is simply no way that mortal, corruptible bodies could last more than a few hours in ordinary fire let alone last a thousand years in the everlasting, unquenchable fires of Hell. Likewise, as passages such as Romans 5-6, 1 Corinthians 15, and Revelation 20 indicate, through Jesus Christ's introduction of immortal resurrection for human beings, there will be a general resurrection of the dead at the end of millennium. At that time, the wicked who are resurrected will be cast into the Lake of Fire just as the beast, false prophet, and the devil were.

In conclusion, we can see that Matthew 10:28 does not support the idea annihilation. On the contrary, Jesus' statements clearly contradict such a conclusion. First, Jesus' states that human souls survive the death of the body. While men can kill each other's bodies, the death of their bodies does not harm their souls. And second, Hell does not annihilate men's bodies and souls. Rather, the fires of Hell are perpetual. While Jesus does state that God will destroy both the body and the soul of the wicked in Hell, that destruction is an ongoing phenomenon that never ends. The wicked are constantly subjected to those forces of consumption. And those forces of consumption never finish their task and annihilate the wicked, as they would in the case of mortal bodies. To the contrary, passages like Isaiah 66 and Revelation 19-20 explicitly state that the wicked will continue to exist in Hell year after year, century after century without being annihilated by the flames. Either this is the most ineffective cremation ever or the purpose of the flames of Hell is not cremation or annihilation at all. As we have said, the point of the fires of Hell is not annihilation, but the restraint of immortal beings, just as it has already been a place of containment for angels for millennia. For as long as the godly continue to worship the Lord, the immortal bodies and souls of the wicked (men and angels) will continue to be subject to corrosive forces in Hell.