

Precepts

Through Your precepts I get understanding; Therefore I hate every false way. Psalm 119:104

October 31, 2021

Fate of the Wicked Part 1: Eternal, Conscious Torment

We have endeavored through our series of studies on spirits in the Bible and on souls in the Bible to establish the nature of man. We have seen that, far from teaching that man has a unique thing the animals do not have called a “soul,” actually all animals who have blood are called “souls” by the Bible. And far from teaching that the soul of man is immortal and not subject to death, the Bible teaches that the soul is very mortal and very much subject to death. It even speaks of “dead souls,” though our translators have chosen to remove that from our versions for us. Yet the truth is that souls are mortal and can die, if we are going to believe what God says about them in His Word.

So now that we have established this truth about the nature of man, our next question is, “What is man’s destiny?” In other words, when a man dies, what is going to happen to him? Now I believe that all my readers would admit that this destiny is affected by whether or not a man is wicked or righteous before God, though some might believe that the difference is only temporary. Yet practically all acknowledge that the wicked and the righteous will not be treated the same way by God when it comes to their judgment. Therefore, this topic of man’s destiny may be divided into two considerations: the punishment of the wicked and the reward of the righteous. In this series of messages, we will consider the negative side of this and the various views of the future punishment of the wicked and what it will be.

Of course all Christians would claim that their view of the future punishment of the wicked is the Biblical one. Yet if we want to satisfy ourselves that what we believe and teach regarding this is Biblical we must approach the Word of God ourselves to see what It teaches regarding this very important truth. Thus we will look at several proposed fates or destinies of wicked men and the Biblical evidence in the case to see whether or not each one matches up with all that God teaches about this subject in the Scriptures.

The first proposed destiny of the wicked is that every wicked person will be eternally, consciously tormented in a place called Hell. Hell is then said to be a place of suffering in fire and brimstone, the same as the “lake of fire” of the book of Revelation. To make this article run smoother we need to find a name for this view. Since “the eternal conscious torment view” or “believers in eternal conscious torment” or “eternal conscious tormentism” are all long and awkward names, we will seek a shorter title for this view that should hopefully be accurate and yet satisfactory to all. This is the traditional, orthodox view, held by the majority of people who identify themselves as Christians going back to the days of Augustine. So because this is the long-standing traditional view, a good name for it is “traditionalism.”

To start off with, there is a very good reason that I have chosen to study this view after considering the true nature and duration of man’s soul. For this view is based largely, not on the Bible, but on an assumption of the eternal nature of the soul. If man must continue to live somewhere after death and for all eternity, then the wicked must live somewhere for all eternity in some place like the orthodox Hell. This only makes sense. Once this idea is established, then the Bible is ransacked for passages that may be used to suggest that suffering eternally in fire is the fate God intends for all the wicked. Having found passages

that may be used this way, the traditional Christian is satisfied that he has found the truth of the matter.

However, once we examine the underpinnings of this belief it immediately starts to unravel. As revealed in my studies on the word “soul” in the first ten books of the Bible, the Biblical *nephesh* or “soul” is not by any means immortal. It is subject to death, and a *muth nephesh* or a “dead soul” is something that is very real in the language of the Bible, though it is not in the language of orthodoxy. When we discover this truth and realize that there is no Biblical reason to insist that the wicked must live eternally anywhere at all, this argument dissolves. We are then left with a few poetic passages of uncertain meaning, a few difficult passages whose interpretation is far from certain, and a few scattered references to fire that do not by any means give a unified testimony to the idea that the wicked will be tormented in fire at all, not to mention eternally.

Ultimately what is at issue here is the question, “What exactly is death?” For there can be no doubt but that the Bible teaches that the ultimate punishment for sin is death. God told Adam in the beginning, “**Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die,**” Genesis 2:16-17. Thus Adam was clearly warned that death was the punishment he could expect if he disobeyed God and ate from the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Romans 6:23 concurs with this when it says, “**For the wages of sin is death.**” So there can be no doubt but that death is the rightful punishment for sin that the wicked can expect to experience. But just what is death?

To examine this view we must consider the teaching of traditionalism regarding the answer to this question. What traditionalism says is that death is a separation. Ecclesiastes 12:7 says, “**Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God Who gave it.**” Death is viewed as a separation between the body of man, which returns to the ground, and the spirit or soul (or both) of man, which returns to God who gave it. Thus death is a separation. While God told Adam he would surely die if he ate the forbidden fruit, the fact is that he did not die the day he ate of it, nor for a very long time afterwards. Thus what really happened that day is that he was separated from God. This separation was effected at that moment, and it only continues after a man dies. His soul, separated from God, naturally goes to Hell, the place of separation from God, to suffer rightful torment. This is the fate of all unless they are somehow saved from it by faith in Christ.

Yet this view of death runs into difficulties when it comes to the animals, for these same traditionalists do not teach that animals are separated from God and therefore go straight to Hell to suffer torments when they die. Thus it is argued that death means something different with man than it does with animals. The excuse for this difference is that man has an immortal soul, whereas animals do not. To support this view Ecclesiastes 3:21 might be quoted, “**Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?**”

Ultimately, the conclusion of traditionalism is that death for the wicked means eternal, conscious torment in a lake of fire called Hell. Psalm 55:15 might be quoted in this regard: **Let death seize them;
Let them go down alive into hell,
For wickedness is in their dwellings and among them.**

This is the teaching of traditionalism regarding the fate of the wicked. Yet is this the Bible’s teaching regarding this matter? We might well point out that Ecclesiastes 12:7 speaks as much of a return as it does of a separation. Consider this verse once again. **Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God Who gave it.** The word “separation” is not found here, but “return” is found twice. This passage describes death as a

return as much as it does a separation. Death for the body means a return to the soil from whence it was taken. Death for the spirit means it leaves the man and returns to God Who gave it. We might as well use this passage to define death as a return, rather than defining it as a separation.

Moreover if we go back to the very beginning of death we can see what exactly it was that Adam was promised as a punishment because he had eaten of the forbidden fruit. The punishment that God set forth to Adam is declared in Genesis 3:19.

**19. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread
Till you return to the ground,
For out of it you were taken;
For dust you are,
And to dust you shall return.”**

Thus we see again that what Adam was penalized with was not a separation of body and spirit or an “eternal separation from God” while suffering in a lake of fire called Hell. No, Adam was promised a return in punishment for his sins. He was taken out of the ground when God created him, Genesis 2:7: **And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.** Yet now, having sinned, he was destined to return to the ground. He was made of topsoil, and after his life was over he would return to the topsoil. That was the fate Adam was sentenced to in punishment for his sins.

Moreover these are not the only passages that speak of death as a return. Ecclesiastes 3:20 says the same: **All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust.** The “dust” is truly the topsoil, and what Solomon means is that at death we return to that topsoil. Solomon’s words are right in line with God’s words in Genesis 3:19. Surely Solomon speaks the truth in what he says here. Mankind was taken from the topsoil in the beginning, and mankind returns to the topsoil upon death.

**Job 34:14-15. If He should set His heart on it,
If He should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath,
15. All flesh would perish together,
And man would return to dust.**

This passage records the words of Elihu, and this man too speaks the truth when he says this, for he speaks in line with what God said about death in the beginning. Death is a return. If God decided to gather His Spirit and His breath back to Himself, all flesh would perish together, and man would return to the dust. Man would return, notice, not be separated one part of him from another, nor be merely separated from God but still be living. No, if God took back the breath of life, this would result in all living beings that God made perishing.

Not only is death described by the Bible as a return to the elements from which one was made, not as a separation from God, but death is also said to be the same for animals and for man, since neither knows anything any longer. Ecclesiastes 9:3-6 declares this truth.

3. This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

This verse makes out that all the sons of men go to the dead after their lives are over. Yet the teaching of traditionalism is that death means Hell so only the wicked go to the dead to suffer with them in Hell, whereas the righteous go to Heaven to experience bliss with the saints. This is not the teaching of Solomon here in Ecclesiastes, however.

4. But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

Since life is better than death, a living dog is better off than a dead lion. Solomon is clearly not just speaking of animals, of course, but his real topic is human beings. A lowly, poor person who is alive is better off than a powerful, rich person who is dead. Oh, how traditionalists hate this passage! No wonder they attempt to discredit the testimony of Ecclesiastes. There are various ways of doing it. One of them is to make out that Ecclesiastes is limited in scope to “under the sun,” so that its words are not trustworthy about anything having to do with life after death. Others make Ecclesiastes out to be “an inspired record of man’s faulty reasoning,” which means that they can disagree with it at will. Thus God’s Word is made of no effect by man’s traditions. The negation of this book is just one of the nefarious legacies of traditionalist teaching.

**5. For the living know that they will die;
But the dead know nothing,
And they have no more reward,
For the memory of them is forgotten.**

Of course this verse flies entirely in the face of the idea that the dead are suffering consciously in Hell.

**6. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished;
Nevermore will they have a share
In anything done under the sun.**

Here those who are dead are said to have perished. This is the end of men according to this book, and not to find themselves instantly suffering in Hell.

Tying this whole issue back to what we had studied regarding the nature of the soul, we found that souls are mortal and subject to death. Yet the traditional view ascribes immortality to the soul of man, thus justifying the idea that after death the wicked must continue living somewhere like Hell. If there was no doctrine of Hell, they would certainly need to create one in order to justify their idea that mankind is naturally immortal.

Yet this is not the teaching of the Bible. In Its pages, immortality is not inherent in the wicked, but must be granted. I Corinthians 15:54 shows the fact that immortality must be granted as a gift most clearly.

54. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

We are currently mortal, and thus are not fit for the kingdom of God and for the eonian life He offers. In order to be fit to live in His kingdom, we must put on both incorruptibility and immortality. This does not just refer to our bodies, but to our very beings. It refers to our souls as well, for we have seen that souls are mortal and must put on immortality before they can be immortal. We will all put these blessed gifts of incorruptibility and immortality on when we are raised from the dead to live in God’s kingdom.

Yet none of us has immortality right now. Jesus Christ alone has immortality as a possession and right. I Timothy 6:16 states this truth.

16. Who (Jesus Christ, see verse 14) **alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.**

This passage states the truth unmistakably. Jesus Christ alone has immortality. That being the case, none of the rest of us can have it, either in respect to our souls or to any other part of us. He alone qualifies as immortal. The rest of us can only put on immortality as He grants it to us in the future at the resurrection, as I Corinthians 15:54 told us.

We also need to ask ourselves if torment is the just punishment for the wicked? For this is what traditionalism tells us. As terrible as eternal, conscious torment seems, it is God's justice that demands it and so it is right that He enacts it on the wicked. Yet is this truly what the Bible sets forth as both the just punishment for sin and the one God is going to enact on the guilty?

Adam was warned of a grim penalty if he ate of the forbidden fruit and brought sin into the world. Yet what he was warned of was death, not torment. Notice this in Genesis 2:17. **"17. but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."**

Notice the utter inadequacy of the LORD God's words sentencing Adam in Genesis 3:19, **"For dust you are, And to dust you shall return,"** if the punishment he was actually going to experience from God was eternal, conscious torment in fire. If this was to be Adam's experience the instant he died and his body returned to the soil, then how could his actual, stated punishment be nothing more than a returning to the soil? What God said was a gross understatement if in fact Adam did not return to the soil, but instead suddenly and instantly found himself in a place of horrific, fiery torment to be experienced for all eternity. How could God's simple statement of his punishment be considered at all adequate if this was the case? Surely Adam and his descendants were never adequately warned of their possible, final fate if both the word of Genesis is to be read and believed and yet at the same time the teachings of traditionalism are correct.

The Bible does teach what the rightful penalty for sin is, and it is not eternal, conscious torment. The Word of God teaches that the wages of sin is death, not torment. We can see this in Romans 6:23. **For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.** Everyone knows that your wages are what you earn. Thus what we earn by the fact that we are sinners is death. We do not, on the other hand, earn eternal, conscious torment, suffering, torture, or anything along those lines. That is not what the Bible says about the matter.

The traditional view, far from being consistent with the character of God as a God of justice, seems to run entirely contrary to the character of God as He states it in the Scriptures. By the view of traditionalism that many hold, even unsaved children (at least those who have passed the "age of accountability") are destined to be eternally, consciously tormented. I know that when I was a child in elementary school I was told by traditionalists that if I did not believe in Jesus Christ I would end up in Hell. Yet the passing of children through fire was something that God disassociates Himself from entirely in Jeremiah 32:35. **"And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin."**

Here the LORD states that it never even entered His mind that men should pass their children through the fire to Himself as they did to this foul god Molech. Historians differ on just how old these children were when this was done: whether they were infants, or elementary age children, or even in their teenage years. But at any rate, God claims He never even thought of

demanding such a thing. Yet traditionalism would tell us that, far from never thinking of it, God actually plans to subject every child or young person who dies without trusting in Christ to torment in fire, not just to burn up and die in a few minutes, but rather to stay alive and suffering in the fire for all eternity! Surely such a view is entirely out of character for the God Who stated Jeremiah 32:35.

Does God ever enact torment as a punishment for sin? We cannot say that this is never the case. Arguably the wickedest men of the Bible, those who follow the kingdom of Satan and the anti-Christ, are kept alive and tormented for five months. Revelation 9:3-6 tells us about this.

3. Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5. And they were not given *authority* to kill them, but to torment them *for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. 6. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them.*

So these men, men against whom God is most angry, are kept alive for five months, not being allowed to die during that time, in order to be tormented by the locusts that came out of the Abyss. So these, some of the most reprehensible characters in Scripture, are kept alive for five months to be tormented. This is a grim punishment, yet this is a far cry from eternity!

Among traditionalists, I have heard as a common argument for the justice of eternal, conscious torment the following idea. The wicked who sin do not just sin against some little man. They sin against the infinite God, and sin against an infinite God deserves an infinite punishment. Yet those who make this argument in modern times do not seem to realize where this argument comes from. This argument has been around for many centuries, and actually is based on medieval thought. In the thinking of the time, the one sinned against mattered before the law. If you sinned against a lord or a member of the nobility this was much more serious than if you sinned against a commoner, and therefore a sin against a noble deserved a much greater punishment. Yet our modern idea is entirely against this. Most who make this argument would argue that basing the punishment of a crime on the status of the person the crime was committed against would be a corruption of justice. Yet they apply this kind of thinking to God!

Not only is basing the punishment for a crime on the status of the victim contrary to modern thinking and, if I may take the liberty to say so, entirely contrary to true justice, this is also not a Biblical view of justice and is contrary to Bible law. Exodus 23:3 says, “**You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.**” Exodus 23:6 declares the opposite as just as important. “**You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute.**” Thus the poor, the helpless, those who lack power or status, are not to be either favored or disfavored in judgment. True judgment, then, from the Biblical standpoint is without respect to the status of the person wronged. How, then, can it be right to punish more severely just because of the greatness of God against Whom man has sinned? No, this argument is outdated and contrary to true and Biblical justice.

Once any strong argument against the concept of eternal conscious torment is made, the traditionalists have one great passage they will run to as their final and undefeatable fortress against which no attack is supposed to be able to be made. This passage is what is commonly called “The Rich Man and Lazarus” in Luke 16:19-31. This is made to be the premiere passage in the Bible on the future destiny of the wicked. From behind the safe walls of fact that this passage supposedly conveys the traditionalist claims to be standing on impregnable truth and throws the charge of un-Biblical and unbelieving against all who refuse to bow to the reality they claim it irrevocably teaches. Yet one single passage surely does not justify ignoring

everything else said in the Bible about future punishment! At the same time every passage in the Bible is God's Word and deserves careful and serious consideration. Further study of this passage is sorely needed, but we hardly have time to do so in this article. We will look at this supposed fortress of the traditionalists in a future study.

Not to say that there are not other passages that the traditionalists appeal to. Some of their primary ones are Isaiah 14:9-11, Ezekiel 32:17-32, and Revelation 14:10-11. Again, we will consider these passages and what they are teaching in future messages in this series.

Some will say, "The Bible speaks of Hell," as if this fact in itself answers all arguments against the traditional view. Yet the fact that the Bible speaks of a thing does not justify every extreme statement that every wild-eyed preacher may say about it. Yes the Bible speaks of Hell, but what does it have to say about it? We must answer this question before we can be certain we stand on Biblical truth. Moreover, "Hell" in English is a translation of multiple Hebrew and Greek words that mean different things. The Greek word *hades* is said to be "Hell," and yet in Revelation 20:14 Hades is cast into the lake of fire. So how could Hades be the lake of fire and be cast into the lake of fire at the same time? Clearly all the words translated "hell" cannot be the traditional idea of Hell in English. Further study is needed. We have already carried this study throughout the Old Testament in our articles, "Hell in the Books of Genesis to Job," "Hell in the Books of Psalms and Proverbs," "Hell in the Books of Ecclesiastes to Malachi," and "The Lake of Fire in the Old Testament." We will continue this study on into the New Testament in future articles.

So in conclusion, the traditional view requires the inherent immortality of the soul to make sense. Yet this idea is not a Biblical one, but rather comes from the philosophies of Plato and other worldly thinkers. Traditionalism assumes multiple definitions of what death is, insisting that it means separation from God in Hell when it comes to unsaved humans, though that is clearly not the case with animals. The Bible, on the other hand, defines death as a return to the elements from which one was made, a truth which applies to men, animals, and even the second death. The Bible never sets forth torment as the right and just "wages of sin," but only death and a return to the dust from which we came. The traditional view of eternal, conscious torment fails to stand up to the test of Scripture.

Nathan C. Johnson

Letters to Precepts

(On "Romans 10 Part 2")

Letter: Thank you for sending the study of Romans 10:10-14.

Nathan: You are welcome.

Precepts: But where is there evidence in their lives of their love for God that they so quickly proclaim?

Letter: The ordinary behavior of man towards God is indeed so often insane, isn't it? Within our breadth of familiarity, there are many who grew up with every advantage we did, and with all of these

advantages they essentially say the following to God:

I accept Your offer of salvation, but let it be known to You that I categorically reject essentially everything else You say. The things You call good, I hate those things. I consider them evil. And as for the things You call evil, well, those things suit me. I call them good. I still expect you to save me though.

Love, So and So

Nathan: It is sad when people claim connection to God and salvation, and yet they prove by their lives, actions, and words that they will not live according to the standards and morals set down in God's

Word. These men abandon God out of a self-sacrificial love for this world, even as Demas did in Paul's day. While it is clear that they believe that acting this way will have no effect on them, we can be sure that what a man sows, he will also reap. Whether or not such people are really saved, ungodly actions and lifestyles will have an effect on the life to come, and this will not result in honor for those who live after this manner.

Precepts: We ought to trust God's inspiration of the New Testament and conclude that the Hebrew text can, at least, be looked at the way the New Testament sets it forth.

Letter: Thank you for going into detail regarding the layout of ancient Hebrew and how the quotations of the Old Testament that appear in the New prove that His Word shines through the shortcomings of man. I recall some time ago that you had mentioned that you were embarking on the study of learning how to read ancient Hebrew and I rejoice in every opportunity when you have had chance to share the fruits of that labor.

Nathan: Translating Hebrew to English is a much less exact science than the translation of Greek, since the languages are significantly more different. Yet certainly it is true that accurate translation is possible. Hebrew is a beautiful and poetic language, and it is a good thing that it has been resurrected for current use. It is good at least to know the Hebrew alphabet and to be able to examine passages in Hebrew like I do in Greek. I am still certainly better at Greek than Hebrew, however.

Precepts: We must also take into account the fact that the term "Greeks" has to do with a lifestyle, not a nationality.

Letter: Thank you also for emphasizing this point as something around 99.9% of expositors insist that every appearance of "Greek" or "Gentile" should automatically be assumed to mean someone with no connection to Israel. All who have ever perused your commentaries know full

well that to do so is to make a great mistake.

Nathan: It is indeed a mistake to make such assumptions. When we take a careful look at such words and how they are used in the Bible, we will come to learn that those without Israelite ancestry are much less relevant to the New Testament than most people would care to believe. We would do well to adjust our understanding to align with the importance of Israel in God's work throughout the Bible, and not just in the Old Testament.

Precepts: It is impossible to call on Him without believing in Him first.

Letter: As is the case of the hypothetical man I described above, how can one expect anything from God when one rejects what He has said???

Nathan: Christ told His disciples that, if they loved Him, they should keep His commandments. He also said no man can serve two masters. Those who refuse Christ's commands prove their lack of love. Those who serve the world prove they despise the Lord they claim to follow. What do such people think they will get in the end from God for such behavior and such an attitude?

Precepts: At that time, no one could hear about Jesus Christ without someone heralding it to him, and these heralds were commissioned. Yet that changed at the moment when the gospel was written down.

Letter: A transition can be denied, even one so great as this. Yet even though it can be denied, it cannot ultimately be escaped from, as even the Olympic-class hand-wavers and word-salad speakers we know so well can only guise its presence temporarily. May there be many in their sway and even those among their ranks who are ready to truly consider if their beliefs really hold up to what God has said.

Nathan: Indeed! It is useless to deny the reality of the unique character of the Acts period. That unique character shines forth in

everything that takes place in the historical record of that period, and in the epistles written during that time, like the book of Romans. As important as are the truths these books teach, yet at the same time, it is not right to ignore or explain away the truths that apply uniquely to that dispensation. It is far better to acknowledge that that period was different from today. It is far better to rightly divide.

(On "Romans 10 Part 3")

Letter: Thank you for sending the study of Romans 10:16-21.

Nathan: You are welcome.

Precepts: This helps explain why studying the Bible and knowing what is in it is so important: because we cannot have faith in what God has said until we know what He has said.

Letter: Just as you had indicated, I too know many who identify as "Bible-believing" who in fact have not read the Word and are unfamiliar with it other than a small sample of verses they have heard others recite. It is as if for many, they move along on the notion that since they have now mumbled a few words indicating a profession of faith, they now have the right to use their imagination to decide what God is all about. Their conclusions always match what they decide best suits them, and like everything that originates from the heart of man, the outcome is at the very least futile.

Nathan: There is no knowing God outside of the revelation He has given us of Himself. A philosophy of God that is based on ignorance is inevitably going to be flawed. While an understanding of God as revealed in the gospel is a good starting point, that is only the starting point. As you say, many have a God Who is largely developed from their imaginations, or whom they have pieced together from what they have heard about God from those around them. Once again, all such notions are going to be inadequate. God is not just like we would expect or imagine Him to be. He is always

going to be greater, and our vain attempts at imagining Him are all going to fall short.

Precepts: Faith only follows on God speaking. Without His word, there can be no faith at all.

Letter: Man is very confident in what he imagines to be right as it relates to himself and those he considers to belong to him, and in his zeal, many who should know far better attempt to enlist God in their crusade for such things as physical well-being and material prosperity. Man is very talented with respect to plucking at heart strings, let us be careful to not get caught up in fervor of those we know as they quest to bend the will of God to match their personal desires.

Nathan: Trying to recruit God to become a part of our program is an ancient mistake. Israel made it when they assigned God a small part in their campaign against their brother tribe of Benjamin in Judges 20. God spoke to the small role they gave Him, and then upended their entire program by giving victory to the wayward tribe. God is not available to join man's ministries. All we do ought to be focused on serving Him. The mistake of thinking God will get on board our program will ultimately lead to disappointment.

Precepts: God does not send His agents to no purpose. The apostles had results in Jerusalem, they had results in Antioch, in Corinth, in Thessalonica, in Rome, and in many other places around the world where Jews dwelt.

Letter: Thank you for pointing out that the "not all" of verse 16 requires that we acknowledge that many in fact did believe. Furthermore, the record makes clear the undeniable presence of those of Israel who believed, in those and a myriad of other places. This fact cannot be diminished, regardless of how hard so many since have tried.

Nathan: The idea that Israel rejected Christ in the gospel period and again in the Acts period is ingrained in the thinking of many, so much so that they tell themselves they

see it in the historical record of Scripture. While they are partially aided by translations bent to help them, ultimately there is much in the Bible even as we have it translated to point out that this is not so. There were tens of thousands of Jews who believed in Judea, and the impact could be clearly seen

to all who entered Jerusalem. The same was mirrored around the world. Not all believed, but faith in Christ made a huge impact. As you say, this fact cannot be diminished.

Nathan C. Johnson

Next issue: Having considered the traditional view of the eternal, conscious torment of the wicked and found it to lack in true, Biblical support, we now consider what many purport to be the alternative view to traditionalism: universalism. Is it true and Biblical that all men or even all beings including Satan and his forces will someday be reconciled to God? We consider the verses that universalists bring forward to support their view, as well as their arguments regarding this. Does the universalism view match up with all Scripture?