



Eternity Is A Very Long Time To Suffer

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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The anniversary marking the death of a dearly loved member of my family has just passed. To me, this is a very somber day – not just because of thinking about a loved one I no longer get to talk and spend time with, but also because I think about what he is experiencing now. As I consider this, let me state that I am not the ultimate judge. God is the one who will judge him. But, as I consider what I knew about his life and compare it with the teachings of Scripture, the two do not match up. Even though he was a good man by the standards of the world, he was not a true Christian (to the best of my knowledge). So, as I think of him and the time he has been away from me and my family, I am reminded all too well that eternity is a very long time to suffer.

1) Suffering in Hades. The Bible teaches that when people die, they go to a “waiting place” that is called Hades. Jesus taught this in Luke 16:19-31 regarding the rich man and Lazarus. Both individuals died and went to Hades. However, Lazarus went to a part of Hades that was full of comfort, whereas the rich man went to a part of Hades that was full of torment. The rich man is depicted as being tormented in the flame of that place (verse 24). He desired even to have just a moment’s relief from his torment by having Lazarus dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue (verse 24). But, even this was not provided. Then, this man was told that there was no way of escape from the place he found himself. There was a great gulf/chasm that was between him and the place of comfort so that no one could pass from the one place to the other. And, those who do not live in obedience to God during their earthly lives will suffer in this place for as long as life continues on this earth. For, it is not until Jesus returns that the people in Hades will be brought out for the Judgment (see Revelation 20:11-15).

2) Suffering in Hell. Once the Judgment is complete, those who had not obeyed God during their earthly lives will be sentenced to eternal punishment in Hell (see Matthew 25:31-46). Revelation 20:15 says that “anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” This punishment in this place will last forever. Jesus

described the fires of hell as “the fire that shall never be quenched” (Mark 9:43). So, there will be no relief provided to those who suffer in this place for sinning against God.

3) A way to avoid suffering. Thanks be to God that He has provided the gift of eternal life in Heaven through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23)! Now, even though we have all sinned against God, we do not have to suffer in Hades or in Hell. Instead, we can spend eternity in a place of unimaginable beauty and comfort with God. But, He requires that we be obedient to His word. For instance, Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus Christ is the “author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” Only those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of Jesus Christ will experience the vengeance of God (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Although I would like to think about my loved one in a different way, I believe he wants me to think about his suffering – just like the rich man who was in torment desired to warn his brothers (Luke 16:27-31). It is too late for him to make any kind of changes to his life. He is now reaping according to how he had sown. But, he would want me to recognize that there is no escape from suffering for those who do not give their lives to the Lord *completely*. He would want me to recognize that eternity is a very long time to suffer. And, he would want me to do everything I can to live for the Lord and avoid the punishment he likely now experiences and will continue to experience. Eternity is simply far too long to suffer such agonizing punishment in order to enjoy some temporary pleasures and treasures in this life!

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