SCRIPTURE • HISTORY • REASON • HOPE

HELL

A CONSUMING FIRE OF EVERLASTING DESTRUCTION

A COMPREHENSIVE BIBLICAL STUDY

Will the wicked burn alive forever, or be destroyed by everlasting fire?

Examining What Scripture Really Teaches About

HELL • THE LAKE OF FIRE • DEATH • THE GRAVE • SHEOL • HADES
GEHENNA • TARTARUS • THE FALLEN ANGELS • JUDGMENT • SALVATION
and the Hope of Eternal Life

Let Scripture Interpret Scripture

"But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."
ROMANS 6:23

"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night ..."
REVELATION 14:11

"For the wages of sin is death ..."
ROMANS 6:23

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... ... death shall be no more ..."
REVELATION 21:1, 4

Expanded Study Edition
with Deeper Scripture Analysis, Historical Perspectives, and Practical Applications

ALL SCRIPTURE IS BREATHED OUT BY GOD AND PROFITABLE FOR TEACHING, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, AND FOR TRAINING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS
2 TIMOTHY 3:16

BY SID RICHMOND

GOD IS JUST • GOD IS LOVE • THE TRUTH SETS US FREE



A Note to the Reader

HOW THIS STUDY GREW FROM YEARS OF SCRIPTURE NOTES

This expanded edition grew out of a much older personal study: pages of Scripture references, highlighted phrases, questions, cross-references, and observations collected over years. The original notes were not written as a polished theological treatise. They were written as an investigation.

The controlling question remains the same: Does the Bible teach that the wicked are kept alive forever in conscious torment, or that they finally suffer irreversible destruction — the second death?

The approach of this study is simple: let Scripture interpret Scripture. Old Testament judgment language matters when Jesus speaks of Gehenna. Isaiah matters when Revelation speaks of smoke rising forever. Genesis matters when Paul speaks of immortality. The resurrection matters when Christians discuss death.

> *"For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction..."*
>
> ROMANS 15:4

> *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching..."*
>
> 2 TIMOTHY 3:16–17

This edition also does something the original notes did not always do: it openly presents the strongest texts for eternal conscious torment and distinguishes what Scripture states explicitly from what remains interpretive or disputed.



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The study is intentionally cumulative. No single verse carries the entire doctrine. The question is which reading best explains the whole biblical pattern.



1. The Central Question

WILL THE WICKED LIVE FOREVER — OR BE DESTROYED BY EVERLASTING FIRE?

Before beginning with the English word hell, Scripture invites a more basic question: What is the promised destiny of the righteous, and what is the stated penalty of sin?

> *"for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." — Genesis 3:19*

> *"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life..." — John 3:36*

The biblical contrast appears again and again: life and death, immortality and mortality, salvation and destruction, resurrection and the second death.

Romans 6:23 states the contrast with unusual clarity: the wages of sin is death; the gift of God is eternal life in Christ. John 3:16 speaks of those who believe receiving eternal life rather than perishing.

The conditionalist argument begins here: eternal life is a gift received through Christ, not a punishment shared by the lost.



2. Humanity, Mortality, and Immortality

DUST, BREATH, RESURRECTION, AND THE GIFT OF LIFE

Genesis presents humanity as created and dependent. Adam is formed from dust and becomes a living being by God's breath. Scripture does not introduce humanity as naturally indestructible.

Paul says of God that He 'alone has immortality' (1 Timothy 6:16). This does not mean God cannot give immortality. Paul explicitly teaches that at resurrection 'this mortal body must put on immortality' (1 Corinthians 15:53).

That distinction matters: God possesses immortality inherently; redeemed humanity receives immortality.

Romans 2:7 speaks of those who seek 'glory and honor and immortality.' The Christian hope is therefore not merely the survival of an immortal component after bodily death. The great New Testament hope is resurrection, when mortality is swallowed up by life.

This also means that the doctrines of conditional immortality and soul sleep should not be collapsed into one another. A Christian may dispute the intermediate state and still affirm that final immortality is God's gift to the redeemed.



3. The Tree of Life and Lost Immortality

WHY GENESIS 3 IS FOUNDATIONAL

> *"lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever –"*
>
> GENESIS 3:22–24 (ESV)

After the fall, God bars humanity from the Tree of Life specifically so that fallen humanity will not 'live forever.' The importance of this text is difficult to overstate.

The biblical story begins with lost access to life and ends with restored access to the Tree of Life in Revelation 22. Between those two scenes stands Christ, resurrection, and the promise that mortality will put on immortality.

This creates a coherent biblical arc:

- **Genesis:** access to living forever is lost.
- **The Gospel:** eternal life is offered through Christ.
- **Resurrection:** mortality puts on immortality.
- **Revelation:** the Tree of Life is restored in the New Creation.

The original study summarized the point memorably: 'Eternal life is a gift, not a punishment.'

4. What Does 'Hell' Mean?

Keeping the Biblical terms Distinct

Term	Basic biblical use
Sheol	Hebrew term commonly associated with the grave / realm of the dead.
Hades	Greek term for the realm of the dead; in Revelation 20, Hades itself is thrown into the Lake of Fire.
Gehenna	Jesus' judgment term drawing on the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem.
Tartarus	The verb in 2 Peter 2:4 describing sinful angels held for judgment; not a general synonym for the final fate of humans.
Lake of Fire	Revelation's final judgment image, explicitly called 'the second death' in Revelation 20:14 and 21:8.

A major source of confusion is treating every English occurrence of 'hell' as though the underlying biblical term always refers to the same place and stage of judgment. The terms should be read in their own contexts.



5. Gehenna and the Valley of Hinnom

A Real Place with an Old Testament History

The Greek word Gehenna derives from the Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem. Jeremiah describes Topheth in the valley as a place of abomination, child sacrifice, slaughter, and divine judgment (Jeremiah 7:30–33; 19:1–13).

> *"They have built the high places of Topheth... to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire..."*
>
> — Jeremiah 7:31

Jesus later uses Gehenna as an image of decisive divine judgment. The Old Testament background matters because Jesus' hearers did not encounter the term in a vacuum.

At the same time, Scripture never states in a simple equation that the geographical Valley of Hinnom is Revelation's Lake of Fire. The responsible claim is narrower: Gehenna contributes the prophetic imagery by which Jesus warns of final judgment.

The key New Testament text is Matthew 10:28: God can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.



6. Jesus on Destruction and Judgment

CLEAR WARNINGS FROM THE SAVIOR

> *"Fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."*
> — MATTHEW 10:28

The Greek verb translated 'destroy' can sometimes denote ruin or loss rather than literal nonexistence. That lexical fact should be admitted. Yet the verse also creates a real difficulty for the claim that the human soul is inherently indestructible.

Jesus' warnings should therefore be read beside the Bible's broader vocabulary: perish, death, destruction, burn up, ashes, cut off, and second death.

Mark 9 also speaks of unquenchable fire and the worm that does not die. But Jesus is quoting Isaiah 66:24, where the righteous look upon the corpses of those who rebelled against God. The Old Testament picture is one of shameful, irreversible destruction.

Jesus' judgment language is severe. Conditional immortality does not attempt to make it mild. It asks what the severity accomplishes.



7. The Old Testament Witness

BURNED UP, CONSUMED, CUT OFF, NO MORE

The original notes accumulated a large bank of destruction texts. Their power lies not in one isolated phrase but in the repeated pattern.

- **Malachi 4:1–3:** the wicked are stubble; the coming day burns them up; they become ashes.
- **Psalm 37:** the wicked perish, vanish like smoke, are cut off, and 'will be no more.'
- **Obadiah 1:15–16:** judged nations become 'as though they had never been.'
- **Psalm 145:20:** the Lord preserves those who love Him, but destroys the wicked.
- **Proverbs 2:22:** the wicked are cut off from the land.
- **Isaiah 51:8:** moth and worm consume the enemies of righteousness.

Prophetic poetry must not be flattened into a technical metaphysical manual. Yet the imagery points consistently toward consumption and removal, not toward the preservation of evil in endless conscious life.

"In just a little while, the wicked will be no more..."

— PSALM 37:10 (ESV)



"by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire."
JUDE 7

8. Eternal Fire and Unquenchable Fire

JUDGMENT THAT CANNOT BE STOPPED OR REVERSED

An unquenchable fire is a fire no one can put out before it accomplishes God's judgment. Jeremiah 17:27 warned that Jerusalem would burn with a fire that 'shall not be quenched.' Jerusalem was destroyed; it is not still burning.

Jude 7 is especially significant: Sodom and Gomorrah are said to have undergone the punishment of eternal fire. Yet the cities are not still visibly burning.

Peter adds that Sodom and Gomorrah were reduced to ashes and made an example of what would happen to the ungodly (2 Peter 2:6).

Thus 'eternal fire' need not mean that the victims must remain eternally alive inside the fire. The judgment is eternal because what God accomplishes through it is final.

"The punishment is eternal; the act of punishing need not be."



9. The Worm and the Smoke

OLD TESTAMENT IMAGERY BEHIND JESUS AND REVELATION

The worm that does not die. Mark 9 draws from Isaiah 66:24, where the objects of worm and fire are dead bodies. The natural picture is complete, shameful destruction: worms do not fail before consuming; fire is not quenched before finishing its work.

Smoke rising forever. Isaiah 34 describes Edom's smoke rising forever, yet the same prophecy pictures animals inhabiting the devastated land. The image signifies permanent devastation.

This Old Testament background matters when Revelation 14 says the smoke of torment rises forever and ever. But Revelation 14 also adds that the worshipers of the beast have 'no rest, day or night.' A responsible conditionalist cannot simply ignore that phrase.

The conclusion must therefore be cumulative: Revelation's imagery is rooted in prophetic judgment language, while later Revelation explicitly names the final fate of condemned humanity as the second death.

*"They shall go out and look on the dead bodies
of the men who have rebelled against me."*

ISAIAH 66:24



10. The Apostolic Witness

DEATH, DESTRUCTION, RESURRECTION, AND IMMORTALITY

- Romans 6:23: the wages of sin is death; eternal life is God's gift.
- 2 Thessalonians 1:9: the wicked suffer 'eternal destruction.'
- Philippians 3:19: 'their end is destruction.'
- Hebrews 10:39: contrasts being destroyed with preserving life.
- 1 Corinthians 15:26: the last enemy to be destroyed is death.
- 1 Corinthians 15:53–54: immortality is put on at resurrection.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 deserves particular weight. Paul does not say 'eternal torment' in that verse. He says eternal destruction. Traditional interpreters rightly note that the underlying word can describe ruin. Conditionalists reply that the ordinary force of the death/destruction vocabulary across Scripture should not be emptied of meaning without strong contextual reason.

The apostolic pattern is therefore the same one seen earlier: eternal life belongs to the redeemed; destruction belongs to the lost.



11. The Great White Throne and the Second Death

REVELATION'S OWN INTERPRETATION OF THE LAKE OF FIRE

Revelation 20:11–15 describes the Great White Throne. Death and Hades give up their dead. All are judged. Then Death and Hades themselves are cast into the Lake of Fire.

> *"This is the second death, the lake of fire."*
>
> — REVELATION 20:14

Revelation 21:8 repeats the same identification. John therefore gives an interpretive key to his own image: the Lake of Fire is the second death.

The first death is followed by resurrection. The second death occurs after resurrection and final judgment. Scripture never speaks of another resurrection from it.

The casting of Death into the Lake of Fire also demonstrates that the imagery is symbolic as well as real: Death is not a conscious organism that can literally experience pain. Its casting into the fire represents its abolition.

This coheres with Paul: 'The last enemy to be destroyed is death.'



12. Revelation's Hardest Texts

REVELATION 14:11 AND REVELATION 20:10

Revelation 14:9–11. The worshipers of the beast are tormented with fire and sulfur; the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever; they have no rest day or night. This is one of the strongest texts for eternal conscious torment and must be taken seriously

Conditional immortality notes the heavy Old Testament background, especially Isaiah 34, where perpetual smoke signifies irreversible devastation. It also observes that Revelation later explicitly calls the final fate of the wicked the second death. Still, the 'no rest day or night' phrase should not be dismissed.

Revelation 20:10. The devil, beast, and false prophet are said to be tormented day and night forever and ever. This is perhaps the strongest single verse for endless conscious torment.

The immediate subjects are apocalyptic figures; a few verses later the fate of condemned humanity is termed the second death. These observations give conditionalists a serious reply, but Revelation 20:10 remains a genuine pressure point rather than a verse to explain away.

A strong doctrine should survive its hardest texts, not hide them.



13. Matthew 25:46

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT AND ETERNAL LIFE

> *"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*
> MATTHEW 25:46

Traditional interpretation emphasizes that the same adjective modifies both punishment and life. If life is eternal, punishment is eternal. Conditional immortality agrees with that statement.

The actual disagreement is over what the punishment is. If Scripture elsewhere defines the final punishment as destruction and second death, then that destruction can be eternal because its result never ends.

Other biblical phrases illustrate the point: 'eternal judgment,' 'eternal redemption,' and 'eternal salvation' do not require the judging, redeeming, or saving action to be repeated every instant forever. The result is permanent.

Matthew 25:46 therefore establishes everlasting punishment. By itself, it does not define the mechanics of that punishment as everlasting conscious torment.



14. The Rich Man, Death as Sleep, and the Intermediate State

RELATED QUESTIONS THAT SHOULD NOT BE CONFUSED WITH FINAL PUNISHMENT

Luke 16:19–31. The rich man and Lazarus vividly portray reversal, accountability, Moses and the Prophets, and refusal to repent. The story uses conscious postmortem imagery, but it does not describe the final judgment after resurrection and does not say that the rich man's torment lasts forever.

Death as sleep. Scripture often uses sleep imagery for death: Daniel 12:2, John 11:11–14, Acts 7:60, 1 Corinthians 15, and 1 Thessalonians 4. This emphasizes the temporary character of the first death in light of resurrection.

Away from the body. 2 Corinthians 5:8 and Philippians 1:23 can reasonably be read as conscious fellowship with Christ after death. Paul's larger hope, however, remains resurrection embodiment: he does not desire permanent nakedness but to be further clothed so mortality is swallowed up by life.

The essential distinction is this: the intermediate state and conditional immortality are different questions. One need not prove soul sleep in order to argue that the wicked finally suffer the second death.



15. Spirits in Prison and Gnashing of Teeth

DIFFICULT TEXTS FROM THE ORIGINAL RESEARCH NOTES

1 Peter 3:18–20. Christ proclaims to 'spirits in prison.' One substantial interpretation understands these as rebellious spiritual beings associated with the days of Noah, especially when read beside Genesis 6, Jude 6, and 2 Peter 2:4. The passage says Christ proclaimed; it does not say He offered dead humans a second opportunity for salvation.

1 Peter 4:6. 'The gospel was preached even to those who are dead' need not imply postmortem evangelism. A natural reading is that people heard the gospel while alive but had died by the time Peter wrote.

Gnashing of teeth. Jesus uses this expression for judgment, but the phrase can describe rage as well as physical pain. Psalm 37:12 depicts the wicked gnashing their teeth at the righteous; Acts 7:54 portrays Stephen's opponents doing the same.

These observations do not remove anguish from judgment. They simply caution against making a single image prove more than its context can carry.



16. The Strongest Cumulative Case

ELEVEN STRANDS THAT CONVERGE ON CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY

1. God alone possesses immortality inherently - 1 Timothy 6:16.
2. Fallen humanity was prevented from living forever - Genesis 3:22-24.
3. Immortality is something the redeemed receive - Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54.
4. Eternal life is God's gift - John 3:16, 3:36; Romans 6:23.
5. God can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna - Matthew 10:28.
6. The wicked are repeatedly described as perishing and being destroyed - Psalm 37; Philippians 3:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:9.
7. Final judgment is compared to complete consumption - Malachi 4:1-3.
8. Sodom is an example of 'eternal fire' and is reduced to ashes - Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6.
9. Jesus' undying worm comes from a passage about corpses - Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:48.
10. Revelation calls the Lake of Fire 'the second death' - Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8.
11. Death itself is finally destroyed - 1 Corinthians 15:26.

No single verse carries the whole doctrine. The strength of the position is the convergence of the entire biblical pattern.



17. The Strongest Texts for Eternal Conscious Torment

THE PASSAGES A FAIR STUDY MUST FACE DIRECTLY

- Matthew 25:46 - eternal punishment and eternal life.
- Mark 9:48 - the undying worm and unquenchable fire.
- Luke 16:19-31 - the rich man in torment.
- Revelation 14:9-11 - smoke of torment and no rest day or night.
- Revelation 20:10 - torment day and night forever and ever.
- 2 Corinthians 5:8 - away from the body and at home with the Lord.
- Philippians 1:23 - departing to be with Christ.

These texts are not fake difficulties. They are precisely where the debate should occur.

The conditionalist question is whether these passages, read within their literary and Old Testament contexts, require Christians to reinterpret the Bible's larger vocabulary of death, perishing, destruction, consumption, ashes, and second death as describing endless conscious existence.

A fair reader may answer differently. The aim of this study is to make the biblical case transparent enough that the reader can test it.



18. The Historical Question

FROM THE EARLY CHURCH TO THE IMMORTAL-SOUL DEBATE

The original article ended by asking how eternal conscious torment and the immortal-soul idea developed in Christian teaching. That is a worthwhile historical question, but it should be handled carefully.

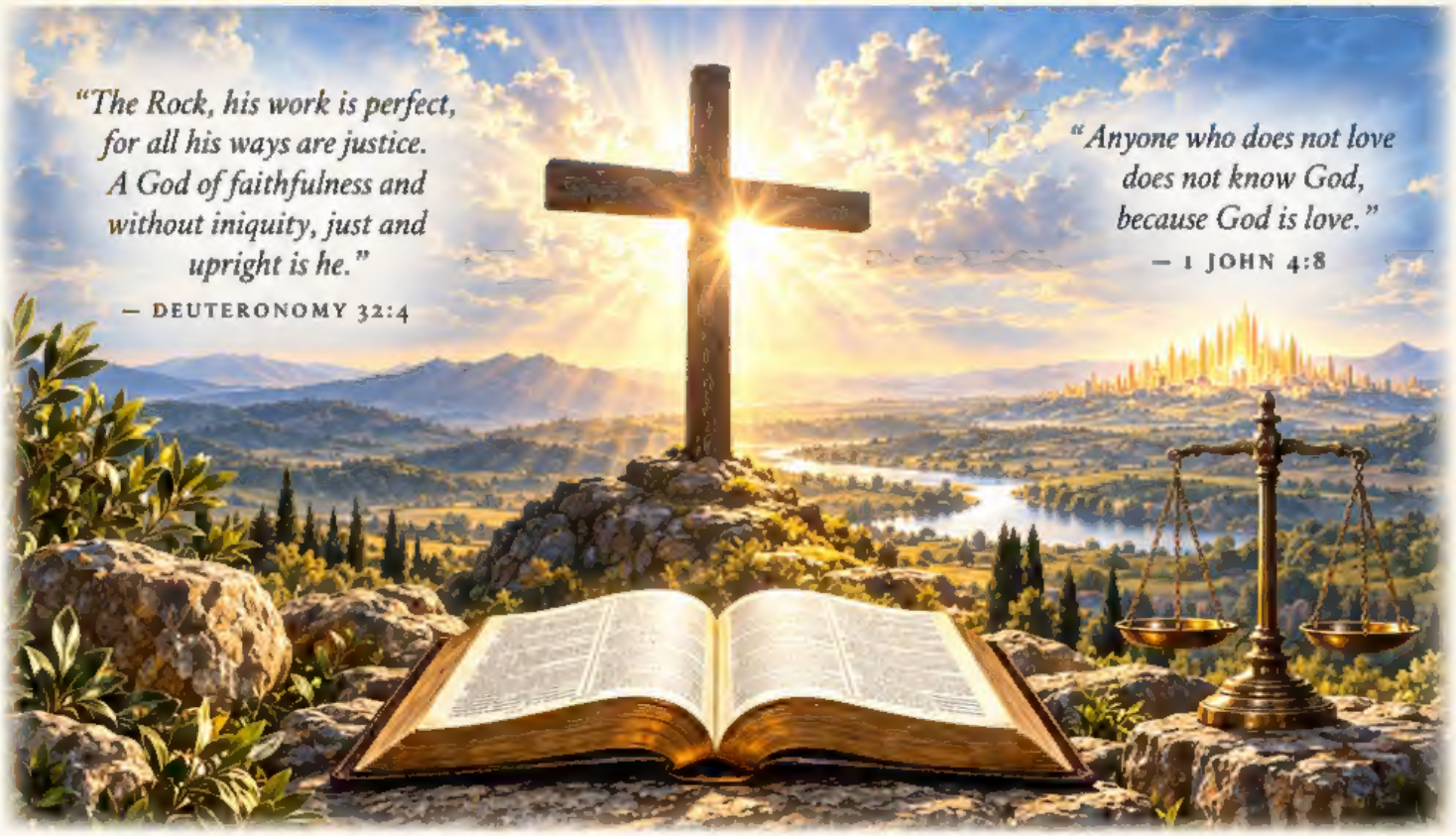
It is too simple to claim that every earliest Christian writer taught conditional immortality and that eternal conscious torment entered Christianity only through Plato. Early Christian writings contain a variety of expressions concerning resurrection, immortality, destruction, eternal fire, and punishment.

Greek philosophical ideas about the soul did influence later Christian vocabulary and anthropology. Yet influence alone cannot settle biblical truth. Historical claims should be tested from primary sources rather than one secondary summary.

Names worth studying: Clement, Ignatius, Hermas, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Athenagoras, Tertullian, Augustine, Tyndale, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, and the Waldenses.

The safest historical conclusion is therefore modest: Christian teaching developed in conversation with both Scripture and surrounding philosophical categories; the biblical question must still be decided exegetically.

"Tradition must be tested by Scripture."



19. God Is Just. God Is Love.

THE CHARACTER OF GOD FRAMES THE QUESTION BUT DOES NOT REPLACE EXEGESIS

Christians should resist arguing that a doctrine must be false merely because it feels too severe. If Scripture clearly taught eternal conscious torment, God's judgment would still be just.

But the reverse is also true: tradition should not cause Christians to call a punishment biblical if Scripture describes something else. The issue is not what punishment we would invent. The question is what God has revealed.

The cross shows both the seriousness of sin and the depth of divine love. Jesus comes to save. John 3:36 again captures the contrast: 'Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.'

The Gospel is not merely an offer to relocate an already-immortal existence.
It is an offer of life.



20. God's Final Victory

THE LAST ENEMY TO BE DESTROYED IS DEATH

The biblical story does not end with death reigning forever. Christ reigns until every enemy is defeated; death itself is abolished; God becomes 'all in all.'

Conditional immortality sees the final destruction of evil as fitting naturally within that vision: the wicked are judged according to their deeds, evil is decisively removed, the redeemed receive immortality, and death itself passes away.

The original research began with a question. After tracing Scripture from Genesis to Revelation, the conclusion of this study is that the cumulative biblical pattern strongly supports eternal destruction rather than eternal conscious preservation in torment.

The punishment is not temporary. The second death is final. There is no escape, no reversal, and no resurrection beyond it.

But through Jesus Christ, mortal humanity is offered the gift Scripture holds out again and again: eternal life.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:26

"The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

REVELATION 21:4

"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."



Scripture Index

KEY PASSAGES BY THEME

1. **Human Mortality & Immortality**
   Genesis 2:7; 3:19; 3:22-24; Romans 2:7; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54; 1 Timothy 6:16
2. **Life, Death & Destruction**
   John 3:16; 3:36; Romans 6:23; Philippians 3:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Hebrews 10:39
3. **Gehenna & Judgment**
   Jeremiah 7:30-33; 19:1-13; Matthew 10:28; Mark 9:43-48; Isaiah 66:24
4. **Eternal / Unquenchable Fire**
   Jeremiah 17:27; Ezekiel 20:47-48; Jude 7; 2 Peter 2:6
5. **Smoke & Apocalyptic Judgment**
   Isaiah 34:9-10; Revelation 14:9-11
6. **Final Judgment**
   Matthew 25:46; Revelation 20:10-15; Revelation 21:8
7. **Intermediate State**
   Daniel 12:2; Luke 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Philippians 1:21-23
8. **Spirits in Prison**
   Genesis 6:1-4; 1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6
9. **Final Victory**
   1 Corinthians 15:24-28; Revelation 21:1-5; Revelation 22:1-5

"and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
- JOHN 8:32 -

Tradition must be tested by Scripture.
By Sid Richmond.