

The Truth About the Second Death

A Scriptural Study



Ray Foucher

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By Ray Foucher

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Introduction

We are all aware of our own mortality; death, like taxes, is a certainty. Bible believers, though, see hope in a resurrection (the first resurrection of the saved) to eternal life at the Second Coming. But death, the first death, is not the end for those who are lost. There will also be a resurrection, called the second resurrection, for the lost (at the end of the millennium) to be followed by a final judgment and the Second Death which is eternal. This study will look at this Second Death to determine, from the Bible, how it happens. Most readers will discover that there are some Biblical differences from what they have believed. Think of this as a second opinion about the Second Death and please do give it prayerful consideration.

Here is the verse most commonly associated with the cause of the Second Death:

"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." (Rev 20:9)

To a person who would like to live forever the topic of the Second Death can be a scary one. The Second Death refers to the final annihilation of the lost; they cease to exist, will never live again and miss out on eternal life which, relative to a short life on earth, is everything. Relative to eternal life our sojourn on earth is insignificant except for the fact that it determines whether or not we gain eternal life.

This study will look in depth at this topic but before going to the Second Death scenario, let's consider what happens at the Second Coming which involves the first death in a judgment scenario. Perhaps we can learn something that will help to understand the Second Death.

First, the First Death at the Second Coming

Here is a verse that speaks of what will happen at that time:

"And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb:" (Rev 6:16)

Why will the lost call on the mountains and rocks to fall on them? They will be afraid of "the wrath of the Lamb" because of the mental anguish it would cause them. It seems they will be more afraid of that than of being physically crushed and killed by falling rock. It is unlikely they would actually speak the exact words ascribed to them in that verse; rather, those words describe their mental state and expectation as they realize the end of the world has, in fact, come. The calls for the rocks and mountains to cover them come from the intensely painful emotions of remorse, shame and terror for their words and the blackness of their characters.



Pretty scary, huh?

This mental anguish is reflected somewhat in the experience of Jesus on the cross. What caused Him more suffering - the physical wounds or the mental anguish? What did He say on the cross:

- Father, why are you torturing me so painfully?
or
- "... why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46)

This gives a picture of the relative degree of physical vs mental anguish in Jesus' experience. It will be somewhat similar in the cases of those who have rejected salvation.

The Emotional Torment of the Lost

Here is a verse describing what will happen to the lost:

"The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:" (Rev 14:10)

This could be referring to both the torment at the Second Coming and the torment experienced at the end of the Millennium. Both occur in the future from the time the messages of Revelation 14 are given. The Lamb and the angels are doubtless all present on both occasions.

It is significant to note that the number of the lost that will be present at the time of the first coming referred to above in Revelation 6:16 will be very small relative to the number of the unsaved of all ages who will be raised at the second resurrection at the end of the millennium and who will be present at the great white throne judgment scene of Revelation 20. The torment will be even more extreme at the end of the millennium when the lost will actually see the New Jerusalem, the home of the saved and realize that they have, by their own choices, forfeited eternal life.

If you lose eternal life, you lose everything.

What is the Nature of the Torment?

The word used in Rev 14:10 is from the Greek verb "basanizo" (Strong's #928). Here are examples of its use:

"And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth." (Rev 11:10)

It seems likely that the torment from the two prophets is more a torment of the conscience because of truth presented than any kind of physical torment. (The symbol of fire will be explained later in this study.)

"(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed [Strong's #928] his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)" (2 Pet 2:8)

The "righteous man" referred to was Lot and the verse describes his reaction to the wickedness of the people in Sodom before its destruction.

"But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed [928] with waves: for the wind was contrary." (Matt 14:24)

Matthew says the ship was "tossed" (from the same original word) but it was the occupants of the ship that were "tormented;" feeling mental anguish because of the expectation that they might die in the storm. Mark describes it more like the disciples are the ones tormented:

"And he saw them toiling [928] in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea, and would have passed by them." (Mark 6:48)

The first definition of basanizo [928] is:

"To test (metals) by the touchstone, which is a black siliceous stone used to test the purity of gold or silver by the colour of the streak produced on it by rubbing it with either metal."



A touchstone - used for testing alloys of gold.

Think of "gold purified in the fire." This "torment" can be thought of as the application of the touchstone; it is the test, the evaluation of their purity, their fitness for heaven. It is especially the revelation to the lost themselves (God already knows their condition and destiny) of their condemnation as a result of their sins. Can you imagine being in that situation and coming to understand that you have thrown away eternal life because of choices you have made? The regret and mental anguish would be totally overwhelming.



Losing eternal life would be something like a black hole. A person goes into it - the Second Death - never to return; never to live again.

The End of the Millennium

At the end of the millennium, there will be a second resurrection at which the lost will be raised to face their life records in judgment and receive their final sentence. Here again is the verse commonly understood to be describing the Second Death; the final annihilation of the lost:

"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." (Rev 20:9)

It is important to note what Rev 20:9 does and does not say. It says:
 the lost (those resurrected in verse 5)
 came from the whole earth
 surrounded the holy city (in context, the New Jerusalem)
 and were devoured or consumed
 by fire from God out of heaven (the part in question)

It does not say:
 what prompts them to come to the city,
 what happens between surrounding the city and the fire coming down,
 what state the lost are in when the fire actually falls

Obviously, it is leaving out a lot of detail. We need to recognize that the idea that it is a physical fire that kills them is an assumption. It does not say that - it could merely be a cleansing fire that burns the corpses and other remnants of sin. Whether the fire actually causes death or not can only be established by other scripture. The key factor is whether or not that is consistent with other verses.

Assumptions are dangerous - they close the mind to other options.

It is interesting that most ancient manuscripts and modern Bible translations don't have the words "from God" in Rev 20:9.

"There came down fire out of the heaven (the words 'from God' are of doubtful authority) and devoured them." (Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers)

The Lake of Fire

Let's look at more scripture. This verse gives us a definition of what the Second Death is:

"And death and hell [the grave] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." (Rev 20:14)

In this verse, the Lake of Fire is also equated with the Second Death and it is described as an event or an experience, not a place although, obviously, people will be somewhere when it happens:

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part [Greek: meros, Strong's G3313] in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." (Rev 21:8)

The Lake of Fire is the Second Death.

That it is an experience is supported by the following verses which help to define the meaning of the word "part." The words translated from "meros" are indicated in each case:

"And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matt 24:51)

"Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." (John 13:8)

"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:" (Col 2:16) (See Colossians 2 for how this word affects the meaning of that passage.)

"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." (Rev 20:6)

The word "part" in the verses above indicates taking part in or experiencing something rather than being in a place, a geographical location. Here is the definition of the original Greek word from the On-line Bible:

3313 merov meros mer'-os
 from an obsolete but more primary form of meiomai (to get as a section or allotment); TDNT-4:594,585; n n
 AV-part 24, portion 3, coast 3, behalf 2, respect 2, misc 9; 43
 1) a part
 1a) a part due or assigned to one
 1b) lot, destiny
 2) one of the constituent parts of a whole
 2a) in part, partly, in a measure, to some degree, as respects a part, severally, individually
 2b) any particular, in regard to this, in this respect

Water, in prophetic scripture, can be a symbol of people, specifically large groups of people as used in the book of revelation. In this verse, waters are likened to people, lots of them:

"And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues." (Rev 17:15)

In this verse, "the voice of a great multitude" is used in parallel with "the voice of many waters" indicating a correspondence between them:

"And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." (Rev 19:6)

So the "Lake of Fire" could just be a way of describing a large number of people gathered together and going through (taking part in) the experience of agonizing over their sins.

In Bible prophecy, "waters" can represent people.

Fire as a Symbol

Fire is not necessarily just literal. The Bible (especially Revelation) uses many words in symbolic ways. Here are some verses that use the word "fire" symbolically:

"Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them." (Jer 5:14)

"Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord ..." (Jer. 23:29)

"From above hath He sent fire into my bones ..." (Lam 1:13)

"But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:" (Mal 3:2)

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:" (Matt 3:11)

This was spoken by John the Baptist to the faithful. He is not talking about people being immersed (the meaning of "baptize") in literal fire.

"I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?" (Luke 12:49)

Jesus was speaking in a metaphorical sense. When is it ever recorded that during His life on earth He brought down fire? When His disciples suggested it He rebuked them (Luke 9:54-56). This is similar to Matt 10:34-36 where Jesus was said to bring a sword. He did not literally bring a sword but the message He brought, because of people's reactions to it, did cause divisions. Likewise, He did not bring fire but the truths He shared brought figurative fire into the minds of people. Here is a verse that uses fire that way:

"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." (Rom 12:20)

Is this consistent with "love your enemies"? Not if it is literal fire. But if it is to convict a person's conscience and hopefully turn them to God, then it is.

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." (1 Cor 3:13)

Literal fire does not literally reveal work, it destroys it. This verse is very consistent with the definition of the word "basanizo" as given above - a means of testing quality.

"But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." (Heb 10:27)

"Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" (James 3:5)

The fire here is speaking of the result of words spoken whether for good or evil.

"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." (James 3:6)

"Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days." (James 5:3)



That seems to be parallel to this verse:

"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God;" (Rom 2:5)

Here are yet more obviously-symbolic uses of fire:

"And of the angels He says, Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire." (Heb. 1:7)

"And the tongue is a fire ..." (Jam 3:6)

"And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." (Jude 1:23)

"His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;" (Rev 1:14)

"And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;" (Rev 2:18)

"I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see." (Rev 3:18)

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:" (1 Pet 4:12)

Surely the two verses directly above are not saying the righteous will have their characters tested by literal fire. The lost will also go through a final character test (although it may be more to demonstrate that choices have already been made), similarly described as involving fire and will endure torment ("basanizo") of mind in the process.

"And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." (Rev 15:2)

It is plain from the verses above that "fire" is often used in a symbolic sense in scripture. Why couldn't the fire that comes from God to "devour" the lost in Rev 20:9 be symbolic as well? At least the possibility should be looked at. But then how could symbolic fire "devour" anyone? Perhaps we need to look at that word as well.

I have sensed, in my own experience with others, that the more a person has been personally wronged in life the more likely they are to view God as judgmental and to be using fire in a judgmental, punitive way. The following discussion of fire from www.tentmaker.org/BreakingBread/1.html seems to be quite applicable here (emphasis mine):

I believe, in order to understand our English Bible translation, we must know something about the culture of the people who wrote the original in their native languages. Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek are highly figurative, extremely expressive languages, full of many kinds of idiomatic expressions and figures of speech. The customs of the Semitic peoples in particular are quite foreign to the Western mind. We must understand how they used the word "fire" if we are to understand the meaning of the word "fire" in the Bible.

Fire, is first and foremost, a symbol of divinity in the Semitic Middle East. It is a symbol of Yahweh Himself. God manifesting in physical fire could be a favorable judgment as when He came to consecrate Solomon's Temple or a negative judgment as when He swallowed up Aaron's sons for offering up "strange fire." Being creatures quick to become fearful, we have a tendency to dwell on the negative side of things and so usually associate divine fire with wrath. (Lev. 10:1) This has been a serious mistake of the church throughout much of its existence.

It is interesting to note that the more judgmental, vengeful, legalistic, ritualistic, and fundamental one is, the more likely they are to see fire as God's punishment. They have a difficult time seeing fire as a positive symbol of God. For this mindset, fire usually means Hell, the lake of fire, and everlasting punishment. On the other hand, the more loving, merciful, and compassionate one has become, the more likely they are to see fire as a symbol of love, zeal, and sacredness. They are "on fire for God" is an expression used in a positive sense.

Devoured

The fire of Rev 20:9 is said to "devour" the lost which sounds like physical destruction. But one of the definitions for the original word ("kataphago" Strong's H2719) is:

"of the consumption of the strength of body and mind by strong emotions"

Here are some other uses of the same word:

"And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." (John 2:17)

"But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another." (Gal 5:15)

So it appears that it can be and has been used other than to describe physical destruction. This verse should give us a clue about the meaning of being devoured:

"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the LORD spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said." (Lev 10:1-5)

Notice that fire "devoured" them yet their bodies weren't burned up and their clothing was even still intact. Diligent Bible students consider context and Bible definitions for words such as "eternal" and "everlasting" to determine that "hell fire" does not, in fact, burn without end. They should do the same with this and other uses of words such as "devoured." Here is one more good example of how the Bible uses such terms:

"Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." (Jude 7)

Sodom and Gomorrah are not still burning. If people would similarly allow the Bible to define other terms they would come closer to understanding Bible truth. We have looked at "fire" and "devoured;" let's consider the phrase "consume away."

Their Flesh Shall Consume Away

This verse is a fearful-sounding representation of the final fate of the lost at the end of the millennium:

"And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth." (Zech 14:12)

Is that speaking of physical consumption? Some have seen it as people being exposed to the explosion of a neutron bomb:

"When this bomb blows the release of the neutrons are lethal to humans and any other animal life around it. ... If you are within the blast radius what will happen to you is eerily similar to what Zechariah describes in chapter 14 of his prophecy. Any kind of flesh is destroyed by a kind of melting process as all the atoms are destroyed within it. Thus Zechariah's description of something that rots flesh, eyes, and the tongue are often compared to what happens at the detonation of a neutron bomb."
(www.calvarychapeljonesboro.org/prophecynews/zechariah-14-neutron-bombs-and-gods-ultimate-purpose-for-israel)

However, as always, we need to consider whether the Bible has its own definition and whether that is different from the popular understanding.

To "consume away" is from the Hebrew word "maqaq" (Strong's #4743) which means "to pine away." The website www.dictionary.com gives these meanings for pine:

to yearn deeply; suffer with longing; long painfully
to fail gradually in health or vitality from grief, regret, or longing

Here are Bible verses that use the original Hebrew word "maqaq":

"And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them." (Lev 26:39)

"That they may want bread and water, and be astonished one with another, and consume away for their iniquity." (Eze 4:17)

"And your tires shall be upon your heads, and your shoes upon your feet: ye shall not mourn nor weep; but ye shall pine away for your iniquities, and mourn one toward another." (Eze 24:23)

Notice in the verse above, people are described as both pining away and mourning suggesting a close equivalence of those two actions.

"Therefore, O thou son of man, speak unto the house of Israel; Thus ye speak, saying, If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live?" (Eze 33:10)

This verse, with its use of terms similar to Zech 14:12, seems to relate:

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." (1 John 2:16)

It is interesting that John mentions three categories of sins that seem to line up with what is described as being consumed in Zechariah 14:12 (Pride of life is mainly expressed via the tongue as in bragging). Now notice the account of Satan's three-fold temptation of Jesus:

"And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread [the lust of the flesh; sensualism]." (Matt 4:3)

"Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone [the pride of life; humanism]." (Matt 4:5-6)

"Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them [the lust of the eyes; materialism]; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." (Matt 4:8-9)

God has provided a way of escape from every temptation:

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." (1 Cor 10:13)

Jesus used the Word of God to overcome each time Satan presented another temptation. In each case He replied with "it is written" (Matt 4:4,6,10) and an appropriate scripture.

Notice that Eve experienced these same three categories of temptation:

"And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food [the lust of the flesh], and that it was pleasant to the eyes [the lust of the eyes], and a tree to be desired to make one wise [the pride of life], she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." (Gen 3:6)

This was also the three areas in which the people of Sodom fell:

"Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride [the pride of life], fulness of bread [the lust of the flesh], and abundance of idleness [the lust of the eyes, materialism] was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy." (Eze 16:49)

It seems there are three major categories of sin that can be summarized as follows:

	Sensualism	Materialism	Humanism
Eve (Gen 3:6)	the tree was good for food	it was pleasant to the eyes	to be desired to make one wise
Sodom (Eze 16:49)	fullness of bread	abundance of idleness	pride
Jesus (Matt 4:3-9)	command that these stones be made bread	All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me	cast thyself down
1 John 2:16	lust of the flesh	lust of the eyes	pride of life
Zech 14:12	flesh	eyes	tongue

This makes sense in light of this verse:

"For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb 4:15)

How could Jesus have been tempted in every way we have been tempted - Jesus was never tempted to drive over the speed limit? "All points" is a reference to these broad categories not to every little variation of temptation that might come our way. Thankfully, we do have an high priest who was also tempted in each of these categories of sin - and overcame.

And so the flesh, eyes and tongue being consumed is not literal, physical consumption. Rather, what is being described is people pining away, being overwhelmed by all the sins (in three main categories) that they have committed during their lifetime and did not turn from. The consumption is in more of a moral than a physical sense.

So we can see, having considered the terms "fire," "devour" and "consume away" that the Lake of Fire is not what has been commonly believed.

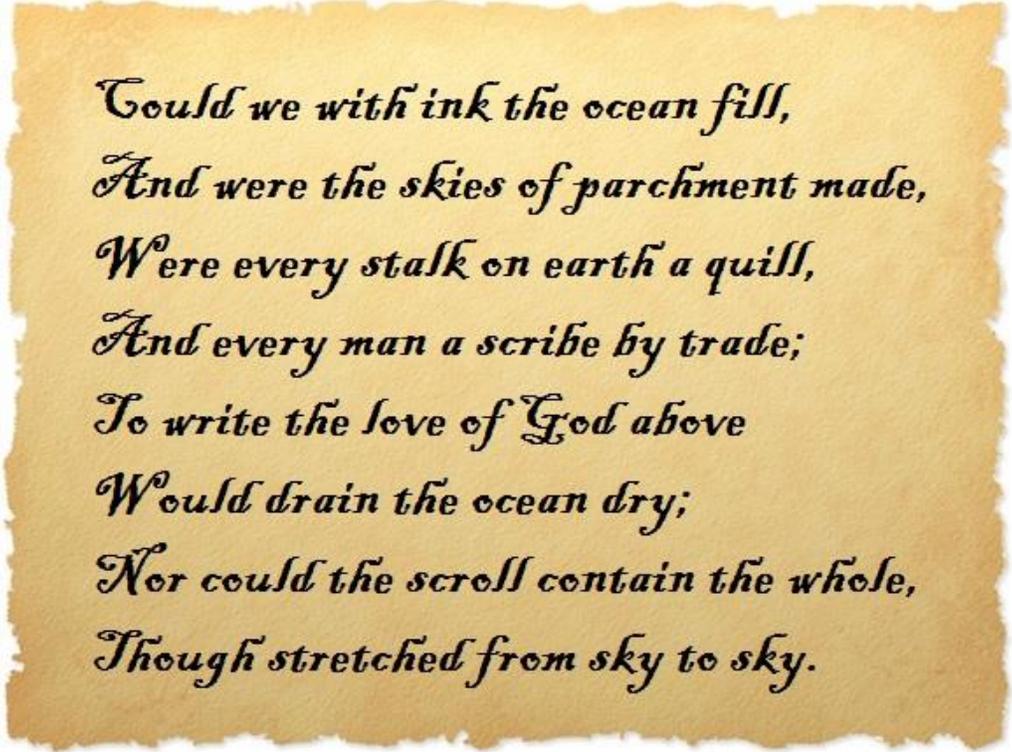
The Love of God Revealed as Never Before

Adding to the shame, I believe, is the fact that the lost will be given all the evidence including a portrayal (perhaps some kind of heavenly, high-tech recording) of what God has done in trying to save them, especially in the life of Jesus who died for them.

This verse is interesting:

"And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." (Rev 6:14)

What do you do with a scroll? Normally, you write on it or, in our modern age, this could be something like a screen that you project onto. Many have the idea that, in the judgment, the history (His-story) of the world and the plan of salvation will be portrayed for all to see. God wants everyone to have the evidence - some have never even heard the story of the Saviour. I think of the lyrics of the song *The Love of God* which has a verse:



*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

Through whatever means is used it seems likely that the evidence will be made plain for all to see. God will not be hiding anything.

Of course, the point of the judgment, in large part, is to vindicate the character (which is love) of God Himself

"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." (Rom 3:4)

I believe that God is going to allow the struggle between good and evil to go on long enough to make a very convincing case for God's side. The evidence will accumulate to the point that, in the final judgment, this verse will be fulfilled:

"I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear." (Isa 45:23)

In the final judgment everything will be revealed; all the evidence will be on the table. We don't tend to think of it this way but God Himself is, in a sense, on trial:

"God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged." (Rom 3:4)

This final revelation and judgment is in contrast to before this time when God even shields His people from too sudden or too much of a revelation of truth, portioning it out to us as we are able to take it in. Jesus said to His disciples:

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." (John 16:12)

Could it be that, in the final judgment, the lost will be exposed to all the truth of God's character in His very presence while, at the same time, becoming fully aware of their own sins? The sense of guilt from their lives of sin and their sense of loss at missing eternal life would be overwhelming; they literally will not be able to bear it. Let's consider that in more detail.

**Imagine the sense of loss if you miss eternal life.
Whatever you do, don't miss heaven.**

The Experience of the Lost in the Lake of Fire

Imagine (or remember) a situation - and we have all experienced it - where you are caught red-handed in an embarrassing situation. You have done something wrong and are caught in the act. What is your typical reaction? Perhaps your face flushes and you even feel some heat. In psychiatry, fear of blushing is seen as a symptom of social anxiety disorder. Some sufferers will even undergo surgery on their sympathetic nervous system (cutting or clamping the nerve tissue that causes sweating and blushing) to prevent reddening. People will go to considerable lengths to avoid mental pain!



If you are "caught" by peers who you know have done the same thing and are just as guilty as you, then you don't feel nearly as guilty or condemned but it can still be an uncomfortable situation.

However, if you were caught by someone in authority, someone you greatly respect and who you know would be greatly disappointed or displeased with your actions, (who also has total control over you) you would feel much more shame and embarrassment. The greater your respect for the person you have been exposed to, the greater their authority, the more you will "feel the heat."



So think of the sinner in the "Lake of Fire" experience. Remember, the Lake of Fire is the Second Death. It is not a place but an experience and a process. The lost will have the record of their lives come up before them, they will feel the guilt and the shame. But not the guilt and shame of one sin at a time as committed over the years of their lives. No, it will be worse than that. It will be the guilt and shame of an awareness of all their sins at the same time. Have you ever heard anyone tell

you that when a person is facing certain death their whole life flashes before them? Apparently, it does happen.



This is NOT Revelation's Lake of Fire

Even worse than that, they will experience all their guilt and shame in the presence of the Lamb - the Lamb who died for them.

"... he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:" (Rev 14:10)

They will experience a tremendous amount of "heat," in a sense - guilt and shame - coming from within; feeling it mentally. This relates to a verse in Romans which describes the effect of being afflicted by a guilty conscience:

"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." (Rom. 12:20)

Of course, those "coals of fire" are not literal; it is the Bible's way of describing the effects of a guilty conscience. It also corresponds to the Bible's description of the end of Satan himself:

"Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffick; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee." (Eze 28:18)

The fire that devours Satan will come from inside him not down from God out of heaven. Why should it be any different than the "fire" that devours anyone else? There is another verse that seems to suggest this same sort of reaction at quite an intense level:

"And they shall be afraid: pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth: they shall be amazed one at another; their faces shall be as flames." (Isa 13:8)

To the lost as they, in the Lake of Fire experience, have all their sins exposed in the presence of the Lamb, they will "be consumed" with mental anguish because of the guilt of all their sins. There will also be the sense of the removal of God's presence from them and a realization that it will be for eternity. This mental anguish will parallel what Jesus felt as He cried out:

"... My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46)



The wicked will merely reap the results of the life they have sown. They suffer the wages (results) of sin which is (the second) death (Rom 6:23).

Those wages are not imposed directly by God but come as a natural consequence of the choices to separate from God.

"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:15)

This is merely following the principle that says you reap what you sow.

"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." (Gal 6:8)

Note carefully: death comes from sin, not from God.

Could You Stand Before God Without Feeling Some "Heat"?

In the case of Isaiah, it was the presence of the Lord, at least in vision, which produced in Isaiah a conviction of his sinfulness ("woe is me") and brought from him the admission, "I am a man of unclean lips:"

"Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isa 6:5)

Matthew also makes this connection:

"O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." (Matt 12:34)

There are examples in scripture including of those we would consider holy men who seem to have manifest great woe and conviction of sin in the presence of God or angels.

"And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the LORD, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord GOD! for because I have seen an angel of the LORD face to face." (Jud 6:22)

"And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God." (Jud 13:22)

"And I Daniel alone saw the vision: for the men that were with me saw not the vision; but a great quaking fell upon them, so that they fled to hide themselves. Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength." (Dan 10:7-8)

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:" (Rev 1:17)

Those are the reactions of those who we would consider to be relatively holy men - they were on God's side. What is the reaction to His presence going to be like for those who have rejected God?

The Permissive Idiom

There are many examples in the Bible of the use of idiomatic expressions where God is said to do what He merely permitted or allowed. See examples at:

<http://characterofgod.org/2016/02/god-takes-the-blame/>

One of the best examples and one that very much relates to the topic here is from the book of Job. Consider this verse:

"While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee." (Job 1:16)

Compare that to Rev 20:9 which sounds very similar:

"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." (Rev 20:9)

In both cases, it could easily be understood that the fire is coming directly from God out of heaven. Yet, in the book of Job, we are given a behind-the-scenes glimpse of what is really going on. In fact, it was Satan that brought the fire down and instigated the other troubles upon Job. So, with our understanding of the word "devoured," the fire in Rev 20:9 could be from a different source than has been traditionally understood.

The book of Job is commonly considered to be perhaps the first book of the Bible written. While it should (and was quite probably intended to) help us understand what is really going on, Satan has twisted our understanding in so many ways.

In another case, God was said to harden Pharaoh's heart while other verses say Pharaoh hardened his own heart (God's part was to permit, not cause.):

"And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt." (Exo 7:3)

"And when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunders were ceased, he sinned yet more, and hardened his heart ..." (Exo 9:34)

More Twisted Truth

Satan has put an amazing twist on the truth. He has led most people to believe that those who are lost live forever (Rather than suffer the Second Death - the wages of sin - as the Bible teaches.) in literal hellfire by God's will when the truth is quite different:

"Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you. And the people shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire. ... The sinners in Zion are afraid; fearfulness hath surprised the hypocrites. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from seeing evil;" (Isaiah 33:11-12,14-15)

The surprising answer to the question "who will 'dwell with everlasting burnings'?" is that it is actually the saved who will live forever in the spiritual, "devouring/consuming" fire of God's presence. Obviously, this is not the literal, physical fire that we are most familiar with. No, it has more to do with being in the presence of God.

Consuming Fire for the Saved

To those being saved, even now, the presence of God is a consuming fire as day by day throughout their lives they are "tried in the fire" (Rev 3:18) as they "behold" Him and have the impurities "burned" out of their characters.

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor 3:18)

It is by beholding Him and understanding what He has done for them that motivates them, of their own free-will choices, to separate themselves from sin; to make their relationship with God the most important thing in their lives.

Who will dwell in everlasting fire? - The answer will surprise you!

Some Clues from Hebrew

We can learn something about this by looking at some Hebrew characters. The word for "man" - as distinct from woman - in Hebrew is "ish" and looks like this:

איש

It is spelled with the Hebrew letters - reading from right to left - aleph, yod, shin. The "yod," the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet, is equivalent to the Greek letter iota and is translated as "jot" in this verse:

"For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." (Matt 5:18)

The "yod" means or has reference to the hand of God. When the hand of God is removed from man - when the yod is removed from the word for man - the result is the Hebrew word for fire:

אש

And, interestingly, a similar thing happens with the word for woman, which is: (reading from right to left):

אשה

Reading from right to left, it is spelled: aleph, shin, hey. When the letter "hey" is removed, once again, what remains is the word for fire.

The letters "yod" and "hey" that have been removed from the words for man and woman respectively, when combined as yod-hey, make the word "Yah," the poetic form of God's name:

יה

It takes both man and woman together to properly represent God. When God is removed from them what remains is fire. What we find, with a correct understanding of the role of God in the destruction of the wicked, is that men or

women "burn" when God is totally removed from them. So it is not a direct act of God that destroys man but the removal of His life-sustaining presence.

This is consistent with the idea that God, throughout Biblical history, has not directly destroyed anyone. He removes His protective presence when it is not wanted and leaves the unprotected to the destroyer (Satan himself), to others who would do them harm or to forces of nature. In this case, what He is removing is His life-sustaining power and - disconnected from the source of life - people die.

These verses suggest an active role on God's part in keeping us alive from moment to moment:

"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power ..." (Heb 1:3)

"And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." (Col 1:17)

"For in him we live, and move, and have our being ... " (Acts 17:28)

When He ceases to do that, death is the result.

The Second Death and the Character of God

This whole study began in connection with my investigations into the topic of the character of God. Late in 2015, I started the website www.characterofgod.org with the goal of sharing information about what the Bible says about God's character. I have found, through letting the Bible define its own terms as done above with "fire" and "devour" and "consume away," that God becomes more understandable and more loving. A big question that soon comes up in discussions about God's character is: "does God kill?" Even more important is the more specific question "does God kill with the Second Death?" Again, in reference to Rev 20:9, does God personally, actively and directly send fire to kill the lost?

If we somehow mix literal fire directly from God with the mental anguish that will be part of the experience, we have what is defined as torture. Torture - to inflict pain before execution - is something that civilized governments do not do. Torture is of no benefit to the one being tortured (obviously), to anyone looking on (to them it should arouse sympathy, even indignation at the injustice) or to the

torturer although he may feel that it is satisfying to a vindictive spirit. Any physical torture being imposed would make the penalty more severe than simply "the wages of sin is death."

The wages of sin is not torture.

God personally and actively terminating the sinner's life would demonstrate that death proceeds from Him, and that death is part of His way, His principles of government. That would mean that God brought death as the final solution to the sin problem. But we know that is not the case because death itself is an enemy of God.

"The last enemy that will be destroyed is death." (1 Cor 15:26)

Wouldn't it be rather strange if the last enemy that should be destroyed in the Great Controversy - death - was destroyed by an act of God causing death? That makes no sense whatsoever - God destroys death by using it! That would establish death as a tool God uses to solve issues. Wouldn't death be more effectively destroyed by God showing that death never was necessary in the first place; that it was never part of His plan?

The final, end result of sin is death. Sin brings forth death (James 1:15); that is its source. If we say that, in the end, the source of death is God then what does that make God?

Consider what was said to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden:

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." (Gen 2:17)

Was that a threat or a warning? It makes a difference. If I tell you of danger from something or someone else, that is giving you a warning. However, if I tell you of possible danger coming from me - that is a threat.

Was "thou shalt surely die" a threat or a warning?

God was saying either:

if you eat from that tree there will be negative consequences and I don't want you to experience that (a warning).

or

if you eat from that tree I will kill you. (Sounds pretty harsh but that is exactly what it would amount to - a dire threat.)

As we well know, much can be learned from the tone of voice in which words are said. Unfortunately, we don't get that in reading Genesis. But just think of it - God has just created Adam and Eve; He has made everything perfect; designed everything for their happiness. Then He says to them basically "do it my way, obey me or I will kill you" (at least eventually). Does that seem to fit? Hardly.

Summary

Again, the question is over this verse:

"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." (Rev 20:9)

What is the "fire" that devours the wicked? We have already seen, in verses above, the frequency with which "fire" is used in a symbolic sense. In the context of the Lake of Fire, the fire seems to be more like affliction of conscience.

Of course, there could also be a physical, cleansing fire to remove the corpses and cleanse the earth:

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (2 Pet 3:10)

This in preparation for the recreation of the Earth which will soon follow:

"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea." (Rev 21:1)

God killing with the Second Death by burning His enemies, in the end, is inconsistent with:

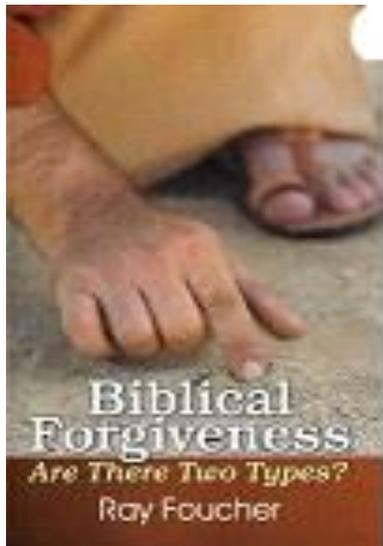
- the fact that it is "a fire from the midst of thee" that will devour Satan.
- the circumstances of Jesus' death - no fire from heaven there.
- the principle of reaping and sowing - death is a consequence of one's choices rather than something externally imposed by God.
- sin destroys itself. Essentially, God is permitting suicide rather than committing homicide.
- Jesus' character as displayed in the gospels.
- Jesus' claim that if you have seen Him you have seen the Father.
- the admonition to "love your enemies," to do good to persecutors.
- God merely withdrawing life support (His Spirit) will result in death. He does not need to actively cause death.
- the many examples of the use of idiomatic expressions where God is said to do what He merely allowed as in the case of Job.
- the scores of Biblical examples of the pattern wherein God removes Himself when not welcome and the trouble comes from another source.
- God's role as protector.
- God is "not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet 3:9) - personally killing would be going against His own will.

To those willing to allow the Bible to explain itself, the Second Death takes on a new meaning. Certainly, the source of that death is better understood. Many who insist on understanding it using the world's definitions, while they may be convinced that God is love, have a lurking fear; some understanding that if they don't line up, in the end God will kill them.

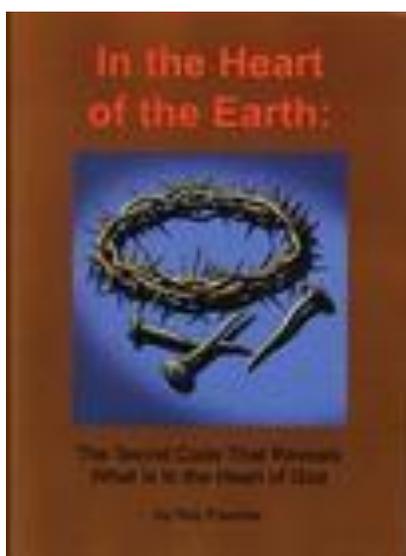
I hope this study on the Second Death will help to clear up some of the mystery and confusion of what happens on the "other side." Again, I would like to point readers to my website www.characterofgod.org which has much more to share about the wonderful character of God and why we have nothing to fear from Him Who is love. Any comments are welcome.

I may be contacted via either of my websites. - Ray Foucher

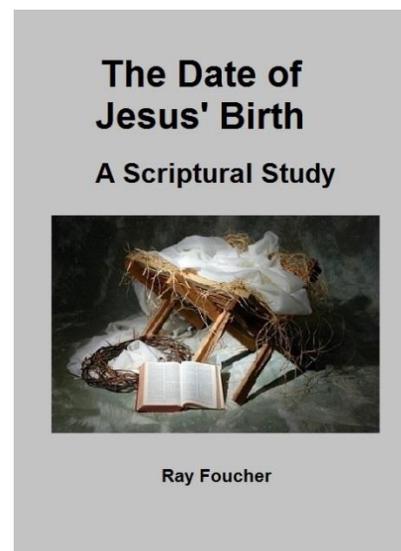
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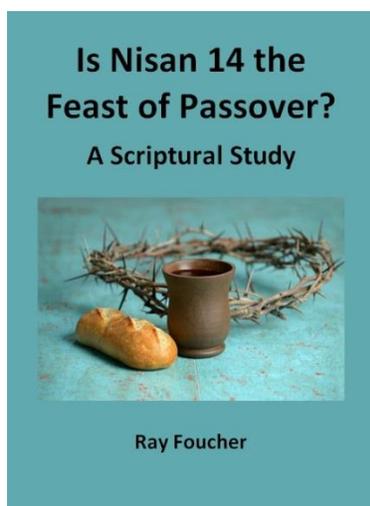
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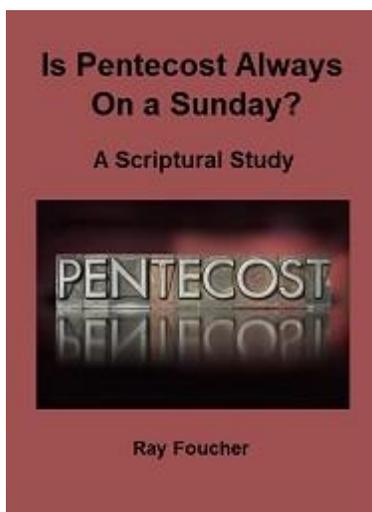
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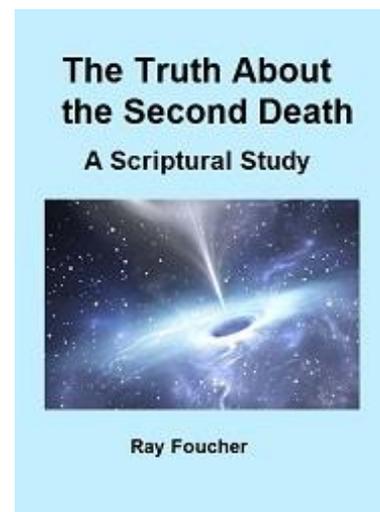
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The Truth About the Second Death: A Scriptural Study - explains the true nature of the Second Death and shows that it is not from God.
31 pages

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www.jesus-resurrection.info/available-items.html