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Do the Fires of Hell Come From God? (Part I)

Acts 3:23: (NASB) *And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.*

Christianity is all about salvation in Christ Jesus, but it is also about judgment and accountability for wrongdoing. All Christians believe that Jesus clearly addressed both salvation and judgment, but we are widely divided on what he meant by his words. Did Jesus teach that all who do not accept him are doomed to eternity in the ravaging and torturous fires of an ever-burning hell or did Jesus teach that the ultimate consequence for those who do not either now or later accept him is eternal death?

We do not believe hellfire as an eternal place of torment is taught in the Bible. Upon close examination of the Scriptures, we find a logical explanation for all of the Scriptures that seem to talk about it.

In a series of programs, we will carefully examine all of the words of Jesus regarding the potential teaching of hell and hellfire, dividing them into three categories. This is a difficult subject, so we want to deal with it thoroughly and in context to get to the truth of the matter.

Jesus spoke of three categories of "hell:" 1. The phrase "weeping (or wailing) and gnashing of teeth;" 2. The Greek word "Gehenna" that is sometimes translated "hellfire;" 3. The Greek word "Hades" that is sometimes translated "hell."

We believe these three categories represent three distinctly different types of judgment and should not be all lumped together, for their context shows them to be *separate* teachings!

This Part I program will deal only with the first item: *Weeping (or wailing) and gnashing of teeth*. We believe all seven uses of the phrase express a reaction to a great loss of opportunity throughout and at the end of the age of the Gospel message. This loss is most often experienced by classes of people and sometimes by individuals, but is NOT related to a final judgment after death.

Weeping/Wailing: Strongs #2805, klauthmos (klowth-mos'); lamentation

The only two uses of this word outside of this context - these are vivid pictures! Matthew 2:18: (KJV) *In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and **weeping <2805>**, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.* This was used to describe a powerful, deep reaction to an unfathomable loss, the murder of Rachel's children.

Acts 20:37: (KJV) *And they all **wept <2805>** sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him...* Paul was leaving the Ephesians, and it had been prophesied they would never see him again. They were more than sad, as the Apostle Paul was like a father to them and changed the course of their lives in bringing them the Gospel. The word means a great, deep, emotional response.

Gnashing: Strongs #1030 brugmos (broog-mos'); a grating (of the teeth)
KJV—gnashing 1) a gnashing of teeth 2) snarling, growling: in the sense of biting

Example #1: Parable of the Closed Door. Jesus is speaking a parable to a Jewish audience as he is traveling, teaching and healing: Luke 13:23-28: The Jewish audience is asking, "Master, are there only a few who will answer what you are calling them to?" Jesus gives them a parable of the door of opportunity coming to a close. Jesus is trying to focus them on what they will miss if they do not follow him as the Messiah - a dramatic opportunity of favor. Notice it says they will still "see" Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets, even though they are not on the "favorable" side of the door. What is their response? *Weeping and gnashing of teeth* - a deep, heartbreaking sorrow and anguish coupled with consternation, anger and pain at a GREAT loss. The context is for the Jewish nation. They were close, but they did not recognize and accept him. This was a great loss because they could have been part of the spiritual class. **Example #1** refers primarily to those of the Jewish nation called to follow Jesus and how some will not be faithful to that full devotion of their "all" to him. The Bible promises the Jewish nation will still have great favor from God, but just not in the same way.

Example #2: The Faithful Centurion - Jesus speaking to a Gentile: Matthew 8:5-12: This is a similar expression of being cast out of this great favor that is presented. It introduces *outer*



darkness. This is a clear reference to Israel being rejected and replaced by Gentiles (*many shall come from the east and west*) because they rejected the Messiah. This Gentile Centurion was "on the outside looking in," but he displayed great faith. Jesus compares the faith of those following him "on the inside" vs. those who are on the "outside." Notice in **Example #2**, *outer darkness* is in no way connected with torment by fire.

This refers to the children of Israel, having rejected the Messiah, cast into disfavor (they would experience a role reversal as the Gentiles would now be favored). Upon the realization of that role reversal in the next age, they who lost a great opportunity will exhibit anger and lamentation (*weeping and gnashing of teeth*) over their loss. But it is not the end for them as God still has more to His plan!

1 Peter 2:9-10: This is about those who have come to Christ having been *called out of darkness*. The Gentiles were figuratively in outer darkness but came out of that darkness into the light.

Outer darkness = the (temporary) blindness of the world without the enlightenment of God's favor.

These first two examples give us a general broad-stroked look at the dispensational (meaning certain things only apply at certain times) aspect of *weeping and gnashing of teeth*. The main lesson was for all Jewish or Gentile converts, but primarily from the Jewish perspective regarding their loss of favor. The loss of the light of God's favor brings you into darkness. It is not a permanent loss.

Example #3: Parable of the Wedding Banquet Matthew 22:8-14: Wherever there is *weeping and gnashing of teeth*, there was something offered (Jesus) but not taken. **Example #3** is a stark lesson of choice and loss for all called to the heavenly calling. The *garment* described is the merit of Christ because the robe of Christ's righteousness "covers" those in this picture. *Bind him hand and foot* signifies the removal of the influence on others the man without a garment would have. His ability to influence others is limited - he is bound hand (what he can do) and foot (where he can go). Without the proper attire (the covering of Christ), he is then cast into *outer darkness* - away from the light of favor for he did not "clothe" himself to accept it. There is a consequence for not doing what he should have. Matthew 5:20: (KJV) *For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

What is the historical common thread? Fear! It is fear of death, darkness, pain and the unknown. (Source for this and subsequent quotes in this Rewind: *The Origin and History of the Doctrine of Endless Punishment*, Thomas B. Thayer, 1881) But, as I have remarked, though the Greeks borrowed, they altered and improved...they are not satisfied with the Egyptian method of generalizing respecting the punishments of the wicked, but begin specifying particular sinners, and particular kinds of punishment adapted to particular offenses. Hence the fables of Ixion, Tantalus, Tityrus, etc... everything must be sharp, pointed and dramatic to suit the lively genius of the Greek; and the terrors of the invisible world must be presented in a way to strike the imagination in the most powerful manner, and produce some direct result on the individual and on society. The Greeks took what the Egyptians believed and embellished further in order to control the people. Jesus *did* teach about judgment and we definitely believe in judgment and complete accountability! We do not believe God needs to use torture and torment to achieve that accountability.

Example #4: The Parable of the Talents - the focus is no longer on a Jewish audience, but now it is directed to Christianity: Matthew 25:24-30: Again no talk of torture or fire. This is another pointed lesson to those called into the light of the Gospel through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, who are given opportunities to directly advance the Master's cause, but instead merely preserve those opportunities by their preoccupation with the world.

Just like the Jews, any Christian given the opportunity of the Gospel who did not use it will lose that privilege. They will be sorrowful. There is hope at the end of the tunnel, but it is a different hope than they could have had.

Pre-New Testament Greek history: Polybius (c. 200 - 118 BC) was a Greek historian of the Hellenistic Period noted for his work, *The Histories*, which covered the period of 264-146 BC in detail. (Per Wikipedia: Polybius's *The Histories* provides a detailed account of Rome's ascent to empire and included his eyewitness account of the Sack of Carthage in 146 BC. Polybius held that historians should only chronicle events whose participants the historian was able to interview, and was among the first to champion the notion of having factual integrity in



historical writing.) Polybius says, "Since the multitude is ever fickle, full of lawless desires, irrational passions and violence, there is no other way to keep them in order but by the fear and terror of the invisible world; on which account our ancestors seem to me to have acted judiciously, when they contrived to bring into the popular belief these notions of the gods, and of the infernal regions." This is 200 years before Christ! These concepts based on pagan beliefs were embellished to control the people, keeping them in ignorance and fear. **Another verification of the darkness that Jesus is referring to in the parable: Isaiah 60:1-3**

More Greek history before Christ explaining the idea of eternal torment and flames was made up to control the crowds: Strabo (64/63 BC - c. AD 24) was a Greek geographer, philosopher and historian. He says, "The multitude are restrained from vice by the punishments the gods are said to inflict upon offenders, and by those terrors and threatening which certain dreadful words and monstrous forms imprint upon their minds... For it is impossible to govern the crowd of women, and all the common rabble, by philosophical reasoning, and lead them to piety, holiness and virtue - but this must be done by superstition, or the fear of the gods, by means of fables and wonders; for the thunder, the aegis, the trident, the torches (of the Furies), the dragons etc., are all fables, as is also all the ancient theology. These things the legislators used as scarecrows to terrify the childish multitude."

1 Timothy 4:6-7: When we look at the Greek background of that culture, we see why the Apostle Paul wrote this warning to Timothy. *Fables* had crept into Christianity.

A quick review of the first four examples of *weeping and gnashing of teeth*:

- Being cast out of favor
- Looking in at the faithful fellowship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the ruling kingdom
- Landing in outer darkness (introduced after Example #1) - no light of truth or spirit to show the way
- Great sorrow, regret and consternation over this loss
- This *outer darkness* consequence is a very personal experience to the Jew first because of their loss of favor - and their replacement by the un-favored Gentile peoples of the world (role reversal)
- The *outer darkness* angst and sorrow are also very personal to the Christian as well, as they are in no less jeopardy of losing privilege if they chose self-service over God-service

The same theme: Losing the opportunity to be a true follower of Jesus, but this is not a final judgment.

The next two *weeping and gnashing* examples are similar, just as the previous four were similar. **Example #5: Parable of the Wheat and the Tares - this parable adds another dimension - a *furnace of fire*: Matthew 13:37-43: Aha! Finally the concept of fire is introduced! So, what is this *furnace of fire*? Will Scripture identify it for us? **It refers to the Great Time of Trouble - here is how we know: Psalms 21:8-9: (NASB) ⁸Your hand will find out all your enemies; your right hand will find out those who hate you. ⁹You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger; The LORD will swallow them up in His wrath, and fire will devour them. We think when Jesus used the phrase *furnace of fire*, he had the Old Testament in mind. Malachi 4:1: (NASB) For behold, the day is coming, **burning like a furnace**; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.****

This is talking about the time at the end of this Gospel Age - a great time of trouble before the Day of Judgment.

The *weeping and gnashing of teeth* is put into context. This parable is specifically an end of the age picture as shown by **verse 40** and the *furnace of fire*.

- It refers to *separating out* the false Christian systems at the end of the Gospel Age. It is not about individuals but rather systems. The tares were allowed to grow throughout the age.
- The tares (false systems) are DESTROYED in fire - not tortured. A tare cannot be tortured - it is a weed.
- This is the *furnace of fire* of the *Great Time of Trouble*, not *Gehenna*, which is the second death.



- The weeping refers to the anger and lamenting at being exposed as false and hypocritical.
- The timing is pre-Judgment Day (see **verse 43**) with no allusion to eternal torment - just destruction.

A bit more history - this time from a Roman perspective: Lucius Annaeus Seneca (c. 4 BC - AD 65) was a Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman, dramatist, and in one work humorist, of the Silver Age of Latin literature. Seneca says: "Those things which make the infernal regions terrible, the darkness, the prison, the river of flaming fire, the judgment seat, etc., are all a fable, with which the poets amuse themselves, and by them agitate us with vain terrors." Sextus Empiricus (160 - 210 AD) calls them "poetic fables of hell;" and Cicero (106 BC - 43 BC) speaks of them as "silly absurdities and fables."

Example #6: The Parable of the Net Cast Into the Sea Matthew 13:47-50: This is the same context and explanation as **Example #5**.

What has been added by these last two examples?

- *Outer darkness* as a penalty - loss of favor was the "weeping" context throughout the Gospel age.
- The context is at a different time frame: Now we are clearly set at the end of the age when the *Great Time of Trouble* arrives.
- This *furnace of fire*, this *Great Time of Trouble* is a time of (among other things) a final separating out and destroying of nominal Christian systems.
- The "true colors" of the systems are here revealed and are now exposed to the "fire" of God's wrath. There is great accountability and levels of judgment.
- A *furnace of fire* is a contained and controlled fire vs. Gehenna which utterly destroys all therein.

This kind of teaching instills a deep fear in people. Did Jesus in his ministry instill that kind of fear and uncertainty? No. He drew people to his love, goodness, mercy, justice and teaching. He drew them through goodness, not through threats. There is a dramatic contrast.

Now for the last use of *weeping and gnashing*. This one is different - it is individual and focused. **Example #7: Jesus' great prophecy of his return:** Matthew 24:44-51: This parable is a somewhat unique example. It deals with an individual (not classes of people or systems) who was given great responsibility at the end of the Gospel Age. It describes the consequence of such a servant chosen to dispense "meat in due season," (the deep things of the Gospel message) if he should not be faithful to his responsibility in its entirety. This teaches that with great privilege comes great responsibility and potential for a great loss - the greater the leadership, the greater the potential fall. This is a warning in principle to stand firmly for what we believe to be right and true according to the Gospel. By not doing so, we would experience *weeping and gnashing of teeth* - a great loss.

So far in what we have covered, the phrase *weeping and gnashing of teeth* repeated seven times has nothing to do with a final judgment.

THE HEATHEN INVENTED THE DOCTRINE OF ENDLESS PUNISHMENT - SHOWN BY THEIR OWN CONFESSIONS. Any one at all familiar with the writings of the ancient Greeks or Romans cannot fail to note how often it is admitted by them that the national religions were the inventions of the legislator and the priest, for the purpose of governing and restraining the common people. Hence, all the early lawgivers claim to have had communications with the gods, who aided them in the preparation of their codes. Zoroaster claimed to have received his laws from a divine source; Lycurgus obtained his from Apollo, Minos of Crete from Jupiter, Numa of Rome from Egeria, Zaleucus from Minerva, etc. The object of this sacred fraud was to impress the minds of the multitude with religious awe, and command a more ready obedience on their part. There are many historical references to show the fabrication behind all of this. What does that mean? These fabrications happened before the New Testament was written and they are not a part of the Old Testament. They begin to appear in ancient Egyptian theology and borrowed and expanded upon by the Greeks and others. They were made up stories for the purpose of controlling the people. *Weeping and gnashing of teeth* is not about control. It is about personal accountability when making the wrong choice. Why would God leave out from His dealings with His chosen people such an important aspect of life as hellfire if it were true? Why leave out something so important? Because it did not belong. Future CQ programs will continue to review every Scripture that even alludes to hell or hellfire in the New Testament.

We believe all seven uses of the phrase weeping and gnashing of teeth express a reaction to a great loss of opportunity throughout and at the end of the age of the Gospel message. This loss is most often experienced by classes of people and sometimes by individuals, but is NOT related to a final judgment after death.



Genesis 2:16-17: God laid out the consequence for sin right at the beginning! It was a really simple consequence: You will begin the dying process and you will die. It is interesting to note what God did *not* say. He did *not* say the penalty of sin was eternal torture. Satan contradicted God and lied to Eve, assuring her she would *not surely die*. That was the first lie in the Bible and gives the opportunity for the belief of hellfire to exist! Without that first lie, you cannot have that other fabrication.

Romans 6:23: (NASB) *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.* This is a simple statement in the New Testament that accurately reflects the proclamation of God in the Old Testament! The wages of sin is....eternal torment? Separation from God? No! *The wages of sin is death.* Death is the absence of life. This is a very serious matter. We urge all to really focus on what the Bible teaches. What God said in Genesis was repeated in Romans 4,000 years later. What He said

		Phrase used	TO WHOM primarily does it apply?	WHEN does this apply and WHAT does it mean?
Example #1	Parable of the Closed Door	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> weeping and gnashing of teeth 	The Jews living in Jesus' time	At the end of the "Jewish Age" (the period of Jewish favor) for the Jews who rejected their opportunity – their weeping and gnashing experience will be witnessing their position of favor being handed over to those who were once looked at as unclean, unprofitable and undesirable.
Example #2	Faithful Centurion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> weeping and gnashing of teeth outer darkness 	Christians	Throughout the "Gospel Age" (the period of time the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles) for any Christian who talks the talk without walking the walk – their weeping and gnashing will be directed at having come out of a dark and undesirable state into light, only to choose to misuse or abuse that light and be returned to a darkened state of being.
Example #3	Parable of the Wedding Banquet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> weeping and gnashing of teeth outer darkness 	Christians	Same as above.
Example #4	Parable of the Talents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> weeping and gnashing of teeth outer darkness 	Christians	Same as above.
Example #5	Parable of the Wheat and the Tares	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> weeping and gnashing of teeth furnace of fire 	False systems (not individuals) of Christianity	At the end of the "Gospel Age" for the false systems of Christianity and those they house – their weeping and gnashing will be focused on having occupied the seats of honor – only to be exposed as being hypocritical and self-serving systems and NOT God's called out church.
Example #6	Parable of the Net Cast Into the Sea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> weeping and gnashing of teeth furnace of fire 	False systems (not individuals) of Christianity	Same as above.
Example #7	Jesus' prophecy of his return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> weeping and gnashing of teeth cut asunder 	Individuals – favored servants of God that do not meet the highest mark of being a true follower of Jesus	At the end of the "Gospel Age," to even the most highly favored servants of God, should they become slack in their zeal. This weeping and gnashing is directly focused on having overcome the previous errors and pride and in spite of that overcoming, still being subject to the potential choice of self-service and therefore being cut off from incredible opportunity.

*So, do the fires of hell come from God?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*