

THE SECOND DEATH

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“Death,” along with having to pay taxes, is known as one of the two certainties of life. Hebrews 9:27 tells us that “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Physical death is an “appointment” we are all going to keep unless Christ returns while we are still living (1 Thes 4:15-17). The dictionary definition for the word “death” is “a permanent cessation of all vital functions: the end of life.” There are medical and legal definitions for death that are all aimed at precisely identifying when physical life comes to an end. The true definition of physical death, according to the Creator Himself, is “*the body without the spirit*” (Jas 2:26). Thus, God defines physical death as the point at which a person’s spirit is separated from their physical body. There is another kind of death described in scripture: when a person becomes separated from God because of their sins (Isa 59:2; Rom 5:12; 6:23; Eph 2:1-3). This is *spiritual* death. Being dead in trespasses and sins is the state of “having no hope” and being “without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). Most tragic of all, without reconciliation to God through His Son Jesus Christ, that condition becomes permanent. The Book of Revelation calls this the *second death* (Rev 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8). Obviously, physical death would be the *first* death. But what is the second death like? Who is it for? How long does it last? God’s word answers these important questions.

The lake of fire

In his divinely inspired vision in Revelation 20:13-15, the apostle John describes Judgment Day: “*And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*” The “lake of fire” described in this vision is the location of the “second death” suffered by those who are cast therein. A similar description is found in Revelation 21:7-8, which also lets us know the characteristics of those who will partake of the second death: “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*”

Another key point to recognize is that overcoming sin is the way to inherit eternal life and to avoid partaking of the second death. Revelation 2:11 also says, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the

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(continued)

churches; *He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*”

Everlasting punishment

Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 says, “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: *who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*” The punishment is one that involves separation from God and “destruction.” Today, more and more people outright deny that there is a literal hell to punish the wicked. The Bible clearly teaches otherwise. God’s word also teaches against the idea that the wicked will be *annihilated*. The word “destruction” does not mean being put out of existence. This is demonstrated by the fact that the destruction is described as being “everlasting” in duration. The word “everlasting” also does not leave room for another false doctrine that says hell is a literal place, but those who go there will not actually be there for all eternity. Do the scriptures teach any kind of a “second chance” after this life? No! The Greek word for “everlasting” is *aionios*, the root of which is where our English word “eon” comes from. This word is also used in Matthew 25:46 where Jesus says that the wicked “*shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*” “*Aionios*” is the Greek word translated “everlasting” and “eternal” in this same verse. Therefore, according to Christ, the duration of hell for the wicked is the same as the duration of heaven for the righteous. The duration of heaven for the righteous is “forever and ever” (Rev 22:5). Therefore, the duration of hell for the wicked must also be the same. Indeed, Revelation 14:11 says that “*the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever.*” Furthermore, 2 Corinthians 4:18 uses the same Greek word to contrast the duration of the things that are seen with the things that are unseen: “*While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*” This verse makes no sense whatsoever if the things that are unseen are anything less than eternal, because what is not eternal is temporal by definition. Therefore, it is clear that this Greek word means “eternal,” that is, never ending. Thus, when God says in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 that the destruction of hell is “everlasting,” He means that hell is truly “everlasting.” Those who go there will be there for eternity. They will never leave nor escape. *That* is the second death. May we overcome the world so that the only death we ever partake of is the first one!