

THE LARGER HOPE

Anthony E. Johnson

My title *The Larger Hope* may be taken by some to mean that believers in Christ may only *hope* for salvation. To avoid any misunderstanding, I would like to clarify that rather than casting doubt on the biblical *promise* of salvation to all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, *The Larger Hope* is an attempt to demonstrate from Scripture that, contrary to the traditional view that a limited number of people will be saved, we may confidently hope for the ultimate salvation of all.

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What the Spirit has already done for some he seeks to do for all, because it was for all that the Father sent his Son and it was for all that the Son offered himself on the cross. Such a universal hope has, as we have tried to show, good grounding in the New Testament Scriptures. The God who does not reject anyone, and does not abandon us to our own choices, has in his Son and his Spirit the love that is mighty enough to bring us all home to himself. All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well, but only because Jesus has died for the world and risen again.

Tom Smail, Once And For All.

For Christine, Helen, Connie,
Melvyn, Norman and Joan.

All Scripture quotations are taken
from the New King James Version,
unless otherwise indicated.

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INTRODUCTION

All Christians revere the Bible as God's inspired message to the world. All agree that His loving purpose for us is spelled out in the Holy Scriptures. However, despite this unanimity, there have been, and still are, various and often conflicting beliefs about the final destiny of the wicked. The traditional view is that all who receive Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord in this life will spend eternity with Him in heaven, while the rest will suffer endless punishment in hell. Another view, held by a growing minority, is known as 'Conditional Immortality.' This is the belief that, rather than the soul being immortal, immortality is reserved for those who believe in Christ. Those who hold this view believe that the unrepentant will be judged and then annihilated. A lesser-known belief, widely held in the first six centuries and becoming increasingly popular in the last three hundred years, is that all people will ultimately be saved. This is known as 'Universal Salvation,' 'Universal Reconciliation,' or 'The Larger Hope.'

Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a very influential advocate of the traditional view, says there were 'very many' in his day who believed in, or leant towards, Universal Salvation, including such godly and learned Fathers as Basil 'the great' (330-397), Gregory of Nyssa (330-395), and Gregory of Nazianzus (330-389), Gregory of Nyssa being highly regarded as a champion of orthodoxy, indicated by his important role in the formulation of the Nicene Creed. These, and many others of a similar persuasion, were not only devout Christians, but also masters of Greek, the language of the Septuagint (a key Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures), and the New Testament. Whilst this does not guarantee the validity of

their interpretation of the Bible, it tells us that in the first five centuries there were many Christians, including men of great learning and deep spirituality, who came to believe that God's love and saving grace will eventually reach all people, whether in this life or the next.

The objection is sometimes heard that the early champions of Christian Universalism were unduly influenced by philosophy. It is true that many of the advocates of the Larger Hope were philosophers as well as Christians, but this can be said of the Fathers generally. For instance, Justin Martyr (100-165), who was no friend of Universalism, strove to show the pagan world how the ideas of Plato prepared the Gentiles for the coming of the Messiah. Having said this, being devoted to Christ, *all* the early Fathers based their teaching on Scripture, notwithstanding differences of interpretation.

During the Dark Ages (5th - 11th cent.) the Church of Rome came to dominate western Christendom. Under the Papacy the Augustinian view of the destiny of the wicked (endless torment) prevailed. The Reformation (16th - 17th cent.) brought greater freedom of thought and belief, and this was furthered by the availability of Bibles in languages other than Greek and Latin. However, whilst rejecting many aspects of Roman Catholicism, the Reformers held on to Rome's doctrine of everlasting punishment, with some Protestant preachers of the 18th and 19th centuries spelling out the torments of hell in frightening detail.

Hell-fire preaching has declined in recent times, but it still occurs in some of the more fundamentalist sects, particularly in the southern states of North America. However, even in churches where endless punishment in hell is still accepted, it is rarely preached with the vehemence of former days, or taught to any depth, or with real conviction.

This has happened for a number of reasons: one being that nowadays Christians and people in general have a more humane approach to justice and the punishment of offenders. Another is that a growing number of theologians are coming to view God's punishment of the wicked in a similar light to many of the early Church Fathers, i.e., as essentially remedial and restorative.

It is significant that the Anglican Church and other major denominations now welcome Christians of this persuasion. This does not, of course, prove that Christian Universalism, or even the hope of universal salvation, is true, but it does indicate that many Churches and Christians are open to the possibility.

In the following pages we will consider i) some scriptural evidence for the Larger Hope; ii) some key Bible terms connected with future punishment; iii) some Bible passages which are often cited in support of the traditional view; iv) some common objections to the Larger Hope; v) a comprehensive list of Bible verses that point to the Larger Hope; and vi) an extensive A - Z of the Larger Hope, designed as a quick reference to help the reader explore further the biblical and theological basis of this subject.

My purpose in writing is to glorify God, and provide the reader with some scriptural evidence for the belief that all people will ultimately be saved. God is glorified when His goodness, grace, mercy and love are proclaimed; when His goodness is seen to embrace all; His grace shown to abound 'much more' than sin; His mercy declared to 'triumph over judgment,' and His love known to be, not simply one attribute among many, but the very essence of His Being, the motivating principle and power behind all His works (Ps.145:9; Rom.5:20, 21; Jam.2:13; 1John 4:8, 16).

THE LARGER HOPE

The revelation of God's Son as the Saviour of the world is the dominant theme of Scripture. It makes its entrance in the opening drama of Creation and runs like a silver thread through the whole Bible. As it progresses it becomes clearer, until it blazes forth in the Person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not stopping there, it is explored and expounded by the New Testament writers, and seen to extend into the ages to come. It is in the light of this grand theme of Scripture that we begin to understand something of God's purpose of making 'all things new,' in and through His Son, the 'Saviour of the world' (Rev.21:5; John 4:42).

In the first part of this book we will examine some Bible passages that teach, or strongly suggest, it is God's purpose to save all people.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Promised Seed (Gen.3:15)

'And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise
your head, and you shall bruise His heel.'

This verse has come to be known as the *protevangelium*, i.e., the first mention of the Good News in Scripture. Paraphrasing, it says that 'the Seed of the woman [Christ] will bruise the seed of the Serpent [Satan] in the head,' which signifies the overthrow and destruction of the devil and his works by Christ. That the Seed of the woman is

Christ is clear from Gen.22:18 and Gal.3:16. No Christian disputes this, but what is disputed is the nature and extent of Christ's victory over Satan revealed here. Most Christians believe that some/many people will be condemned to suffer endless punishment in hell, with the devil and his angels, even though that seems difficult to square with Christ's *total victory* over Satan, sin and death. However, a careful consideration of Gen.3:15, and related verses, shows that the traditional view falls seriously short of the first promise of salvation in Scripture. In Gen.3:15 the promise is that Christ, the 'Seed of the woman,' will bruise Satan's head, which clearly predicts the devil's complete overthrow and the deliverance of all his captives (Heb.2:14, 15).

When Adam fell, all his progeny fell *in* him (Rom.5:12; 1Cor.15:22). This followed on from Satan's insidious work, but the Apostle John declares that, 'the Son of God was manifest that He might destroy the works of the devil' (1John 3:8), that is *all* his works. The conquest of Satan by Christ ensures that 'those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage,' i.e., the 'whole creation,' will be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Heb.2:15; Rom.8:22, 23). These verses describe the *universal extent* of Christ's saving work. Unlike the popular creed, there is nothing narrow about them.

It could hardly be said that Satan and his works will be destroyed if, due to his work, some/many of his victims will be permanently ruined and alienated from God. From the very beginning, immediately after our first parents were tempted and fell into sin and condemnation, God revealed to them that He would break the devil's power and rescue all his captives in and through Christ. In Adam the Fall was universal, for in him 'all die,' so the

remedy must be universal in scope, resulting in life for all in Christ. After saying 'In Adam all die,' Paul says, 'even so in Christ all shall be made alive' (1Cor.15:22); not just resurrected, but given life in and through Christ.

Great was the sin that brought humanity into condemnation and death, but greater is the super-abundant grace that restores all people to life and blessing in Christ (Rom.5:19-21). A salvation more limited in scope and power than sin and death is not worthy of our gracious and merciful God. Yet believers and unbelievers alike have been told that the Fall has resulted in more people being condemned to endless punishment than are saved to enjoy the benefits of God's love in Christ.

In the following Bible passages the Larger Hope shines through, leaving the unprejudiced reader with the distinct impression that God purposes to restore the whole creation.

The Redemption of All Prefigured (Gen.3:7, 21)

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings . . . also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin and clothed them.

A feature of the Creation story, the significance of which is not always appreciated, is the way God replaced the leafy coverings Adam and Eve had made for themselves, with tunics of skin of His own making. It had been a matter of finding something to cover themselves with, and leaves were more available than skins, if less durable. However, God's removal of their leafy coverings, and His provision of tunics of animal skin, is full of the deepest

spiritual significance; the coverings of foliage representing sinful humanity's attempt to cover its guilt and shame, and the tunics of skin God's way of dealing with the problem. God's act of covering His disobedient children with the skin of an animal, obtained through the shedding of blood, speaks prophetically of Christ's redeeming sacrifice for all (1Pet.1:18, 19). It shows that in Christ sin and guilt are covered, cleansed and removed (John 1:29).

The link between the covering of our first parents with animal skin, and God's redemptive love for all people, may at first seem tenuous, but it becomes clearer when it is realized that the *whole human race* was in Adam and Eve when they were covered, depicting humanity's redemption in Christ, the greater Adam. Christ 'tasted death,' not only for Adam and Eve, but for 'everyone' (Heb.2:9; 1Tim.2:6).

So by this simple act in Eden - the covering of our first parents with the skin of a sacrificed animal - God indicated, in type and figure, the redemption of the whole world, in and through His Son. How simple, yet how profound! A race lost in Adam and restored in Christ. There was divine wisdom in this apparently trivial act. If we do not understand, it is because God has 'hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes,' in order to 'put to shame the wise . . . and the things that are mighty . . . to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence' (Matt.11:25; 18:3; 1Cor.1:26-29).

These things assure us that the blood of Christ has been shed for us *all*, and that we are all clothed in Him. As such we have been redeemed, reconciled and made acceptable to God in Him (1Cor.1:30; Col.1:20; Eph.1:6). All is God's amazing work of love and grace to be received and enjoyed by faith.

God's Promise to Abraham (Gen.22:18)

'In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.'

In this verse and others, such as Gen.12:1-3 and 26:4, God promises that all the inhabitants of the earth, i.e., every nation, tribe, kindred and tongue, will be blessed in and through Abraham's 'seed' (offspring). This promised seed who brings universal blessing refers in the first place to Christ, then to His Body, the Church (Gal.3:16, 29). The 'Seed of the woman' is Abraham's seed also, the Lord Jesus Christ who came to destroy the devil and his works, and the Church shares His victory (Gen.3:15; Rom.16:20).

God has promised to bless all the nations of the earth through Christ, the 'Saviour of the world' (1John 4:14). God Himself is the 'Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe' (1Tim.4:10), 'those who believe' being a kind of sub-group (the 'first fruits') of all who will finally be saved (see pp.89-91).

A Worldwide Turning to God (Ps.22:27-29)

All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. 28. For the kingdom is the LORD'S, and He rules over the nations. 29. All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow down before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive.'

This Messianic Psalm is about Christ's suffering and victory. It foretells the salvation of Israel and the world, and reminds us of Isa.53:11, 'He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied,' i.e., satisfied with the victorious outcome of giving Himself 'a ransom for all' (1Tim.2:6).

What else could '*all* the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD ... *all* the families of the nations shall worship before You . . . *all* the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship . . . and *all* those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him' *mean* other than universal salvation and worship? The language of restoration in these verses is broad and hopeful, even of *all* people turning to God. It is not a case of *the few* being saved (as the narrow theology teaches), but the many, even *the all*.

Interpreting these words in terms of universals by no means inflates them to mean something beyond what the Psalmist envisaged. The extent of the recovery of sinners to God is clear. It is that 'All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD.' If these words are not meant to declare the widest hope for humanity, then what is the use of language?

Universal Mercy (Ps.145:8-13)

The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. 9. The LORD is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. 10. All Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You. 11. They shall speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk of Your power, 12. to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. 13. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations.

David's heart overflows with thanksgiving and praise to God. He applauds His greatness, majesty, goodness, righteousness, compassion and mercy (vv.1-9). Notice how

he speaks of God's goodness and mercy extending over 'all His works' (vv.8, 9); and how he says, 'All Your works shall praise You, O LORD' (v.10). Notice also that an important aspect of the saints' ministry is to talk of God's power and 'make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of His kingdom' (vv.11, 12). This alludes to a little appreciated truth about 'the saints' (elsewhere referred to as the 'the Church' and 'the elect'), which is that whilst enjoying salvation themselves, they have the great privilege and responsibility, in this life and the next, of ministering truth and hope to the 'sons of men,' whom God has promised to subdue and restore to Himself (Acts 3:21; 1Cor.15:28; Phil.3:21; 1Cor.6:2).

After being gathered *first*, as the 'first fruits' of God's creatures (Rom.8:23; Jam.1:18; Rev.14:4), the saints will be instrumental in gathering the great harvest of the redeemed, when the whole creation will be mercifully 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:19-21).

It is true, as the Psalmist says, that God will destroy the wicked (v.20), but there is reason to believe this means the destruction of their *corrupt nature and evil ways* rather than their whole being (Ps.99:8; Mic.7:19). Hence, it will be an essentially *remedial and corrective* judgment that will bring the wicked to repentance, and into the good of the redemption Christ has accomplished for *all* (Isa.53:6; 1Tim.2:6; Heb.2:9). This hope is strengthened by the fact that in Deut.6:15; 7:4; Esth.3:6; Amos 9:8; Ps.145:20, and many other verses, the Hebrew word translated 'destroy' refers to *the termination of physical life*, not endless punishment after death.

The spirit of Ps.145 is one of hope in God's goodness and tender mercy. There *is* an element of judgment, but a careful study of Scripture reveals that judgment and mercy

are often closely linked (Ps.67:4; 99:8; Isa.26:9; 40:1, 2; 54:8; Ezek.24:13; 1Cor.5:3-5 & 1Tim.1:20; 1Thess.2:16 & Rom.11:25, 26). God judges the nations, not to destroy them utterly and for ever, but as Zeph.3:8, 9 tells us, 'to restore to the peoples a pure language, that they may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord.' In relation to this, it is highly pertinent that rabbis in the Talmudic period (200 B.C. - A.D. 600) emphasized the essential link between judgment and mercy. Abraham Cohen, author of *Everyman's Talmud*, says:

While believing, therefore, that He is the Judge of the Universe, the Rabbis delighted to call Him *Rachmana* (the Merciful), and taught that 'the world is judged by grace' (Aboth III. 19, p.20).

From this, and similar sayings, it becomes clear that Christian teachers have often portrayed God and His judgments in much darker tones than some of the more enlightened rabbis.

Ps.145 is an example of David's deep insight into God's character and purpose. Judgment will be severe for the wicked who fail to repent, but, as Scripture assures, not without hope (Isa.57:16; Rom.8:20).

Christ Bears Everyone's Iniquity (Isa.53:6).

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.

At a time when Israel was intolerant of other nations, Isaiah was privileged to be given a remarkably clear vision of universal redemption. The last part of ch.52 and

the whole of ch.53 describe the Person and work of Christ, God's suffering Servant, the Redeemer and Saviour of Israel and the world.

The recurring 'we,' in 53:1-6, shows that the humble and faithful Isaiah identified himself with God's sinful people who had 'gone astray,' and whose iniquity had been laid on Christ (see Isa.6:5). But it was not only Israel's sin that was atoned for by Christ, for Jesus 'tasted death for *everyone*' (Heb.2:9), and 'gave Himself a ransom for *all*' (1Tim.2:6). This was according to the good pleasure of God, who 'will have *all* men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth' (1Tim.2:4, AV).

Isaiah's words about God laying Israel's iniquity on Christ, and John's words, 'Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,' together declare that *all* are redeemed and reconciled to God (Col.1:20). This leads to the hope that all will be saved, for surely salvation is the purpose and goal of redemption and reconciliation.

Some may want to qualify what has been shown above, saying that although redemption and reconciliation have been provided for all people, they become operative only through faith in Christ. In reply, we may say that while faith in Christ is essential for salvation, repentance, faith and forgiveness of sins are all gifts of God's grace (Acts 5:31; Eph.2:8; 2Tim.2:25), and that He 'will have *all* men to be saved' (1Tim.2:4,AV). Hence there is hope for *everyone*, even the 'whole creation' (Rom.8:20); for the Lamb of God has *taken away* our sin (John1:29), so that our trespasses are no longer imputed to us (2Cor.5:19). This enables Christ to 'draw *all people*' to Himself (John 12:32) and 'subdue (conform) *all things* to Himself' (Phil3:21), so that ultimately '*every creature* which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea' will worship God and the Lamb (Rev.5:13).

Some may point out that Jesus said, 'If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins' (John 8:24), which may suggest that unbelievers are not redeemed, or if they are, forfeit their redemption through unbelief. However, dying in one's sins is not the same as being lost forever. It means that it is impossible to enjoy the benefits of redemption and reconciliation in one's unconverted state. Such remain unconverted until God 'subdues' them and brings them to trust in Christ in the age to come (1Cor.15:28; 1Pet.4:6). In Rom.11:25-32 God promises to take away Israel's sins, even from those who had become hardened and had died in their sins. Rejecting Christ in this life is a great loss for the unbeliever, but due to God's mercy it is not the loss of hope.

Repentance and faith, God's gifts, are essential if we are to come into the good of all He has accomplished for us in Christ, but we can rest assured that all people are redeemed and reconciled to Him (1Tim.2:6; Col.19, 20). Because God is good, and is love in the essence of His Being, we may trust that He will ultimately grant all people repentance and faith (Eph.2:8; 1Cor.3:5). It was when Jesus was asked about the extent of salvation, that He replied, 'with God *all things* are possible' (Matt.19:26), words pregnant with the widest hope, as are, 'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth will draw *all men* to Myself' (John 12:32, AV).

Mercy Triumphant Over Judgment (Ezek.16:44-63)

'When your sisters, Sodom and her daughters return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters return to their former state, then you [Jerusalem] will return to your former state' (v.55).

After condemning 'Jerusalem' (representing the people of

the southern kingdom of Israel), God promised its eventual restoration, along with that of Samaria and Sodom. All these cities were morally and spiritually corrupt, Jerusalem more than the others, but God promised to atone for her sins (v.63). In 1John 2:2 we learn that this atonement/propitiation is for the '*whole world*,' which includes Jerusalem's 'sisters,' Samaria and Sodom.

This will happen regardless of what Jude says about Sodom and Gomorrah 'suffering the vengeance of eternal fire' (Jude 7). The fire that fell on these cities was not *everlasting*, for it went out after a while. The expression 'eternal fire,' in this verse, conveys the idea, not of everlasting burning, but of a divinely administered judgment, the word 'eternal' referring to the fire's divine origin and purpose, rather than its duration. In the same way, 'eternal life' in the New Testament sometimes means a life that is spiritual and heavenly in its origin and quality, irrespective of its duration (John 17:3; 1John 1:1-3).

The promise of Sodom's restoration, along with that of Jerusalem and Samaria, lends strong Scriptural support to the Larger Hope, i.e., the hope that through redemption and reconciliation, including the redemption of the *people* of Sodom, Jerusalem and Samaria (for God does not merely restore cities), all people will be saved.

Many Old Testament passages point to the Larger Hope, but the few we have considered alert us to its presence and power in that part of the Bible which, through all the Prophets, points to the 'restoration of all things' (Acts 3:21).

Next we will look at this glorious theme as it unfolds in the New Testament, and see how both Testaments present a unified testimony to God's eternal purpose, in and through Christ, to subdue and conform all things to Himself, so that in the end He will be 'all in all' (Phil.3:21; 1Cor.15:28).

THE NEW TESTAMENT

Good Tidings to All (Luke 2:10, 14, 29-32)

Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring good tidings of great joy which will be to all people' . . . 14. 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!' . . . 29. 'Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; 30. for my eyes have seen Your salvation 31. which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, 32. a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.'

The 'good tidings of great joy' brought by the angel of the Lord was God's message of hope to '*all* people' (v.10). The angel assured the startled shepherds that the new-born Child was 'a Saviour . . . Christ the Lord' (v.11), the One soon to be acclaimed 'Saviour of the world' (John 4:42; 1John 4:14).

We may rightly assume that the words '*all* people' (v.10), '*men*' (v.14), and '*all* peoples' (v.31), refer to the human race in its entirety, if the joyous spirit of the angelic message is to be maintained. The Good News of the coming and saving work of Christ is meant for the ears and hearts of all people, for God intends that all should be recipients of His peace and good will in Him.

In the same Nativity account, godly Simeon speaks of salvation being 'prepared before the face of *all* peoples' (vv.30, 31). So the natural sense of these expressions of joy at Jesus' birth seems to be that God's love in Christ is being extended to all His creatures, which is in keeping with His will that all should be saved (1Tim.2:4, AV). In view of these things, it is difficult to draw from the Nativity story anything less than the Larger Hope.

The Saviour of the World (John 4:42; 1John 4:14)

'this is indeed the Saviour of the world.'

the Father sent the Son to be the
Saviour of the world (AV).

Twice in the Bible our Lord is called 'the Saviour of the world.' The newly converted Samaritans saw in Jesus God's love for all people – Jews, Samaritans, and people of every family, tribe, kindred and tongue. After seeing and hearing him they were convinced He could break down the age-old barrier of hatred between Samaritan and Jew, and the barriers dividing people everywhere. This led them to call Him 'the Saviour of the world.' They had no clear theological understanding of what the name entailed, but were persuaded that Jesus could somehow unite all people by His love. They felt that all things were possible to the One who could neutralize the festering animosity that had kept the Jews and the Samaritans apart for centuries (John 4:9).

John's description of Jesus as 'the Saviour of the world,' in his First Letter, is in a context of divine love (4:14, 8, 16). It came after decades of contemplating His Master's life, death and resurrection, and is part of his message of God's love for needy humanity, and how this should lead us to love one another. He assures us that the Saviour of the world is available to the 'whosoever' (v.15). God 'is love' in the essence of His Being, and it is as Love that He seeks the salvation of all His offspring (Acts 17:28, 29).

It is true that the Apostle John makes confession of Christ as the Son of God essential for salvation, but nowhere in his letter does he limit salvation to a select few; on the contrary, Christ is 'the propitiation for our sins . . . also for the *whole world*' (2:2). Consequently, we can say

that the *whole world's* salvation has been made possible. In view of this, we may ask why this universal provision if God does not intend to save the whole world?

The truth that Jesus is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, demonstrates that all have a place in God's heart, that all are the objects of His Fatherly care. Would God send His beloved Son to redeem and reconcile the world to Himself, and then not save the world? Has He provided the means of everyone's salvation, only to leave some/many of the objects of His love helpless, hopeless and in endless torment? Is the Saviour of the world' the Saviour of only *some* of His offspring, while the rest are left to suffer in hell-fire forever? If so, then what becomes of His complete victory over Satan, sin and death? And if salvation is to be enjoyed by only a portion of the human race, in what sense will God be 'all in all,' or 'everything to everyone'? (Moffatt). Traditional answers to these questions often leave a lot to be desired.

How glorious, in contrast, is the prospect of Christ fully living up to His name, 'the Saviour of the world,' by rescuing the whole of humanity from the damaging effects of the Fall. Isaiah says, 'Behold the LORD'S hand is not shortened that it cannot save' (59:1). And Jeremiah says that the sovereign Lord is able to give Israel 'one heart and one way,' that they may fear Him 'forever' (32:39,40). With universal overtones, God says to Jeremiah, 'Behold, I am the LORD, the God of *all flesh*. Is there anything too hard for Me?' (Jer.32:27; see also Luke 3:6; Matt.19:26).

What God did for Israel in Bible times, and has promised to do for her at the end of the age (Rom.11:25, 26), He can do for all nations, tribes and tongues; for He has 'committed all to disobedience that He might (i.e., in order to) have mercy on all' (Rom11:32). God, who 'will have all men to be saved,' wills to save all people, for He says, 'My

counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure' (Isa.46:10). We read also, 'He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth' (Dan.4:35). In view of these and other declarations of God's sovereign will and power in heaven and on earth, may we not derive the widest hope from Jesus' name, the Saviour of the world?

Christ Draws All Men to Himself (John 12:32, AV)

'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.'

The NKJV rendering of this verse: 'And I . . . will draw all *peoples* to Myself,' suggests it may be all *nations*, rather than every *individual*, that Jesus promised to draw to Himself. However, it was for '*all men*,' '*every man*,' and '*the whole world*' that Christ died (Rom.5:18; Heb.2:9; 1John 2:2). Lamsa, in his translation of the *Peshitta*, has 'every man.'

It is through His Cross that Jesus draws all people to Himself. He had just spoken of His death producing 'much fruit' (v.24, AV), i.e., saving many; and went on to say He had 'not come to judge the world but to save the world' (v.47). May we not deduce from these things that His bearing '*much fruit*,' His drawing '*all men* to Himself,' and His coming to save '*the world*,' indicates that Jesus died to save all people? All these sayings involve Christ's love for *all*, leading us to believe that *all* will be brought to repentance and belief in Him as Saviour and Lord (Isa.45:23, 24; Phil.2:10). We read that '*All things* were created through Him and *for* Him,' and that it was the Father's purpose '*to reconcile all things* to Himself by Him' (Col.:1:16, 20). Having created, redeemed, and reconciled all things to God, the Saviour of the world will certainly

draw to Himself everyone He has created, redeemed and reconciled to God, so that all may enter into the good of His salvation. The Son of God came 'not to condemn the world,' but to 'take away the world's sin,' and 'give life to the world' (John 3:17; 1:29; 6:33). Being all-powerful and all-merciful, He will not fail to accomplish all He came to do (Isa.55:11).

The Restoration of All Things (Acts 3:20, 21)

' . . . that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, 21. whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.'

In v.21 Peter speaks of a 'restoration of all things,' a time when everything ruined by the Fall will be renewed and restored through Christ. All the Old Testament prophets, some of whose writings we have considered, envisaged this. The following passages help to fill out the picture:- Ps.66:4; 67:6,7; 86:9; 102:15,22; Isa.2:1-4; 19:18-25; 25:6-9; 52:10-15; Ezek.16:44-63; 47:8-12; Dan.7:13,14; Hos.13:14; 14:1-9; Amos 9:11-15; Mic.7:18-20; Hab.2:14; Zeph.3:9; Hag.2:6-9; Zech.8:20-22; Mal.3:1-4. There are many other examples in the Old Testament of God's promise to restore Israel and the Gentiles, even *all things*.

It is hard to understand how there can be a restoration of *all things*, unless every single ruined sinner is redeemed, renewed and restored to God. If just *one* sinner ended up being separated from God forever, it would be less than a full restoration of all things. Such an imperfect restoration would fall short of *all things* being made new (Rev.21:5; 5:13).

Sin has entered God's creation and spoiled it. It has raised a barrier between people and God. The restoration of fellowship between God and His offspring is possible only through Christ, the 'Saviour of the world,' the 'one mediator between God and man' (1Tim.2:5). The 'restoration of all things' implies a prior fall of all things. God permitted the Fall and its damaging consequences for His own good and wise reasons, which will be understood more fully when history has run its course. Then we will know, even as we are known (1Cor.13:12).

Our heavenly Father would not have allowed sin and death to enter the world, if He had not purposed to bring His children into a better, more blessed relationship with Him, based on grace and faith, rather than strict obedience to His laws (Rom.3:24; Eph.2:8; 2Tim.1:9; Tit.3:7). In 1Cor.15:22 Paul tells us, 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.' This reveals that God's saving work 'in Christ' is as universal as the Fall was 'in Adam.' In other words, everyone corrupted by the Fall will receive new life in Christ, and be brought, with the whole creation, into 'the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:21).

Reconciled and Forgiven (2Cor.5:18, 19)

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19. that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

All people are by nature at enmity with God (Rom.5:10). We may not realize it, but it is true. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin, that we have fallen short of God's

glory, we become deeply aware that we deserve His judgment. The Good News is that God has reconciled us to Himself in Christ and no longer imputes our trespasses to us. Sin alienates the world from God, but 'the Lamb of God . . . takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Isaiah, referring to the same redeeming work, says, 'the LORD has laid upon Him [Christ] the iniquity of us all' (Isa.53:6). In both verses, God's work of redemption and reconciliation is *universal* – it is of 'the world,' and 'us all.'

Having removed all obstacles to the reconciliation of all to Himself, through the atoning death of His Son, God commands everyone to repent and be reconciled to Him, for it is through repentance and faith that we enter the good of all He has done for us in Christ (Acts 17:30; 2Cor.5:20, 21).

Repentance and faith are gifts of God (Acts 5:31; Phil.1:29; 2Tim.2:25). Because God is Love, and His 'tender mercies are over all His works' (Ps.145:9), He will surely grant repentance and faith to all people – in this world or the next – for He 'is the Saviour of *all* men' (1Tim.4:10), who 'will have *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth'(1Tim.2:4, AV).

So the reconciliation of the world to God, in Christ, involved the removal of the barrier of sin that existed between the world and God. It paved the way for Him to bring the world into the good of His love in Christ. Consequently, reconciliation is an integral part of God's eternal purpose to restore all people to Himself.

All Things Gathered Together in Christ (Eph.1:9, 10)

. . . having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10. that in the dispensation of the fullness of the

times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him.

When seen in the light of Scripture as a whole, this gathering together of 'all things in Christ,' is not simply the gathering together of all who are saved in this age, but the ultimate restoration to God of all who are redeemed and reconciled to Him in Christ. This restoration has its 'first fruits,' through whom God will bless the great *harvest* of souls when He subdues 'all things' to Himself in Christ, and becomes 'all in all' (Jam.1:18; Rev.14:4; Phil.3:21; 1Cor.15:28). The 'elect' of this and former ages are not the only ones to be saved, leaving the rest of humanity to suffer forever in hell, but are the divinely appointed *means* of judging, governing, instructing, serving and blessing the whole race in the ages to come (Ps.145:10-12; Dan.7:18, 27; 1Cor.6:2; Rev.5:10, 13). In the end, all people will worship God and the Lamb, for we read in Rev.5:13, 'And every creature which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea . . . I heard saying: "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever." ' This is the clearest picture of universal praise in Scripture. It is hard to see how it can mean anything other than the restoration of *all people* to God.

Universal Confession of Jesus Christ as Lord (Phil.2:9-11)

Therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, 10. that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11. and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

In vv.5-8 Paul encourages the believers at Philippi to be humble like Christ. By walking in humility they would eventually be exalted like their Lord, who, after He had suffered, was lifted high and made the object of universal praise. The expression 'of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth' (and similar sayings in the New Testament – Eph.1:10; Col.1:20; Rev.5:13), refers to all people everywhere, perhaps including all sentient beings, whether heavenly or earthly. It is important to emphasize the *universal* in these verses, i.e., that the words 'all' and 'every' really mean what they say, for there is no reason to limit or qualify them.

It is also important to realize that these verses in Philippians are derived from Isa.45:22-24, which reads:

'Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. 23. I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. 24. He shall say, "Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him . . ."'

Bowing the knee to God, and confessing Him as one's "righteousness and strength"(v.24), is the same as confessing Jesus Christ (who is called our 'righteousness' and 'strength,' in 1Cor.1:30 and 2Cor.12:9) as one's 'Lord' (Phil.2:11). This confession should not be thought of as a *forced act of homage*, elicited as it were at knife-point. On the contrary, it is a voluntary oath taken by all. It is nothing less than the humble and joyful confession of people who have come to know Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

It may appear that those who 'shall be ashamed' (of their former opposition to God) are lost (v.24), but there is

nothing in this passage to indicate endless loss. Even those who will experience shame over having been incensed against God will confess with everyone that Jesus Christ is Lord, and that in Him they have righteousness and strength. We can say this because according to Ezek.16:54, 61, Jerusalem's shame over her dreadful apostasy, rather than signifying rejection by God, is actually tied up with her forgiveness and restoration.

All Things Reconciled to God (Col. 1:19, 20)

For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20. and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

God has been pleased to reconcile all things to Himself by Christ. Notice the extent of God's work of reconciliation. It is not a few things, or even many things, but '*all things*' that are reconciled to Him in Christ.

A universal fall requires a universal remedy if grace is to be as extensive as sin and death (Rom.5:20, 21). A partial remedy would leave sin and death triumphant in the lives of many. All have been alienated from God by sin, and all stand in need of being reconciled to Him by grace. Thankfully, it has pleased God to reconcile *all things* to Himself through the death of His Son. Through the 'blood of His cross,' God has removed the barrier of sin and enmity that stood between the *world* and Himself. This is taught repeatedly in Scripture, in type, prophecy, and plain words (Isa.53:5, 6; John 1:29; 2Cor.5:19, 21; 1John 2:2). These verses spell out what God has done for all His sinful creatures, not just some of them.

The Bible makes it clear that we cannot reconcile ourselves to God, for we are sinful and have fallen short of His glory (Rom.3:23). We have been made subject to 'futility' and 'disobedience,' so that the whole of humanity is dependent on the 'hope' of His 'mercy' (Rom.8:20; 11:32). A grasp of these verses is crucial for any true understanding of God's eternal purpose. They describe the predicament we all face, but also hold out the universal remedy of hope and mercy in Christ, through whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.

God Wills the Salvation of All (1Tim.2:3, 4, AV)

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; 4. who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

After telling Timothy how his conversion on the Damascus road was an example of how God would extend His saving grace to others (1:12-14, 16), Paul exhorts his young co-worker to be faithful in prayer (2:1-3). Prayers are to be made for 'all men,' including 'kings and all who are in authority;' for the authorities, in order that Christians might live in peace under their protection.

Paul's burden was not simply that the churches might be able to function without harassment, but that Christians should be filled with loving concern for the spiritual welfare of all people. After making this clear, he goes on to declare God's great work of salvation in Christ (vv.3-6).

The Greek word rendered 'will' in the AV (v.4), 'desires' in the NKJV, and 'wants' in the NIV, can, and often does, mean God's *purposeful* will, rather than what He would *like* or *desire* to happen. It seems to have this meaning in the 'Thy *will* be done' of the Lord's Prayer, and when

Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome to 'prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect *will* of God' (Rom.12:2), a 'will' about which there could be no uncertainty. He says, in Gal.1:4, that 'Christ gave Himself for our sins . . . according to the *will* of our God and Father,' evidently speaking of Christ fulfilling His Father's *purpose* as well as His desire (see also 2Cor.1:1; Heb.10:7; Rev.4:11).

By departing from 'God . . . *will* have all men to be saved' (AV), and preferring 'God . . . *desires / wants* all men to be saved,' the NKJV and NIV translators detract, perhaps inadvertently, from the hope that God intends to save all people, in that they give the impression that although He would *like* all to be saved, some nevertheless will be lost. Rendering the Greek word *thelo* 'desires' tends to detract from the universal redemption taught in v.6, where it is said that Christ 'gave Himself a ransom for *all*,' i.e., all people, as 'men' (v.5) clearly indicates. So for these reasons the translation '*will*' in 1Tim.2:4 seems preferable.

Even if 'desires' fairly represents Paul's meaning in v.4, the salvation of all need not be doubted, for in Isa.46:10 God says, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do *all My pleasure*' (the Hebrew word rendered 'pleasure' could just as easily have been translated 'desire' or 'delight' (Strong; see also Ps.135:6; Isa.55:11). So if God always does what He pleases, there is nothing to prevent Him from saving the 'all men' He 'desires' to save.

Many resist Christ to the end of their lives, and untold millions throughout history have never heard of Him; but rather than assuming that these are lost, may we not hope that their failure to come to Him has been permitted because God intends to bring them to Himself at the end of the age, or even in the age/ages to come? This seems possible, even probable, in view of Jesus' words to the unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem (Matt.23:39), who, on His

return, will say 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Similarly, we read in Rom.11:25-32 that Israel's spiritual 'blindness' (AV), 'hardness' (NKJV), with regard to the Gospel, will continue '*until* the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel shall be saved.' Comparing Rev.1:7 with Zech.12:10-14 reveals that the 'mourning' of those who pierced Christ precedes, *not unbelieving Israel's doom*, but her *repentance, forgiveness and restoration* as God's 'beloved' people (cf. Jer.32:37-42; Rom.11:28).

What is true of the eventual restoration of Israel, is true of all people, for Christ's victory over Satan, sin and death involves the recovery of the human race, for by Him God has redeemed and reconciled *all things* to Himself (1Tim.2:6; 2Cor.5:19; Rev.5:13).

The Grace that Brings Salvation to All (Tit.2:11)

For the grace that brings salvation has appeared
to all men.

Translations of this verse vary considerably. A number of them convey the widest hope for humanity. The AV has: 'For the grace that brings salvation to all men hath appeared,' which clearly lends support to the Larger Hope, as does the REB's: 'For the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all mankind.' The RSV's 'For the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men' also magnifies God's universal grace. But it is Moffatt's version that most clearly shows the *full extent and purposeful nature* of God's saving grace: 'For the grace of God has appeared to save all men.'

Nothing could be more explicit than the above words in revealing the broadness of God's saving will. Paul goes on

to say that Christ 'gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity' (v.14, AV), echoing 'the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all' (Isa.53:6). So 'all iniquity' - 'the iniquity of us all' - has been dealt with once and for all by the death of Christ.

Tasting Death for Everyone (Heb.2:9)

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

This is another trumpet blast announcing Christ's complete victory over sin and death. His redeeming work is said to be universal in scope, i.e., for 'everyone.' He tasted death for everyone, in order to manifest God's love for all people, which suggests that He intended, through His death and resurrection, to redeem and ultimately save all His children. Having, through His *death*, accomplished the reconciliation of 'all things' to God, 'whether things on earth or things in heaven,' He will not fail to save the world by His *life*, for He has been given 'all authority . . . in heaven and earth,' and is able to 'subdue [conform] all things to Himself' (Col.1:20; Rom.5:10; Matt.28:18; Phil.3:21).

The context of Heb.2:9 is rich in universals, e.g., '*all things*' will be put under Him (v.8, AV); '*all things*' are said to be 'for' and 'by' Him (v.10, see Col.1:16); and 'in *all things* He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest . . . to make propitiation for the sins of the people' (v.17) - a propitiation which, according to 1John 2:2, is for the sins of 'the *whole world*.'

The Propitiation for the Sins of the Whole World (1John 2:2)

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.

This verse speaks of God's work of making all people acceptable to Himself in and through His Son. The beloved Apostle wanted his brethren in Christ to understand that Jesus, through His atoning death, was the full propitiation ('expiation,' RSV) for their sins and the sins of humanity.

The sense of John's words is that God's redeeming love, a love that 'covers all sins' (Prov.10:12), has been revealed for all to see and benefit from in the gift of His Son for 'the life of the world' (John 6:51). It is difficult to see how God could make such an all-embracing provision for the salvation of the world, and not bring everyone into the good of it, especially as repentance, faith and forgiveness – the prerequisites of eternal life – are His unconditional gift to unworthy sinners. Knowing that God wills/desires to save all people, and that He does whatever He pleases; and that through the propitiation He has provided in Christ, He has removed the barrier of sin that stood between the world and Himself, may we not confidently hope for the salvation of the *'whole world'*?

God is Love (1John 4:8,16)

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love . . . 16. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Cushioned between John's twofold declaration that 'God is love,' we find love's perfect vehicle and expression, Christ,

the 'Saviour of the world' (v.14). Love is not simply a facet of God's character alongside others, such as wisdom, justice and power; for God is Love in the essence of His Being. Love is the ocean and spring of all God's attributes, the motivating principle behind all His works. Love is, as it were, the soil from which the root and branches of all His purposes draw their life and fruitfulness. Love underlies, surrounds and permeates all God says and does in relation to the creation, redemption, salvation and preservation of His creatures.

It is sad, even tragic, that the love of God has become part of a theological balancing act: His judgment, wrath and vengeance being made to tip the scales against His love, goodness and mercy, when it comes to the fate of His sinful creatures. But when it is understood that God's love is the eternal foundation and edifice of all His dealings with us, and that His judgment, wrath and vengeance are but the sharp edge of His love for us, we can rejoice with joy unspeakable that even the severest outpourings of His anger are for our eternal benefit. God, in His wrath, does not purpose to destroy *us*, only our fallen, sinful nature and ways, – the 'flesh,' as Paul calls it, – that being purified of evil we might partake of His holiness (Isa.4:4; Rom.7:13-25; Ps.99:8; 1Cor.5:5; Heb.12:10).

The passages we have studied point to, or at least suggest, the hope we may entertain for the eventual salvation of all people. However, there would be a serious imbalance in my treatment of this subject if we did not consider a similar number of passages usually cited in favour of the traditional view. Therefore, after defining some key terms associated with judgment and punishment, we will explore the meaning of twenty passages that appear to teach the endless torment of the wicked.

THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF THE DESTINY OF THE WICKED

There is no universally accepted understanding of the nature of everlasting punishment, but it can be said that all its advocates believe that persistent unbelievers will be separated from God forever. Some maintain that it will involve being subjected to endless burning in literal fire, while others interpret hell as unending *spiritual* anguish, which seems just as horrendous.

In view of the unpalatable nature of these views, some evangelicals have opted for the less severe doctrine of Conditional Immortality, i.e., that the faithful are rewarded with immortality, while the ungodly are annihilated.

Many thinking people stand aghast at the awful severity of a God who condemns many of His creatures to everlasting torment, or oblivion, through their failure to believe in His Son.

It is claimed that these doctrines, or versions of them, are biblical, but it can be shown, I believe, that *few, if any* of the passages used to support the doctrine of endless punishment exclude the hope of God's mercy (Jam.2:13).

Some Preparatory Considerations

The words hell, damnation, judgment, wrath, destruction, perish, fire and eternal, pepper the pages of the Bible, and are often cited in connection with the doctrine of endless punishment. Consequently, it is essential to define these terms with some degree of accuracy before examining the passages in which they occur. This will minimize repetition, though some overlapping will be unavoidable. Before doing so, it will be helpful to mention one or two pertinent observations in relation to future punishment.

In the Old Testament there is no threat, or even hint, that the wicked will suffer endlessly in hell. The Hebrew word *sheol* is rendered 'grave,' 'pit,' and 'hell' (AV). With regard to the afterlife, *sheol* means *the shadowy realm of departed spirits*, the final resting place of the righteous as well as the unrighteous (Gen.42:38).

In view of the traditional doctrine of everlasting punishment, we might expect to find at least one reference to it in Old Testament judgments, but there is no threat or warning of it in the account of the Fall (Gen.2:16-3:24); the Flood (Gen.6:1-8:22); the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen.18:16-19:29); the judgment of Moab (Isa.ch.15; Jer.ch.48); Egypt (Isa.ch.19; Jer.46:1-26); Tyre (Isa.ch.23; Ezek.26:1-28:19); Assyria (Isa.3:27-33); Judah (Jer.ch.1-ch.11); Ammon (Jer.49:1-6); Edom (Jer.49:7-22), or Babylon (Jer.ch.50-ch.51).

'Topheth' (Isa.30:33) was a place of judgment outside Jerusalem where children were sacrificed to Molech, and where the carcasses of the wicked were consumed by fire and worms – not a place of endless torment (see Isa.66:24).

In the New Testament there are several passages that appear to teach endless punishment, but while Jesus occasionally speaks of *gehenna* ('hell,' AV), the key Apostles, Peter, John and Paul, *never* use it in their Epistles, which, in view of Christ's use of it, is difficult to understand. It occurs just eleven times in the first three Gospels (mostly in repeated sayings), and once in James. So *gehenna* occurs very infrequently in the New Testament. This may lead some to wonder why the clergy (of nearly all denominations) have given such a disproportionate place to hell in their preaching and teaching through the centuries.

We shall look at the derivation, meaning and use of *gehenna* in Scripture in more detail, but it is important

to give proper weight to the above considerations in any discussion of the final destiny of the wicked.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

In any study of the Bible's teaching about the punishment of the ungodly, it is essential to understand the key words and concepts used by Christ and the Bible writers. Great damage has been done to generations of believers, and people in general, by the portrayal of God as an unmerciful Judge who sentences many of His children to endless torment in a fiery hell. Preachers of this doctrine have undoubtedly tried to be faithful to their understanding of Scripture, but have, I fear, in this case failed to understand its meaning. This has happened due to i) not grasping the *true spirit* of Bible teaching on the destiny of the wicked; ii) failing to comprehend the oriental modes of thought and expression in Scripture; and, most importantly, iii) being blind to the *loving character and purpose* of the 'Father of mercies' in relation to Israel, the Church, and the world in general. What we believe about God is reflected in our preaching and teaching, so it is vital that our understanding of Him is true.

These things should be borne in mind when we look at the twenty passages often cited in support of the doctrine of endless punishment, but first we need to define some words that are closely associated with judgment, death, and the hereafter.

Hell

This is an Anglo-Saxon word, the meaning of which is 'to cover.' The scholars who first translated the Bible into English, used 'hell' to represent the Hebrew word, *sheol*; two Greek words, *hades and tartarus*; and the Hebrew compound word *Ge Hinnom*, i.e., *gehenna*.

Sheol

This word occurs 65 times in the Old Testament. It is translated 31 times 'grave,' 31 times 'hell,' and 3 times 'pit' in the AV. Its basic meaning is *the shadowy realm of the dead*. The ancient Hebrews believed that the dead existed in a dark, insubstantial world, as mere shadows of their former selves. The righteous and the unrighteous entered *sheol* at death, although we may infer from the passages where *sheol* is translated 'hell,' that the wicked found little rest in that place/state. David dreaded the thought of *sheol*, due to its association with death and the end of life as he knew it (Ps.9:17; 22:15). The author of Ps.116:3 viewed *sheol* in the same way. So the understanding of *sheol* we derive from the Old Testament, is that it was the abode of the dead, the mysterious place of departed souls, the final resting place of saints and sinners alike, but that it conveyed little or nothing of the endless torment associated with later ideas of hell (see pp.174, 175).

Hades

Hades is found in eleven places in the New Testament, and is rendered 'hell' in ten of them. It is generally viewed as the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol* (taking into consideration that words can attract nuances of meaning with the passage of time, in this case through the rise and influence of Greek culture). That these words have more or less the same meaning is evident from the way the creators of the Septuagint, the famous Greek version of the Old Testament (132 B.C.), invariably substituted *hades* for *sheol* wherever they found *sheol* in the original Hebrew text. As an illustration of this, in Acts 2:27, 'You will not leave my soul in Hades,' Peter is quoting from the Greek Septuagint version of Ps.16:10, in which 'Hades' is a translation of the Hebrew *sheol* (see p.128).

From the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31, AV), – in which *hades* is rendered 'hell,' – we learn that in Jesus' day it was generally thought that *hades* was divided into two parts, i) 'Abraham's Bosom' for the faithful; and ii) a place of punishment/chastening for the rest. We will take a closer look at this parable later; sufficient to say here that by New Testament times ideas about the afterlife had become more clearly defined. Also, it is worth mentioning that although 'torments' feature in this parable, no mention is made of their duration.

Tartarus

Like Hades, Tartarus is a Greek word and concept. Essentially a part of Greek mythology, it was borrowed by Peter to describe the abode of fallen angels who are awaiting judgment (2Pet.2:4). It is found nowhere else in Scripture. We read in Matt.25:41 that the evils spirits are destined to be punished, with the uncharitable, in the 'everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (see 'Fire' and Eternal,' pp.50-53), but there is no mention of their final destiny in 2Pet.2:4 (see p.179).

Gehenna

Gehenna – a transliteration of the Hebrew *Ge Hinnom* – occurs twelve times in the New Testament, and is rendered 'hell' in each case. It is derived from the Valley of Hinnom outside ancient Jerusalem, and is found, in various forms, thirteen times in the Old Testament. It never refers to anything like the traditional hell.

In the New Testament passages where *gehenna* appears it is never called 'endless' (we shall consider its association with 'the unquenchable fire and undying worm' later). We have already mentioned the remarkable fact that there is no reference to *gehenna* in any of the Epistles of Peter, Paul

or John. It is used eleven times by Christ, seven in Matthew, three in Mark, and once in Luke (some of these occurring in sayings repeated in different Gospels). It is used once in the Epistle of James.

As has been mentioned, *gehenna* refers in the first instance to a valley outside the walls of Jerusalem, where human sacrifice took place in the days of Ahaz and Manasseh. By the time of Christ it had become a rubbish tip where the bodies of criminals were consumed by fire and worms. During the centuries leading up to the coming of Christ, Jewish apocalyptic writers, possibly influenced by Persian and Greek ideas about the afterlife, spiritualised *gehenna* into a place where the souls of the dead were punished. However, no commonly accepted understanding of *gehenna* has emerged in Judaism; some rabbis maintaining that it is a place of eternal punishment (although not strictly endless); others that it is a place where the wicked suffer for a season before being utterly destroyed; while a minority hold out the hope of release from *gehenna* after a period of remedial punishment. In *Everyman's Talmud*, Abraham Cohen relates how the merciful view finds support in the teaching of some notable rabbis (pp.377, 378); and it appears that the more hopeful belief is widely accepted in modern Judaism (*The Jewish People: Their History and Religion*, pp.269, 270).

All three views of *gehenna* may have been taught in first century Israel. If so, Jesus and His disciples were probably familiar with them. However, it would be wrong to assume that Jesus was unduly influenced by them, or that He accepted any of them as the basis for His teaching about human destiny. From the beginning of His ministry, He made it clear that the source of His authority and teaching was God and His inspired word (Matt.5:17-19; John 17:17). He fearlessly taught that religious traditions

can 'make the word of God of no effect' (Matt.15:6).

Jesus may have considered the eschatological speculations of the Apocalyptists to be little more than 'Jewish fables' (Tit.1:14). If we are to discover how He understood *gehenna*, we must study, not the conflicting ideas of the Hebrew mystics, but the divinely inspired Scriptures, in the light of the Holy Spirit (2Tim.3:16; John16:13). Having said this, the fact that He taught and exemplified divine mercy, compassion and forgiveness, – like the more enlightened rabbis of His day, and since, – it would seem out of character if His view of *gehenna* was radically different from theirs. As we might expect, His teaching *upholds and develops*, rather than departs from, Old Testament assurances of mercy and forgiveness (Exod.34:6; Ps.118:1-4; 145:9; Matt.5:7; 18:21; Mark 6:34; Luke 6:36; 23:34, see 'Mercy,' pp.147-152). This should strengthen our belief in the merciful 'restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began' (Acts 3:21; see pp.124, 125).

Damnation

Recent translations of the New Testament use 'judge' and 'condemn' instead of 'damn' and its cognates. This is because 'damn' is misleading, due to the way it has come to be associated with hell – a development encouraged by Christendom's teaching, literature and art.

F. W. Farrar, the Victorian divine, famous for his books:- *Life of Christ, Eternal Hope, and Mercy and Judgment*, provides the following details about 'damn' and its derivatives in the AV:

The words 'damn' and its derivatives do not occur in the Old Testament. In the New Testament they are the exceptional and arbitrary translation of two Greek verbs and

their derivatives, which occur 208 times. These words are *apollumi* and *krino*. *Apoleia*, 'destruction,' or 'waste,' is once rendered 'damnation' (2Pet.2:3), and once 'damnable' (2Pet.2:1); *krino*, 'judge,' occurs 114 times, and is only once rendered 'damned' (2Thess.2:12). *Krima*, 'judgment,' or 'sentence,' occurs 24 times, and is 7 times rendered 'damnation.' *Krisis*, 'judging,' occurs 49 times, and is 3 times rendered 'damnation.' *Katakrino*, 'I condemn,' occurs 24 times, and is twice only rendered 'be damned' (*Mercy and Judgment*, p.369).

So the presence of 'damn' in the AV is due to the translators' decision to render a Greek word that means 'judge,' or at the most 'condemn,' by an English word that most people associate with everlasting punishment.

Judgment

A. Cohen tells us that judgment is invariably attended by mercy in rabbinic literature, some rabbis teaching that: 'The attribute of grace exceeds that of punishment by five-hundredfold;' others, that 'the world is judged by grace,' and that even the faithless, although unworthy, are 'still God's children' (*Everyman's Talmud*, pp.18-20).

Similarly, Thomas Allin, in *Christ Triumphant*, p.190, says: 'Whenever judgment comes, it comes on Love's errand, if it comes from God.' For Allin, even God's punitive judgments are essentially expressions of His love and mercy. God judges *because* He loves. He chastens in order to improve. His judgments, while containing an element of just retribution for sin, are tempered with mercy, and are in essence corrective (Isa.19:22; Hos.5:14,15; Hab.1:12). This can be seen in God's major judgments of the wicked in Scripture, judgments generally thought to be purely retributive and final. Consider the following examples:-

i) God's judgment of the antediluvians was universal, apart from eight souls. However, a) there were no warnings of endless punishment before the Flood; b) Peter refers to that sinful generation in what are conceivably hopeful terms (1Pet.3:18-29), and c) some of the Church Fathers saw in these verses glimmers of that generation's ultimate salvation. For example, godly Athanasius says:

They who were formerly disobedient and resisted
God were set free.

Speaking more generally, Gregory of Nyssa says:

The power of evil will be taken away, and they, who
on account of their disobedience were called God's
enemies, shall by subjection be made God's friends.

Similarly, Basil says:

For all things shall be made subject to Him, and all
things shall acknowledge His empire; and when God
shall be All in All, those who now excite disorders by
revolts, having been quite pacified (all things) shall
praise God in peace and concord.

Cited in Christ Triumphant, Thomas Allin, pp.133, 122, 120.

ii) God's judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah is a proverbial example of His wrath against the wicked, yet nowhere in the account of the destruction of these cities is there any mention of their inhabitants being threatened with endless punishment. Jude speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah 'suffering the vengeance of eternal fire' (v.7), which is a reference to the fire that fell on them. However, after consuming these cities, and their people, the fire died

down. It is evident that the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah was 'eternal' in a sense *other than* everlasting. It burned only until the cities were destroyed. While suffering terribly, Sodom and Gomorrah will eventually be restored, with Jerusalem and Samaria (Ezek.16:53-63).

iii) The divine judgment that fell on both kingdoms of Israel, culminating in the removal of the Jews to Assyria and Babylon, was particularly tragic, because it happened to God's covenant people. However, as with the Flood, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the judgment of Israel is never spoken of in terms of everlasting punishment. On the contrary, judgment is often preceded and followed by promises of forgiveness and restoration (Isa.54:8; Jer.23:3; 32:36-42; Hos.14:4-7; Amos 9:11-15). Although God speaks of Israel's affliction being 'incurable' (Jer.30:12), not long after this He says, 'I will restore health to you, and heal you of your wounds' (v.17), which clearly illustrates the remedial nature of divine punishment.

Consequently, because a) endless punishment does not figure in Old Testament judgments; b) the restoration of sinners of the deepest dye is promised, and c) Jesus called the Hebrew Scriptures 'truth' (John 17:17), these things carry great weight in any study of divine judgment. F. W. Farrar, in *Eternal Hope*, p.82, informs us that the editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* in his day said: 'endless torment has never been taught by the rabbis as a doctrine of the Jewish Church.' Although not as authoritative as Scripture, these words express historic Judaism's *rejection* of the belief that the wicked will be tormented forever (see pp.133-135).

Wrath

As with 'judgment,' there are numerous references to

There are three times as many references to God's wrath in the Old Testament as in the New). In addition to the major judgments in Scripture (which, we have seen, include the promise of restoration), the Bible contains further assurances that God's wrath, whatever form it takes, lasts only *for a season* (Ps.30:5; Isa.54:8; 57:16-18; Mic.7:18). So it is scriptural to teach that divine wrath is temporal and remedial, and is administered for the eternal good of offenders. After all, isn't this what we would expect from 'Our Father,' the 'Father of mercies'?

Destruction

When God 'destroys' the ungodly it is that He might make them whole (1Cor.5:5). What is true of the destruction and *promised restoration* of Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem (and their people), is also true of Egypt and Assyria (Isa.19:18-25); Elam (Jer.49:34-39), and Ammon, despite its 'perpetual desolation' (Zeph.2:9 and Jer.49:6).

From the New Testament we learn that full spiritual life is possible only when the 'flesh' (our sinful nature and disposition) is put to death (Rom.8:13). Failure to mortify our sinful members can lead to being delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (Col.3:5; 1Cor.5:5). Judgment and destruction, yes, - but also hope, even when judgment leads to death, - for Peter says, 'For this reason the Gospel was preached to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit' (1Pet.4:6; see also 3:18-20). The God who 'kills,' can also 'make alive' (1 Sam.2:6).

Even Christ was 'put to death in the flesh [bearing our sins] but made alive by the Spirit' (1Pet.3:18), which shows what must happen to all sinful 'flesh' if fullness of spiritual life is to be realized (Col.3:1-11).

This principle is seen most clearly in God's dealings with Israel. She has been repeatedly chastened, punished and 'destroyed,' at times receiving 'double' for her sins (Isa.40:2; Jer.16:18), but only to bring her to repentance and renewal. Her latest period of hardening in unbelief, due to her rejection of Christ, is to be followed by her final restoration (Rom.11:25-32), promised repeatedly in the Old Testament, e.g., in Isa.54:7, 8, 10, where God says, 'For a moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you . . . My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall my covenant of peace be removed.' Once again, the 'restoration of all things which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began' shines forth (Acts 3:21). The faulty 'pot' of Israel (with that of creation) will not be cast away forever, but reshaped by the great Potter (Jer.18:1-6; Rom.8:19-21).

Perish

With regard to 'perish' in the Old Testament, a careful study of the relevant passages shows that in virtually every instance it is the destruction of *physical life* that is in view, rather than endless punishment. In the light of this, and Christ's testimony that the Hebrew Scriptures are God's word of 'truth' (John 17:17), 'perish,' for the Jews, meant little more than physical death, either through natural causes, or invading armies, God's instruments of chastening. Occasionally (e.g., Num.24:24; Job.4:20, AV) 'perish' is accompanied by 'for ever' (but see pp.51-53).

In the New Testament, 'perish' sometimes appears to signify more than death. But in keeping with its regular meaning and usage in the Old Testament, it generally indicates the end of natural life. The notion of perishing

forever is deduced (by many) from texts that contain no specific reference to it.

We have seen instances of cities, peoples, and nations that 'perished' due to their ungodliness, which are nevertheless promised restoration. The Israelites were warned they would perish if they forsook God (Deut.11:17; Ps.80:14-18; Ezek.25:7), yet there are many promises of their restoration (p.46). If the promise of mercy for the wicked is so explicit in the Old Testament, at a time when 'life and immortality' had not yet 'come to light,' shouldn't we at least hope for such mercy in the gospel age, the age of *abounding grace*, in which the 'Sun of Righteousness' is risen 'with healing in His wings'? (Rom.5:20; Mal.4:2).

Many of the early Church Fathers had a hopeful and merciful understanding of what it means for people to 'perish.' Methodius, for example, says that the custom of Scripture is to call destruction: 'that which is only a change for the better.' Similarly, Gregory of Nyssa says:

When the Psalmist prays, Let sinners and the unrighteous be destroyed, he is (really) saying that sin and unrighteousness may perish . . . and if there be found any such prayer elsewhere (in the Scriptures), it has exactly the same meaning, viz., that of expelling sin, and not of destroying the man.

And Jerome says:

All God's enemies shall be destroyed, His enemies shall perish and cease to exist, but perish in that wherein they are enemies.

Cited in *Christ Triumphant*, Thomas Allin, pp.189, 190.

Consequently, to these Fathers, and others who could be quoted, the words 'destroy' and 'perish' meant something radically different from endless punishment. They

believed that while unrighteousness will perish, the unrighteous themselves will be saved (see pp.152-154).

Fire

Both materially and figuratively fire has been viewed as an instrument of torture in hell, but it is important to realize that in Scripture 'fire' often symbolizes the purifying and refining process that removes the dross of sin and evil from our lives. We see this in Mal.3:1-7, where the 'Messenger of the covenant' (v.1) comes 'like a refiner's fire' (v.2) to 'purify the sons of Levi' (v.3). Israel and its priesthood repeatedly fell away from God, but Christ's purpose, as the 'Messenger of the covenant,' was not to destroy them utterly, but refine and purify them, to make their sacred ministry pleasing to God (vv.3, 4). That His fiery judgment, whatever its nature, was not to destroy them utterly, but purify them, is seen in v.6, where the vital truth is revealed that God is *unchangeable* in His purpose to save and *not consume* the ungodly (see also 1Cor.3:10-15).

Similarly, the fires that on a number of occasions destroyed Jerusalem (a pivotal one being in A.D. 70, leading to the dispersion of the Jews throughout the Roman Empire) did not, as we have seen, destroy all hope of Israel's restoration. Neither did the 'eternal fire' that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah destroy them, or their people, irrecoverably - which we have considered (pp.45, 46).

Jesus said, 'For everyone will be seasoned with fire, and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt' (Mark 9:49), which, in connection with Hebrew sacrifice, is a hopeful, rather than withering saying, for it signifies *purification*. All of us will be 'seasoned with fire,' i.e., purified from our sinful natures, through sanctification and transformation into Christ's likeness. As the context of Mark 9:49 shows,

this saying comes after Jesus' teaching on the importance of self-mortification when faced with temptation. The imagery He uses in vv.42-48, i.e., the 'millstone around the neck,' the 'hand and foot cut off,' and the 'eye plucked out,' is clearly hyperbolic, its severity serving to emphasize the seriousness of 'causing one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble' (v.44). His triple use of *gehenna* ('hell,' AV) signifies the more painful judgment of all who fail to mortify their sinful members (and impulses) in this life (2Cor.7:1; 1John 3:3). 'Unquenchable fire' (Nestle, Marshall, RSV *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*) is more accurate than 'the fire that will never be quenched' (NKJV). It properly means, not unending fire, but fire/judgment that lasts *until it has accomplished its purpose*. For example, the 'eternal fire' that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah burned *until* they were completely consumed (see pp.120-122)

Fire is feared because it causes pain and destruction, but when the Bible writers use it as a symbol of judgment, it is two-edged, in that whilst it destroys evil and corruption, it works to purify the offender. Love of God steels believers to enter the 'flame' of trial or chastening, and the God who is Love helps them to endure and benefit from it.

In relation to the judgment/chastening, both of saints and sinners, the fire of divine judgment, whilst it is occasionally called 'eternal' (in that it comes from the eternal One, and the eternal realm), continues only until it has served its purpose. We shall see this more clearly in the following section.

Eternal

It is evident from what we have seen so far, that 'eternal' has meanings other than 'endless' and 'everlasting' (see also pp.118, 119). The Hebrew equivalent of the

Greek word *aiwnion* (translated 'everlasting' and 'eternal' in the New Testament) is *olam*. The meaning of *olam* depends on the context in which it is used. When describing God it takes on a *limitless* sense, as when Moses declares, 'from everlasting to everlasting, You are God' (Ps.90:2); however, it often describes things that, having served their purpose, have *ceased to be*. W. F. Farrar supplies the following examples:

The Passover sprinkling (Exod.12:24); . . . the Aaronic priesthood (Exod.29:9); . . . the inheritance of Caleb (Josh.14:9); Solomon's Temple (1Kings 8:12, 13); the smoke of Edom (Isa.34:9, 10). To take one or two books, combinations of *Olam* . . . occur in Exodus at least twelve times out of fourteen of things which have passed away; in Leviticus twenty-four times, always of things which have come to an end; in Numbers ten times; in Deuteronomy about ten times out of twelve; and so on throughout the Old Testament. If the word were used but once in a finite sense it would be enough, but the fact is that it is so used repeatedly, and more often than not.

Mercy and Judgment, p.378.

This being the case with *olam* (translated *aiwn* in the Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament), it is reasonable to expect the adjective *aiwnion* (rendered 'everlasting' and 'eternal' in the New Testament) to mean 'age-long' or 'age-during,' except where it describes someone/something intrinsically everlasting or timeless, such as God and His attributes (Rom.1:25; Heb.7:24, NKJV). Even in these verses, 'forever' is derived from 'unto the ages' and 'unto the age' (Nestle, Marshall, RSV *Greek-English New Testament*).

These things may lead us to ask whether the punishment of the wicked will endure as long as God Himself? (As we

have seen, this cannot be substantiated from the Old Testament, or with any certainty from the apocalyptic literature of the period between the Testaments). This leaves room for the Larger Hope, the belief that in the hereafter the punishment of unbelievers will be limited and remedial, ceasing when they have come to repentance and trust in Christ as Saviour and Lord (Prov.20:30).

Openness, honesty and humility are required as we consider the following New Testament passages, most of which are usually cited in support of the doctrine of everlasting punishment. It is essential, also, to study them with sanctified imagination, as the inspired writers employed the symbolism, imagery and metaphor of their times.

My aim is not so much to prove beyond all doubt the validity of the Larger Hope, but to show from Scripture, the early Church Fathers, and other highly respected authorities, that we can reasonably hope for the eventual salvation of all people.

BIBLE PASSAGES COMMONLY CITED IN SUPPORT OF ENDLESS PUNISHMENT

We begin with four Old Testament verses, the first of which is cited to prove that our eternal destiny is determined by our spiritual condition at death.

Ecclesiastes 11:3

And if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.

In verses 1 and 3 the Preacher assures us that three things can be counted on in life, including a tree always remaining where it falls; however, nothing in this saying, or its context, is remotely connected with a person's eternal destiny. The contrary assertion of some traditionalists is merely an assumption, and a shaky one at that. This verse tells us nothing about the eternal future of anyone. Even if understood as an allusion to a person's fixed spiritual state at death, God's mercy cannot be excluded (Jam.2:13).

What the Preacher appears to be saying is that whether or not we know what may happen to us in the next life, we should live in awe of God who orders all things. His fallen tree analogy seems to mean that things always fall out as God, in His wisdom, has ordained; and that our best course in life is not to be anxious, but trust Him and keep His commandments (v.5; 12:1, 6-7, 13-14).

Isaiah 33:14

The sinners of Zion are afraid; fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?'

Some have maintained that 'everlasting burnings' in this

verse suggests hell-fire, but there is nothing in it, or its context, that remotely conveys the idea of endless torment. The preceding verses speak of the judgment of Israel at the hands of their enemies. They would be threshed and burned like stubble, scorched with burning, like the burning of lime, and burned like thorns in the fire (vv.11, 12); all of which describes, not everlasting punishment, but swift and painful destruction by their foes.

But were not these 'sinners' and 'hypocrites' in fear of endless torment by fire? No. They knew, as did the author of Hebrews, that God is a 'consuming fire' (Heb.12:29), and that only the pure in heart can dwell with Him (Ps.24:3, 4), hence, that sin must be forgiven and lives made pure if people are to dwell in His holy presence. However, things like chastening, punishment, correction, and purification, are quite different from endless torment. So this verse, with its vivid imagery, is about *the holy character of God*, not endless punishment. It says nothing of unending torment by fire, only our need of holiness if we are to dwell with Him. It tells us that God cannot and will not tolerate unrighteousness in His children indefinitely, but must, deal with our sin and consume all our defilement (2Cor.7:1).

So 'everlasting burnings' is essentially an expression of God's holy, burning *love*, a love that is determined to cleanse us from all moral and spiritual impurity, that we may dwell with Him and serve Him acceptably forever (Mal.3:1-7). It is a 'fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb.10:31), not because of any fear of endless punishment, but because, as God's children, we dread the thought of being chastened by our Father, who loves us, and has sent His Son to save us from our sins, and restore us to Himself.

‘And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.’

Here the Lord describes His end-time judgment of ‘all flesh’ (v.16). The idolaters and the impure are punished together (v.17). Their carcasses are left unburied for all to see. There is some uncertainty about exactly when and where this slaughter takes place, but the judgment of God’s enemies is certain (v.6), and all will witness it.

Despite the terrifying imagery, it is going too far to equate this judgment with the traditional hell, because it is *cadavers*, not living people (or spirits) that are described. They remain as a reminder of the fate of the wicked, but in the end are ‘consumed’ by the ‘worm’ and ‘fire’ (v.17).

In view of what we have considered, with regard to the eventual restoration of the most vile and ungodly (the people of Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem), it seems reasonable to hope for the ultimate restoration of these also. For God, as we have seen, has redeemed and reconciled *all* people to Himself, and ‘will have *all* men to be saved’ (2Cor.5:19; Col.1:19, 20; 1Tim.2:4-6, AV; see also pp.31-33, 166-171). What severer judgment could fall on people than that which fell on Sodom, Samaria, and Jerusalem? Yet all are promised restoration (Ezek.16:44-63).

Not even the judgment described in this verse detracts from the hope that all people will be finally forgiven and restored to God, the ‘Father of mercies,’ who faithfully disciplines His wayward offspring in love, for our eternal good, if necessary with the discipline of death (Ezek.23:46-49 with 36:16-37:14; Heb.12:5-11; 1Cor.5:5; 1Pet.4:6).

Daniel 12:2

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Of the Old Testament verses we have looked at, this seems to lend most support to the doctrine of everlasting punishment, however, some things need to be borne in mind, i) the word *olam*, here translated 'everlasting,' can mean, as we have seen (pp.51-53), *age-long*, or *an indefinite period of time*, and *everlasting* only when it refers to someone/something intrinsically timeless in essence, like God and His attributes. So because there is some uncertainty about which of these meanings applies to *olam* in this verse, it is inadvisable to *insist on 'everlasting'*; ii) in a parallel passage (Matt.25:41, 46; see pp.64, 65), Jesus uses the Greek word *kolasis* (translated 'punishment,' in 'everlasting punishment,' AV). *Kolasis* originally meant 'pruning' (see pp. 160, 161), which is suggestive of a *corrective and improving* process, rather than a purely retributive punishment; and iii) if God intended to punish wrongdoers eternally, surely clear and repeated warnings would be found in the Old Testament, the Scriptures of 'truth' (John 17:17), but few, if any, warnings are found (see pp.38, 44-46).

In view of what we have considered, with regard to these four Old Testament verses, often cited in support of the doctrine of everlasting punishment, we may ask whether it is conceivable that the New Testament – in which 'life and immortality are brought to light,' and where grace is declared to abound 'much more than sin' (and its consequences) – teaches as an integral part of the Good News of God's love in Christ, a system of punish-

ment that seems far removed from the spirit of the Old Testament, and the spirit of Christ who fulfilled it; who commanded His disciples to 'love one another,' even their enemies.

Those who accept the traditional doctrine concerning the destiny of the wicked, affirm that unending punishment is not only conceivable, but is in complete harmony with the mind of Christ and the character of God. To prove this, they point to a number of passages (sixteen of which we will examine) that appear to remove all hope of salvation from people who die in their sins. Before we look at this New Testament 'evidence' for the doctrine of endless torment, it is important to keep in mind the terminology we have considered (pp.39-53), as this will help us to correct misconceptions about the teaching of Christ and His Apostles on future punishment. Some repetition will be inevitable, because judgment, punishment, and other key words to do with the last things, occur repeatedly in the New Testament, particularly in the first three Gospels, with their parallel accounts of Jesus ministry.

To gain a true understanding of divine punishment in Scripture, it is essential to realize that we are looking at the judgments of a God who is not only holy, but is Love in the essence of His Being, hence loving in all that He is and does. He is not only our Creator and Judge, but also our Father, Redeemer, Reconciler and Saviour; who because He is 'good to all' (Ps.145:9), always seeks our eternal good. If this truly Christian understanding of God and His character is kept in heart and mind as we approach the following passages, it will help us to discover and appreciate their spirit as well as their letter.

Love is not love which alters
when it alteration finds.

Matthew 3:12

'His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.'

In the chapter of Isaiah that John the Baptist draws from to authenticate his mission as the Messiah's forerunner (Isa.40:6-8,24), we find imagery like that above. The Christ he heralded would perform a great separating work, depicted here and in some of the parables (Matt.13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50). In each parable different types of people are separated, as well as the good and the evil generally.

John's words of hope and warning were addressed primarily to the Jews, although we find echoes of them in other contexts (Matt.25:31-46). Do they teach, as many maintain, the endless punishment of the wicked?

With regard to Israel, the gathering work announced by John, and begun by Jesus, was quickly followed by God's judgment of the nation, in A.D.70, when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the survivors scattered/blown like 'chaff' throughout the Empire, while Christ's followers, the 'wheat,' escaped and were preserved. It is possible, even probable, that this was the judgment John foresaw and warned of in this verse (see Matt.24:1, 2 and Luke 21:20-24). If so, the 'unquenchable fire' he speaks of represents a *temporal* judgment, as this expression invariably does in the Old Testament (Jer.7:20; 21:12; Ezek.20:47, 48; Amos 5:6), which reminds us of the care required when interpreting the Bible, especially its symbolism.

The many divine judgments of Israel in Scripture, including the Exile, were followed by restoration,

not irremediable destruction, which shows it is God's purpose to correct and restore His covenant people when they go astray. Moreover, with regard to the end times, Paul assures us that after experiencing a 'hardening in part,' and after the 'fullness of the Gentiles has come in, . . . all Israel will be saved' (Rom.11:25, 26).

Consequently, it is wrong to construe the Baptist's words as implying that the Jews of his day were in danger of endless punishment, when what he was most probably saying is that failure to repent would expose them to God's fiery judgment of the nation in A.D. 70.

His words are also a reminder that everyone will be 'seasoned with fire' (Mark 9:49), in order to destroy the 'chaff' (that which is of no spiritual worth in our lives) and make fuller participation in the life of God possible (Mal.3:1-3; 1Cor.3:12-16; 5:5). Believers are to judge and purify themselves, in order to avoid the severer chastening suffered by those who 'fall into the hands of the living God,' who, *because He loves*, 'scourges' and purifies 'every son He receives' (1Cor.11:31; 2Cor.7:1; Heb.10:31; 12:6, 10).

Matt.5:21, 22

'You have heard that it was said to those of old, "*You shall not murder*," and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment. 22. But I say unto you that whoever is angry with his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, "*Raca!*" shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, "*You fool!*" shall be in danger of hell fire.'

'Hell fire' (v.22) is a translation of *gehenna*, the meaning of which, as we have seen, is open to question (pp.41-43), although it is traditionally understood to be a place of

everlasting punishment.

In these verses Jesus warns His disciples of the sin of unbridled anger, for anger can lead to insult, and insult to violence. He taught them that uncalled for anger, even in its mildest form, could become a matter for 'the judgment' (local court), and when vented in the form of the derisory 'Raca!' ('Worthless one!'), could invite the condemnation of the highest court (the Sanhedrin). More serious still, when expressed by the withering reproach 'You fool!' anger may lead to *gehenna* ('hell,' AV).

Christ's words, 'in danger of *gehenna*' (v.22), may have been understood to include the shame of being refused an honourable burial, by having one's body thrown into the Valley of Hinnom to be consumed by fire and worms, before suffering one of the three fates suggested by the rabbis (p.42). It seems inconceivable, in view of His emphasis on love, mercy and forgiveness, that Jesus would have believed and taught anything other than the more merciful prospect (see pp.124, 125).

A third possibility is that Jesus made use of hyperbole (exaggeration) in order to emphasize the seriousness of unjustified and uncontrolled anger. He never used misleading language, but did, on occasion, exaggerate to impress important truths on His hearers (Matt.5:27-30; 7:1-5; 19:24).

Matthew 10:28

'And do not fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.'

These words must be understood in relation to their context and spirit. They are a part of the disciples'

preparation for mission, a preaching tour that would involve danger. In many places both they and their message would be unwelcome. Some of them, like their Lord, would be put to death for their faith (vv.17-22). They were to be 'as wise as serpents and harmless as doves' (v.16), which involved avoiding trouble whenever possible (v.23). They would encounter misunderstanding and malice, but were not to fear their persecutors (vv.26, 28).

Jesus, in v.28, did not mean to terrify His disciples with the thought of *gehenna* ('hell,' AV), for He goes on to assure them of their heavenly Father's love for them (vv.29-31). Nor is His main point *gehenna*. He simply emphasizes that God, not the enemies of the Gospel, is the Arbiter of human destiny. Their enemies may destroy their bodies, but who were they compared with God who holds in His hands the life of both body and soul?

The most Jesus says about future punishment in this verse is that God is *able* to destroy both body and soul in *gehenna*. Even though Jesus taught that such a fate was possible, we are still left with what He meant by 'destroy' (see pp.47,48). It is significant, in connection with this, that when John and James asked Jesus if He wanted them to call down fire on some inhospitable Samaritans, He rebuked them with, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man *did not* come to *destroy men's lives* but to *save them*' (Luke 9:55, 56). In view of His declared purpose of coming to save men's lives, can we doubt that Jesus will fully accomplish what He came to do - what His father *willed* Him to do? (Ps.40:7, 8; John 4:34; 1Tim.2:4, AV; see also pp.31-33).

Matthew 16:26

'For what is a man profited in he gains the whole

world, and lose his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his own soul?

This is part of Jesus' response to Peter's protest about what his Master had said about His coming suffering, death and resurrection (v.21). It is in this context that He speaks of the possibility of someone losing/finding his soul (v.25). The Greek word *psyche* means either 'soul' or 'life.' Jesus was about to lay down His life, out of love for God and humanity, and He makes self-sacrifice and following Him conditions of true discipleship (v.24; Luke 14:27).

Verse 25 may be paraphrased, 'Any would-be disciple of Mine who desires to save his life, by not taking up his cross and following Me, will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.' Commenting on v.26, Allin says:

This certainly shows that a man by persisting in sin may lose his soul, a loss greater than that of the whole world. But i) how does this loss teach endless torment, or endless sin? (To be shut out of God's presence for an age would far overbalance the enjoyment of the world for a lifetime). Or ii) how does it prove anything against a final restitution, against Christ's seeking and finding the lost soul? (*Christ Triumphant*, pp.268, 269; see also in this book, pp.139-142).

Farrar, in *Eternal Hope*, p.19, cites a number of notable rabbis who hoped for the restoration of all the lost. Whilst their views, and those of other respected authorities, cannot be taken as proof that all will be eventually be 'found,' they remind us that many devout and learned scholars find evidence for the Larger Hope in the Bible.

With regard to Allin's second point, we have seen how a whole world of sinners was 'lost' at the Flood, and how

whole swathes of humanity, including the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the two kingdoms of Israel, and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah were 'lost,' but then promised restoration (pp.44-47). In view of this, and that Christ came to 'seek and to save that which was lost' - and *keeps on seeking 'until He finds it'* (Luke 19:10; 15:4) - may we not hope that *all will be found* in the end? Will He not continue searching, in this world and the next, until all His offspring are safely home?

Jesus' *hard sayings*, and Scripture as a whole, should be interpreted in the light of God's infinite goodness and mercy. They need to be seen through the eyes of the One who is unchanging love, with whom nothing is impossible (1John 4:8, 16; Jam.1:17; Matt.19:23-26).

Matthew 25:41, 46

'Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels". . . 46. 'And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'

The AV and the NKJV are inconsistent in their translation of *aiwnion* in these verses, rendering it twice 'everlasting' and once 'eternal,' whereas the RSV and NIV have 'eternal' throughout. The translators of both the AV and the NKJV apparently prefer 'everlasting' (with regard to the wicked) to show that they will be punished without end, in contrast to the righteous whose life will be 'eternal' in *quality* and *nature* (John 17:3; 1John1:1, 2). This savours more of interpretation than pure translation.

Aiwnion can mean *an indefinite period* (p.52), which may affect our understanding of 'eternal punishment' in these verses. We have seen also that *aiwnion* means 'endless' *only*

when it describes something/someone inherently everlasting, such as God and His attributes (pp.51-53). But what is true of God's endlessness may not necessarily be true of the punishment of His creatures. The punishment spoken of in these verses may endure for an *age*, or *ages*, or *an indefinitely long period of time*, but not necessarily forever.

Bearing this in mind, v.46 may be paraphrased, 'And these will go away into the punishment of the age to come, but the righteous into the life of the age to come,' which leaves open the possibility of the wicked being restored to God after a period of remedial punishment, as taught by many godly and learned men, in ancient times and more recently (pp.42, 63, 180-194).

An important fact with regard to 'punishment' in this verse, is that it is a translation of the Greek word *kolasis*, which according to reliable sources means punishment that is *corrective* and *remedial* rather than purely retributive (see pp.160-161). In ancient Greek literature *kolasis* is used for the pruning of trees to remedy barrenness and encourage fruitfulness. This more than suggests that divine punishment (whether of believers or unbelievers) is essentially remedial and restorative (Isa.54:8; Hos.6:1-3; 1Cor.5:5; 1Tim.1:20; Heb.12:3-11; see also pp.46-48, 154-162)

When these things are fairly weighed they shed hopeful light on Jesus' words: light that is in keeping with the love, goodness and mercy of God.

Mark 3:28, 29

'Assuredly, I say unto you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; 29. but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.'

From the accusation that Jesus cast out evil spirits by the ruler of the demons (v.22), we gather that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is the sin of attributing what are patently good deeds to the power of the devil. In other words, it is to call good evil, simply out of spite or malice. It reveals a heart that has become impervious to the witness of the Holy Spirit. There can be no doubt, therefore, about the enormity of this particular sin. However, several things need to be considered in relation to Jesus' words, i) if *all other* sins and blasphemies 'will be forgiven,' this creates almost unlimited hope for the human race; ii) with regard to v.29, many scholars consider 'eternal sin' (NIV, Phillips), and 'eternal trespass' (AMP), more accurate than 'eternal condemnation' (NKJV); iii) the Greek adjective translated 'subject to' in v.29 (NKJV) is rendered 'in danger of' in Matt.5:21, 22, in the AV and NKJV; and Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, says it 'is used in the sense of *being in danger of* the penal effect of a misdeed.' This suggests that 'eternal condemnation' is only a *possibility*; iv) by using 'in danger of' instead of 'subject to,' and 'age-long' instead of 'eternal' (for reasons we have considered), and 'sin' instead of 'condemnation,' we arrive at the possible translation, 'but is in danger of age-long sin,' which seems a less-severe prospect than 'eternal condemnation;' v) The Nestle/Marshall RSV *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament's* alternative to 'never has forgiveness' is 'has no forgiveness unto the age,' which leaves open the possibility of forgiveness in the ages to come. This hope was cherished by some of the early Church Fathers, for example, Athanasius, who says of this sin:

If they may obtain pardon, for there is no sin unpardonable with God to them who truly repent.

Chrysostom says:

We know that this sin was forgiven to some that repented.

And Dionysius (Syrus) says:

Many who did blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, afterwards repented and obtained pardon.

The above comments do not prove that this sin can be forgiven, only that forgiveness has been deemed possible by some notable men of God, suggesting a more hopeful way of looking at this matter; vi) it is important to realize that Jesus was not speaking to the notorious sinners of His day, but to the Pharisees. Due to their influence and theological training, these leaders were especially accountable to God for their response to Christ and His message. This suggests that it is the proud, the knowledgeable, and the scrupulously devout, who are most prone to this sin; for pride, as we know, is often followed by a fall; vii) in view of the inherent frailty and ignorance of even the most able and self-possessed human beings, the question arises as to whether *anyone* is able to recognize with absolute conviction the Holy Spirit's presence and power in a situation; and, in the face of such certainty, deliberately and maliciously ascribe His work to the devil? viii) following on from this, it seems natural to ask whether our gracious heavenly Father, who always seeks the eternal good of His offspring (Ps.145:9), would ever permit us to commit the sin that raises an insurmountable barrier to His forgiveness? No loving parents, I believe, would allow it to happen to their loved ones, their own offspring, if they could help it;

lastly, in the same vein, ix) both Peter and Paul declare that the religious leaders who engineered the death of Christ – the very class that Jesus alerted to the danger of sinning against the Holy Spirit – acted with a degree of *ignorance* (Acts 3:17; 1Cor.2:8). Saul of Tarsus bordered on that sin when he persecuted the early Church and instigated the murder of Spirit-filled Stephen. Ever-conscious of this, Paul drew comfort from the fact that he had done it ‘ignorantly and in unbelief’ (1Tim.1:13). If Paul, the ‘chief of sinners,’ viewed his ignorance as a mitigating factor in his crimes against God and the Church, then, to repeat an earlier question, is it possible for weak and ignorant human beings to knowingly and wilfully sin against the Holy Spirit?

These and other considerations should cause us to approach this subject with caution and sensitivity, and help us to avoid making hasty, dogmatic assertions.

Mark 14:20, 21

Then He answered and said to them, ‘It is one of the twelve who dips with me in the dish. 21. The Son of Man indeed goes just as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.’

Farrar, in *Mercy and Judgment*, p.458, in a thorough study of Jesus’ words about Judas, says:

First it should be observed that the ‘Woe to that man,’ is not, as is usually supposed, an anathema, but, as Stier says, ‘the most affecting and melting lamentation of love, which feels the woe as much as holiness requires or will admit.’ The woe is, as in

Matt.24:19, an expression of deepest pity.

Continuing, he says:

While we are not called upon to speculate as to the place and lot of Judas, let us remember that there were some in the early Church who saw in the remorse of his suicide the germs of a possible repentance, and thought that the wretched man hurried into the next world that he might implore his Lord for that forgiveness which Peter, who in the hour of danger had denied Him with curses, lived to gain on earth.

If saintly souls can envisage the possibility of mercy for Judas, may not we? More importantly, may not God, 'whose tender mercies are over *all* His works'? (Ps.145:9).

It is surely not without significance (in connection with our Lord's words above) that the rabbis of His day, from whom He had received regular instruction, were often heard to say of someone: 'It were a mercy if he had never come into the world,' or 'It would have been better if he had not been created' (*Everyman's Talmud*, A. Cohen, pp.27, 95). This kind of comment came under the heading of *haggadah* (personal opinion), rather than *halachah* (legally binding teaching), and was considered an appropriate punishment for daring to enquire about such things as, 'what is above, what is beneath, what is before and what is after?' (see Paul's use of *haggadah*; 1Cor.7:6; 9:8). Consequently, may not our Lord's words reflect something of *haggadah* (opinion/feeling), rather than *halachah* (inflexible law), thereby softening their import? If so, need they, whilst expressing deep sorrow, disappointment, and disapproval, totally exclude the possibility of mercy?

Did Judas truly repent? Perhaps the 'germs of a possible repentance' can be seen in Matt.27:3-5, listed by

Samuel Cox (cited in *Christ Triumphant*, Allin, p.274). Cox detects four signs of true repentance, 'i) his rejection of the wages of iniquity; ii) his open confession of his guilt; iii) his public testimony to the innocence of the Man Whom he had betrayed, and iv) his profound consciousness that the just wage of such a sin was death.'

Most probably it was Judas' unbearable sense of guilt and remorse over betraying His Master, rather than any fear of future punishment, that Jesus referred to when He said, 'It would have been good for that man if he had never been born.'

Judas' betrayal of Christ seems unforgivable, but Jesus, in a different context, where *salvation* is the subject, says, 'With God *all things* are possible' (Matt.19:26), which clearly encourages hope, even for Judas. Once a wise woman assured David that God 'devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him,' and this helped to heal the breach between David and his banished son, Absalom (2 Sam.14:14). Our Lord *loves* His enemies, *blesses* those who curse Him, *does good* to those who hate Him, and *intercedes* for those who despise Him and cause Him grief. Our attempts to do the same, in imitation of Him, reflect the heart of our heavenly Father, however imperfectly (Matt.5:44, 45). So if Christ calls us to love and forgive our enemies, as well as our friends, even 'seventy times seven,' will not Christ forgive Judas, His 'familiar friend' (Ps.41:9), who, though turning out to be a traitor, never previously cursed, hated, spitefully used or persecuted Him? And are we not told that Judas did what he did largely under the spell of Satan, whose works Jesus came to destroy, and to deliver all his captives (1John 3:8; Heb.2:14, 15). All these things remind us of God's grace and mercy, even to the 'chief of sinners' (1Tim.1:15).

May we not hope, then - for surely we should hope -

that the Lord who loved Judas and, because unchanging, loves him still, will in the end make him a glorious example of mercy triumphing over judgment? (Jam.2:13).

Never yet abyss was found
Deeper than the Cross could sound.

Luke 12:46

‘the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him, and in an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.’

These words are part of Jesus’ teaching concerning the Faithful Servant and the Evil Servant (vv.35-48), which is about watchful and compassionate Christian service, and the consequences of neglect and cruelty. Faithfulness will earn Christ’s approval and blessing, but negligence will earn his disapproval and lead to punishment that is proportionate to the knowledge of His will.

Although these verses contain many details, the main point of Jesus’ teaching is not the nature of various rewards and punishments, but the importance of wise and faithful stewardship.

In response to the idea that those pictured by the evil servant will be punished in hell, it is important to realize that, i) nothing in the wording of v.46 supports such a notion. We read nothing about the *duration* of the wicked servant’s punishment. With regard to the words ‘will cut him in two,’ J. C. Ryle, in *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels*, p.94, says:

It admits of some doubt whether the Greek word so translated will bear so strong a sense as our translators have put on it . . . Parkhurst thinks that it

means, 'shall scourge with utmost severity.' Others think that it means, 'shall separate, or remove, from his office; – shall dismiss.'

Phillips' Translation bears Parkhurst out:

' . . . that servant's lord and master will return suddenly and unexpectedly, and he will punish him severely, and send him to bear the penalty of the unfaithful.'

Moffatt likewise:

' . . . sharply he will punish him, and assign him the fate of the unbelievers.'

ii) Jesus' teaching in this passage is for the benefit of His *followers/servants*. At His coming He will call His servants to account and, because He is unchanging, relate to them as their just and merciful Lord. If we look at what happened to some of Christ's wayward followers in New Testament times, such as the immoral church member at Corinth (1Cor.5:5), and the blasphemers in the church at Ephesus (1Tim.1:18-20), their punishment, although severe, was essentially *remedial*, in keeping with Heb.12:3-11. This shows that the punishment of Christ's servants, however painful it may be, is always for their spiritual good. As we have seen, the Bible encourages us to hope for the restoration of even the worst offenders. So the punishment of the evil servant, in Luke 12:46, does not, when viewed in this light, exclude the hope of mercy for those who badly fail their Master.

iii) Jesus sometimes resorted to hyperbole to impress important truths/lessons on His hearers (Matt.7:4; 17:20; 19:24). So this, and His use of eastern imagery, should make us careful about insisting on the literal meaning of

what is meant to be understood figuratively.

Luke 16:22-26

'So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. 23. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. 24. Then he cried and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame." 25. But Abraham said, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. 26. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us."'

The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus closes a series of parables that were taught for the benefit of the scribes and Pharisees (15:1-3; 16:14). They are followed by an injunction to forgive and keep on forgiving all who sin against us (17:3-4). This parable has often been wrenched from its context and used to teach the dogma of endless punishment, but when looked at contextually, linguistically, and with care, it becomes evident that it teaches no such thing, as the following makes clear:

i) the general message of this parable is that all who have prospered, either materially or spiritually, have a duty to care for the materially and spiritually needy; and that if people suffer through our neglect, the time will come when we will suffer the consequences of our selfishness and lack of compassion. The clear moral here is that it is the duty of the wealthy to help the destitute;

ii) more pointedly, the rich man in this parable could represent Israel's religious leaders, and Lazarus those they considered 'accursed' and 'uneducated' (John 7:49; 9:34; Acts 4:13). For all their profession of religion, the Pharisees neglected 'justice, mercy and faith,' and were in danger of judgment (Matt.23:33); while on the other hand, it was the believing poor, the 'poor in spirit,' who were promised the kingdom of heaven (Matt.5:3), all of which resonates with the main characters and their destinies in this parable;

iii) alternatively, this parable may illustrate the tension between Jew and Gentile in Jesus' day. The Jews were proud of their religious heritage, which was like a sumptuous feast set before them daily. In contrast, the spiritually famished Gentiles could only gather the 'crumbs' of truth and blessing that happened to fall from Israel's table. This dependence of the Gentiles on the Jews for spiritual nourishment is poignantly expressed in the Syro-Phoenician woman's plea for her sick daughter, 'Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children's crumbs' (Mark 7:27, 28) - words and sentiments clearly mirrored in Luke 16:21;

iv) this parable reveals something about the afterlife, but exactly what? In place of 'hell' the NKJV has 'Hades,' the realm of the dead where the souls of both the righteous and the unrighteous await judgment. (see pp.40-41, 128). Hades, therefore, is the *intermediate state* between death and the soul's ultimate destiny. So notions of the rich man being in hell-fire are totally unfounded;

v) the 'torment' and 'flame' (vv.23, 24), whether literal or otherwise, could be temporal and remedial, rather than purely retributive and unending. The 'great gulf fixed' is often taken as proof of endless separation from God, but it proves no such thing, for a) it could be 'fixed' for a *limited period*, because 'fixed' is neither preceded nor followed by

'endlessly' or 'forever,' and b) there is nothing about the 'great gulf' which precludes Christ, who has the 'keys of Hades and Death,' from bridging it (Rev.1:18);

vi) the wording of v.25 suggests a *reciprocal* judgment, i.e., a lifetime of deprivation and neglect suffered by Lazarus, and a just/reciprocal period of punishment suffered by the rich man; for with God punishment fits the crime (Luke 12:47, 48) and is tempered with mercy (Ps.62:12);

vii) not least of the things that run counter to the traditional understanding of this parable, is the change in the rich man brought about by God's dealings with him. Finding himself in *hades*, he notices Lazarus in 'Abraham's bosom' (a place/state of blessedness in *hades*), and cries out to the patriarch for mercy (vv.22-24). When this is denied him (at that stage of his chastening), he becomes mindful of his 'father's house' and 'brethren,' and begs Abraham to send Lazarus to warn them about the place of torment that awaits them (nothing is said about the torment being endless). His cry for mercy, and newfound consideration for others, may not, at that stage in his punishment, represent full, heartfelt repentance, but the improving process seems to have begun. The nature of God's love (even for His enemies) is such that He chastens us for as long as it takes to bring us to repentance, and to conform us to His will, that we may partake of His holiness (Heb.12:10), in this case, after death. Until then, the 'gulf' of separation from eternal blessedness is 'fixed' - by our sinfulness as much as by God.

We end our look at this parable with some words of F. W. Farrar:

Unlimited inferences [on the side of endless punishment] have been drawn from the Parable of

Dives and Lazarus, regardless of the fact that i) it is not only a parable but is also full of metaphoric language; ii) that the tremendous inferences built upon its symbols must at least be modified by other inferences equally valid; and iii) above all that Dives is in the Intermediate, not in the Final state.

Mercy and Judgment, p.365.

It has been necessary to examine this parable in detail to show that those who use it as evidence of everlasting punishment are mistaken. It neither detracts from nor undermines the Larger Hope.

John 3:36

'He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him'

Commenting on these words, Allin says:

The meaning is clear – the unbeliever, *continuing such*, shall not see life, but if he repent he may obtain peace. If it were not so, all would be lost.

Christ Triumphant, p.275.

There are many instances in Scripture where, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, dealings and adverse circumstances, permitted or ordained by God, people who had turned from God, often to idols, were *restored* to Him. They experienced His wrath, but not unremittingly (pp.46, 47). 'For I am merciful,' says the LORD, 'and I will not remain angry forever' (Jer.3:12). God 'does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy' (Mic.7:18). Therefore the words 'the wrath of God abides on him'

do not alter what God has revealed about His enduring mercy, and His purpose to chasten *only* until sinners are brought to repentance and faith. He knows about the obstacles to faith that people encounter, many of which are beyond their control, such as i) the vast majority of the world's people, past and present, have had little or no real opportunity to accept Christ; ii) an untold number have died in childbirth, and in infancy, childhood and youth, before reaching the age of discernment; iii) many poor souls have been blighted from birth, either physically or mentally, or have been psychologically damaged through neglect or ill-treatment, making it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for them to consider the love of God in Christ, and iv) innumerable people have been raised in non-Christian cultures, ideologies, sects and cults that distort Bible truth, and often put enormous pressure on members to conform.

In view of such things, are we to believe that these largely hapless souls are forever lost through not having come to Christ in this life? The heart, if not the head, protests 'Surely not!' For God is the '*Father of spirits*,' whose '*tender mercies* are over all His works' (Num.27:16; Heb.12:9; Job.34:19; Ps.145:9).

As Allin points out, persistent rejection of Christ invites God's judgment, but the words of Jesus (or John - for it is unclear who uttered them) do not exclude the possibility that hardened souls may eventually be brought to Him, either in this life or the next. The purpose of God's wrath is to bring about the reformation that makes judgment unnecessary; as with those who, whilst rejecting Christ during His lifetime, came to faith shortly after His death (Acts 6:7). Paul tells the Philippians that Christ is able to '*subdue all things to Himself*,' i.e., subdue in the sense of '*conform*' (Phil.3:21; 1Cor.15:28; see pp.177-179).

Acts 13:46

Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.'

The principles of interpretation applied to John 3:36, which uphold the hope of salvation for those who at first fail to accept Christ, apply also to Paul's words to the unbelieving Jews at Antioch in Pisidia. As long as they resisted the Gospel of God's grace, they missed out on 'eternal life' (NIV), but they may have had further opportunities to hear and believe. If not, they will be saved when *all* Israel is saved at the end of the age, after being hardened for a season (Rom.11:25, 26; Jer.32:36-42; Matt.23:37-39; see p.167).

As long as people resist the Gospel they remain unworthy of eternal life, but this does not mean they will never, despite God's discipline and chastening, come to repentance and faith in Christ. When the whole counsel of God is considered, with respect to His covenant people and humanity in general, we find that hope springs eternal, notwithstanding verses like John 3:36 and Acts 13:46).

Romans 9:22, 23

What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23. and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory . . .

Paul's words should be studied in the context of God's overall purpose for Israel, the climax of which is described in Rom.ch.11, especially vv.25-36, where he says, that '*all* Israel will be saved' (v.26); that God might 'have mercy on *all*' (v.32); and that 'of Him and through Him and *to Him* are *all* things' (v.36). In Rom.ch.8-11 there is a progression in God's dealings with Israel. She is part of the creation that has been 'subjected to futility . . . in *hope*' (8:20), with which she will be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (8:21). Being 'broken off' (11:17-24), 'hardened' (v.25), and 'committed to disobedience' (v.32), are all part of God's purpose for Israel. Divine wrath, discipline, and correction are all designed to chasten her and lead her to Christ. All this can come to pass because God has redeemed and reconciled her, and has promised to save and restore her to Himself (Isa.43:1; 53:6; 2Cor.5:19; Rom.11:26; Isa.54:7, 8; see pp.132, 133).

In view of these things, and what has been said about 'wrath' and 'destruction' (pp.46-48), Paul, in Rom.9:22, 23, does not mean that some Jews will be lost forever.

These verses raise the matter of 'election,' i.e., the teaching that certain people are divinely predestined - not simply to enjoy a special relationship with God - but to be *channels of blessing* to humanity as a whole, a glorious truth often misunderstood. Rather than stopping to discuss the significance of election here, we will look at it again in Objections to the Larger Hope (pp.89-91, see also pp.115-117).

2 Thessalonians 1:6-9

. . . it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, 7. and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord

Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8. in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

This passage appears to teach that the persecutors of the church in Thessalonica will suffer endless punishment, but on closer inspection it becomes evident that such an assumption is far from Paul's mind.

Firstly, if *olethros* (here translated 'destruction') means annihilation - the blotting out of a person's existence, body, soul and spirit - then it provides evidence for Conditional Immortality rather than everlasting conscious torment. Secondly, the words 'eternal destruction' (RSV; NIV; REV; Weymouth) are comparable with 'eternal fire,' the means of God's vengeance against Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 7), but we have seen i) this 'fire' was far from 'everlasting,' and ii) its being 'eternal' was more to do with its *source* than its duration. It came from God, i.e., the eternal One, and this explains why it was called 'eternal fire.' Thirdly, in harmony with 1Cor.5:5 and 1Pet.4:6 (and all God's judgments), 'destruction,' in v.9 above, is more to do with the destruction of the 'flesh,' the old, sinful nature, than the destruction of sinners themselves (see pp.47-48). This is clearly seen in the promised restoration of Sodom (along with the even more wicked Jerusalem and Samaria), even though both city and people suffered 'eternal fire' (Ezek.16:44-63). Fourthly, compare this passage with Zeph.3:8-9, and notice the remedial purpose of God's 'fierce anger' and the 'fire of His jealousy.' Terrible as it is, God's fiery punishment is to 'restore to the peoples a pure language' (see pp.50-53).

Another important consideration is that it is difficult to imagine Paul encouraging his brethren to take comfort from knowing that their persecutors would suffer endless punishment, when in his first letter he says, 'abound in love to one another and to *all*,' and 'see that no one renders evil for evil to *anyone*, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for *all*' (1Thess.3:12; 5:15). This harmonizes with his later exhortation to the Christians at Rome, 'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse' (Rom.12:14). To be told that their enemies would be punished *for their eternal good* is one thing, but to take comfort from their coming *everlasting separation from God* seems alien to the mind and spirit of Christ (Matt.5:43-48; 6:14, 15; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:54-60). Until we can show how the traditional understanding of 1Thess.1:6-9 squares with the verses in this paragraph, we need not reject the more merciful view (see pp.147-152).

Revelation 14:9-11

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, 10. he himself shall also drink of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength 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. 11. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.'

Here is a supreme example of apocalyptic symbolism, which if taken literally, as it often has been, leads to a distorted understanding of the Book of Revelation.

I do not apologize for the following lengthy quotation,

for it is an excellent comment on these verses, and on the language and purpose of Revelation generally. A careful reading of it will repay the reader – not least by the warning Farrar gives against too literal an understanding of a book that is full of figurative language and symbolic imagery:

I might well decline the task of examining any of the passages which are alleged on behalf of this dogma from the Apocalypse. Like most of such passages, they apply to nations and classes, not to individuals; and primarily to temporal and earthly, not to future and endless judgments. Without in any way weakening its canonical authority, I might (if need were) claim to coordinate its teaching with the later wisdom of St John's riper and more loving age in the Gospel and Epistles. It is obvious that a book respecting the interpretation of which the Church has never agreed; a book of which the strange symbols have been understood by devout and learned students in hundreds, if not in thousands, of different ways; is less suited than any other to furnish "texts" for the basis of dogmas which find from all the rest of Scripture so very small measure of support.

It is obvious too that this book, if its weird metaphors have given rise to endless speculations as to the horrors of Hell, furnishes us also with passages which (as is the case with the rest of Scripture) seem to tell of a glorious final consummation. Until men have approximately agreed as to whether, on the authority of that book, there is or is not to be on earth a literal reign of Christ for a thousand years; until they have settled whether they are going to be Praeterists or Futurists, or neither; until they have come to a reasonable certainty as to whether the main symbolism of the Book points to a progressive history of the Church for hundreds of years, or only to the events which should precede and accompany the coming of Christ in the close of the old dispensation and the destruction of Jerusalem; until they can give us some finally decisive criterion as to the interpretation

of this prophetic imagery, and in what cases it is to be taken in the sense of temporal judgments, and in what other cases of everlasting doom, - it is obvious that we are building the popular doctrines upon the sandiest of foundations if we rely for their proof on passages taken from so mysterious a book.

"Nil agit exemplum quod litem lite resolvit."

Take, for instance, the vision of Rev. 14, which is the vision of the harvest of the world and the vintage and winepress of the wrath of God. It is the chapter from which has been deduced the pernicious belief - a belief more liable than any other to deprave and harden the character of so many professing Christians - that the blest will exult in the torments of the damned. That passage is as follows:-

"If any man worship the beast . . . he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torments ascendeth up for aeons and aeons, and they have no rest days nor nights, who worship the beast."

Perhaps it is hardly wonderful that educated as most men are in ignorance of the principles which apply to the true appreciation of Scripture language, and in the vanity which makes them think their interpretations are infallible, they should take this literally, and apply it to endless torments, though one cannot but wonder about the pure arbitrariness which would, I suppose, refuse, a few verses later, to take literally the river of blood rolling out of the winepress bridal deep for a length of one hundred miles. But meanwhile what becomes of such applications after we have noticed one or two facts?

First of all the judgment obviously has a very limited primary application, because, beyond all shadow of a doubt, the Apocalyptic Beast is, in the first instance, Nero. Here then we at once get the true bearings of the verse. Those who worship the beast, that is the persecuting world power of Rome, - and as long as they worship the beast are

doomed to terrible catastrophes, such as actually did befall Rome during that epoch; and these calamities are compared to being tortured with fire and brimstone. Even Mr. E. B. Elliott, in his elaborate *Horae Apocalypticae*, comes to the conclusion that, so far from revealing the endless torments of the wicked, *the whole vision refers to temporal judgments in this present world*. These earthly catastrophes are indicated in strong Jewish metaphor, not untinged with the natural feelings inspired by an epoch of horrible persecution, and the Lamb and His angels are (in human language) represented as cognizant of the earthly overthrow and punishment of those who war against them. And this is to be twisted into the delight of the blest at the shrieks and writhings of the lost, among whom may inevitably be some of those who were sweetest and dearest to them on earth! The whole passage is a symbol as unlike as possible to the inferences which have been deduced from it. And to interpret of interminable agony the expression, "the smoke of their torments ascendeth for aeons and aeons" is doubly erroneous; for first, the phrase is borrowed partly from Gen.19:28, and partly from Isa.34:10, both of which refer to temporal judgments, and of which the second furnishes a strong proof of the false results of an unreasoning literalism. Of the land of Idumaea, Isaiah says, "The streams thereof shall be turned into pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever." Interpreted in the light of prophecy, and of subsequent history, it is clear that "fire" and "brimstone," and "smoke ascending for ever," are terms which, in the highly impassioned and figurative language of prophecy, may be applied to temporal catastrophes, without the remotest allusion to the state of souls in the world beyond the grave. But if the most learned and approved of all Evangelical commentators on the Apocalypse tells us that the vision has no reference to the life to come, what guarantee have we that any of the other visions are not similarly inapplicable to future torments?

And here I will furnish another proof of our liability to

misinterpret entirely the daring metaphors of Eastern imagination. We think "a lake of fire and brimstone," and "a fiery oven," and a "burning fiery furnace," images far too frightful and intense to represent temporal calamities, or anything but the most inconceivable anguish. If we took the trouble to search the Bible, instead of reading into it our own fancies and those of the Fathers, it would remove all misconceptions by throwing the plainest possible light on its own symbols and figurative forms of expression. Thus in Deut.4:20 Egypt is said to have been to the Israelites an "iron furnace"; and the same terrible metaphor is repeated in Jer.11:4, and in 1Kings 8:51 ("Thy people which Thou broughtest forth out of Egypt from the midst of the furnace of iron"). And yet the metaphors imply a condition so far removed from intolerable torments that the children of Israel said, "It was well with us in Egypt," and positively sighed for that which they describe as a land of sensual ease! "We remember the fish that we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick." Until we take the trouble to learn something of the hyperbolic character of Eastern and prophetic metaphor, it is certain that we shall be led continually into wild mistakes.

Instances so decisive will probably be sufficient for many competent and candid readers. They will see how little we can build dogmas on such metaphors as the devil being cast with the Beast (Nero and the Roman world-powers) and the false prophet (?) "into the lake of fire and brimstone, and tormented by day and by night for the aeons of the aeons; into which also are cast two such abstract entities as "Death," and "Hades." At any rate he will see that this lake of fire is on the earth, and that immediately afterwards we read of that earth being destroyed, and a new heaven and a new earth in which there is to be no more death or curse. In the Book of Revelation there are infinitely great and precious truths, but certainly no method which has ever yet been applied to it justifies us in regarding the notions of future

retribution which have been founded on the literalising of its symbols as other than in the last degree precarious and wrong.

Mercy and judgment, pp.468-473.

Having read Farrar's telling comments, you will appreciate why it is unwise, even wrong, to insist that Rev.14:9-11, and other highly symbolic passages in Revelation, can be marshalled, without qualification, on the side of the traditional dogma of hell-fire and endless torment. And if unwise and wrong, then the Larger Hope, which has so much support in Scripture, is not undermined by these verses.

Revelation 21:8

'But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death.'

Allin, in *Christ Triumphant*, pp.280, 281, gives five reasons why the traditional understanding of these words leaves much to be desired:

- i) It will be necessary to consider the entire context of this verse, if we desire to understand its purport. It opens with the vision of the great white throne (20:11), and we find that after the judgment of that Great Day, so far from death and hell (Hades) continuing, they are "cast into the lake of fire" - very unlike, nay, contradicting the popular view.
- ii) Then comes a declaration that God is to dwell with men - not with the saints - but with men as such, and that as a consequence, they shall be *His people, and God shall be with them and be their God.*

iii) It is distinctly said, there shall be *no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor any more pain*. Is this not a denial of an endless hell rather than an affirmation of it – nay, an emphatic denial of such a doctrine?

iv) Then comes a voice from the throne with a glorious promise, *"Behold I make all things new,"* – not *some* things. Note, too, this promise is remarkably emphasized, it opens with the word *"Behold,"* to draw attention to it: it closes with the command to write it, *"For these words are true and faithful."* Was there no reason for this? Is there not thus attention drawn to this as the central point of the whole vision, *i.e., all things made new?* But this again is a denial of the popular creed.

v) In close connection with such promises come highly figurative threats of the lake of fire. It is perhaps possible to argue that this may imply (although I do not think so) the destruction of those cast into it; but it is *wholly impossible to understand it as teaching endless torment* in the face of what has just been promised – (no more crying nor pain, v.4). Therefore, I conclude, looking at the repeated promises (see *"iii"* and *"iv"*) of this very passage, which contrast in their perfect clearness with the highly figurative language of its threats, looking at the true meaning of God's judgments and at the whole spirit of Holy Scripture – nay, its express declaration of universal restoration – that what is here taught, is a fire that purifies while it punishes, a fire that is, in God's mysterious way, an agent in making all things new.

Rev.22:15

But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

As we have seen, arriving at an accurate interpretation of this book is fraught with difficulty, due to its figurative

language. This verse, like 21:27 and 22:11, is in a context of *openness* and *hope*. The gates of the New Jerusalem (the Church, the Bride of Christ, 21:2; pp.112) are *left open* (21:25); the prophecy is *not sealed* (22:10); and the Spirit and the Bride's invitation to come and 'take of the water of life freely' is *still open* (22:17). So alongside the warnings and judgments *there is hope*. From 22:11 the wicked appear to be fixed in their sinful ways, an indication of God's judgment, but His mercy 'endures forever' (1Chron.16:34; Ps.118:1-4; Jer.33:11). He is still able to bring the wicked to repentance, to turn them from their sin and enable them to 'do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city' (22:14).

Moreover, we gather from 21:24 and 22:2 that people *other than* the Church, the New Jerusalem, the City of God, have access to the tree of life and its leaves. The clause, 'of those who are saved' (v.24, AV), relating to the nations who walk in the light of the New Jerusalem, is *not* in the best manuscripts. It was probably inserted into the text because without it this verse suggests that people *other than* the saints, the glorified Church, will enjoy the benefits of the kingdom of God. If these 'nations' are blessed *through* the Bride, whilst being *other than* the Bride, their acceptance by God lends support to the Larger Hope, i.e., the belief that *all people* will be blessed through Abraham's 'seed,' i.e., Christ and the Church (Gal.3:16, 29).

The hope is that the wicked in 22:15 will heed the invitation of the Spirit and the Bride (v.17), and join the ranks of those who were once 'outside,' but are now, by God's grace, blessed with His saints. This hope is Scriptural, for we read that in the end God will be 'all in all' (1Cor.15:28; Rev.5:13; see pp.145, 146).

OBJECTIONS TO THE LARGER HOPE

We have considered twenty passages of Scripture which teach, I believe, that God purposes to save all people. Then, after briefly examining some of the terms related to divine judgment, we studied twenty passages often cited as proof of the traditional doctrine of the everlasting punishment of the wicked. I have endeavoured to show that many Bible verses that appear to teach the traditional view do not in fact do so, at least not unambiguously, which helps the case for the Larger Hope.

Having looked at the Scriptural evidence for the Larger Hope, it is possible that some Christians may disagree with my conclusions, perhaps for the following reasons.

Christ Died for His Sheep, Not for the Whole World

Addressing the last part of this objection first, limited atonement (a Calvinistic doctrine) is not simply against Universalism (the belief that all people will ultimately be saved), but also Arminianism (the belief that Christ died for all people, including the elect, but that only those who believe in Him in this life will be saved). However, both Arminians and Calvinists reject the belief that all people will in fact be saved, and even the *hope* that all will be saved.

Christian Universalists (like Arminians) believe in universal redemption and reconciliation in Christ, but go further, by believing that Christ has not only redeemed and reconciled all, but has purposed to save all, as considered in the first part of this book. To arrive at the Larger Hope, Arminian Christians would have to reconcile what Scripture says about Christ giving Himself

'a ransom for *all*,' and God becoming '*all in all*,' with their view that only *some* will be saved (1Tim.2:6; 1Cor.15:28). And, Calvinists would have to reconcile Christ's 'tasting death for *everyone*,' and drawing '*all men*' to Himself, with laying down His life for '*the sheep*,' interpreted by them as limited atonement (Heb.2:9; John 12:32, AV; John 10:11).

These two religious schools, and to some extent the Universalistic, find it difficult to harmonize these and other apparently conflicting verses about the extent of salvation. However, it seems to me that Christian Universalists are able to unify these strands of teaching more convincingly than the others, and in a way that most glorifies the love, goodness and mercy of God.

The task of advocates of the Larger Hope is to show how both the elect *and* humanity as a whole will be saved. Those who believe in the salvation of all people usually point to the nature and purpose of God's elect in relation to the rest of the world. They maintain that the elect, whether they be individuals like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, especially Jesus (Isa.42:1; Matt.12:18), or nations, are chosen, not simply for their own benefit, but to be channels of blessing to others, even the whole world (Gen.22:15-18; John 6:51; 1John 2:2; see pp.115-117). So it is the elect *and all who are blessed through them* that God purposes to save. It is not a matter of either/or, but *both*. This, in essence, is the Larger Hope. It is Christ in, with, and through His elect Church, blessing and restoring the whole creation.

The Church, Abraham's 'seed' (Gal.3:29) is, with Christ, 'light' and 'salt' for the spiritual blessing of humanity. The elect are the 'sons of God,' who will be revealed at the 'manifestation of the sons of God,' when the whole creation will be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:19-23). The Bible tells us it is the Church, the Body of Christ,

the 'first-fruits' (1Cor.12:27; Col.1:24; Rev.14:4; see pp.122-123), the 'church of the firstborn' (Heb.12:23), the 'overcomers' who will reign with Christ as kings and priests, and judge the world and angels (Rev.3:21; 2Tim.2:12; Rev.5:10; 1Cor.6:1-3). These 'called, chosen and faithful' ones, God's 'royal priesthood' and 'holy nation,' have the privilege of being firstborn sons, and are qualified to minister judgment and justice to redeemed humanity out of their '*double portion,*' their *double inheritance of spiritual riches* in Christ (Rev.17:14; 1Pet.2:9,10; Deut.21:17; Eph.1:18; 3:8-11). God's purpose in blessing the world through His elect 'firstborn' and 'first-fruits,' is admirably explained by Andrew Jukes in his book *The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things*, pp.30-48.

Those who assume that the elect are the only ones for whom Christ died, hence the only ones to be saved, may have difficulty accepting the above Scriptural teaching on the elect and their role in relation to the rest of humanity, but it glorifies God in a way that far surpasses the narrow, traditional teaching. It inspires the widest hope for the world, compared with the hopelessness and despair felt by those who see no alternative to the endless punishment of many of God's creatures, including some of their loved ones.

The Church Has Always Taught the Endless Punishment of the Wicked

This is not strictly true. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) informs us that there were 'very many' in his day, 'brethren of pity,' he calls them, who firmly believed and taught that all people will ultimately be saved (see pp.180-186). The more hopeful view came into disfavour in the sixth century, largely due to Augustine's influence on the Roman Church, but it persisted and eventually became

more popular after the Reformation. In more recent times, particularly in the last hundred years or so, many scholars, Church leaders, and Christians in general have either accepted the Larger Hope or been favourable to it. It is now viewed as a valid theological position in some sections of the major denominations (see pp.186-194).

Many churches still teach that some people will finally be lost, but this should not be taken as proof that the doctrine is true, for many things previously believed by Christians are no longer accepted. This is easily shown, for in pre-Reformation times, when the Church of Rome dominated western Christendom, people were compelled to believe that i) the Roman Church was the only true Church; ii) the clergy must be celibate; iii) deceased unbaptized infants were forever denied the Beatific Vision, i.e., the sight of God; iv) participation in the Crusades, and the purchase of indulgences, brought forgiveness of sins, and v) dying in mortal sin, such as deliberate non-attendance at Mass, resulted in being condemned to hell forever. The list could be extended, but these examples prove the point.

Most of the beliefs listed above are rejected, or at least questioned, by today's Christians. In the same way, the doctrine of the everlasting punishment of the ungodly may in time be shown to be theologically unsound. As we have seen, most of the proof texts marshalled in its defence are capable of being understood differently. Belief that the Father of mercies purposes to save *all* His offspring is gaining ground, bringing hope, joy and peace to many.

Why Preach the Gospel if All Will be Saved Anyway?

This objection to the Larger Hope reveals shallow thinking. With Christians generally, Universalists believe that God uses *means* to draw people to Himself. Calvinists do not let

their belief that the elect will *undoubtedly be saved* deter them from calling people to repentance and faith in Christ through the preaching of the Gospel. Likewise, Arminians, who believe that God elects some to salvation on the basis of *His foreknowledge of their acceptance of Christ*, are usually active in evangelism. So Christians of all types, including Christian Universalists, proclaim the Gospel of God's grace as a means of bringing people to Christ. They do so because Jesus told His followers to 'preach the Gospel to every creature' (Mark 16:15, and 'make disciples of all the nations . . . teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you' (Matt.28:19, 20).

Salvation is much more than deliverance from the 'wrath to come' (1Thess.1:10). God's anger *is* something to fear (for 'wrath' and its purpose, see pp.46, 47); but the essence of salvation is being brought to know and love God, and having His image restored in us by His grace, through the enlightening and sanctifying power of His Spirit, so that being transformed into the likeness of His Son we can glorify Him and be a blessing to others. In other words, salvation is the possession and enjoyment of eternal life in Christ. This becomes a reality only through hearing and believing the Gospel, hence the Good News of God's love in Christ must be proclaimed in all the world as a witness to all nations (Matt.24:14).

No one will be saved apart from repentance and trust in Christ (Acts 4:12; 17:30). Believers in the Larger Hope are fully aware of this, and give it due weight in their teaching. They declare the Good News with confidence because they know that some will respond to Christ in this age (the first-fruits) and that *everyone* (the full harvest) will eventually bow the knee to Him and confess Him Lord (Phil.2:10; see pp.28-30). This is the glorious *end* that will be realized, but only through the divinely appointed *means*.

The Larger Hope Weakens or Removes Belief in Future Punishment

This objection is raised in Allin's *Christ Triumphant*, pp.2,3.
In answering he says:

The very opposite is surely the truth, for you establish future punishment, and with it that sense of the reality of sin (to which conscience testifies) on a firm basis, only when you teach a plan of retribution, which is itself reasonable and credible. A penalty which to our reason and moral sense seems shocking and monstrous loses all force as a threat. It has ever been thus in the case of human punishments. And so in the case of hell. Outwardly believed, it has ceased to touch the conscience, or greatly to influence the life of Christians. To the mass of men it has become a name and little more (not seldom a jest); to the sceptic it has furnished the choicest of his weapons; to the man of science, and to the more thoughtful of all ranks, a mark for loathing and scorn: while alas, to many a sad and drooping heart, which longs to follow Christ more closely, it is the chief woe and burden of life. But the conscience, when no longer wounded by extravagant dogmas, is most ready to acquiesce in any measure of retribution (how sharp soever it be) which yet does not shock the moral sense, and conflict with its deepest convictions. And so the larger hope most fully recognises at once the guilt of sin, and the need of fitting retribution: nay, it may be claimed for it, *that it alone places both on a firm and solid basis*, by bringing them into harmony with the verdict of reason, of conscience and of Holy Scripture.

God who commands us to 'do justly' (Mic.6:8) never behaves unjustly Himself, but always tempers punishment according to the level of culpability (Lev. 4:1-12, 13-21, 22-26, 27-35; Luke 12:45-48). This suggests that God takes into

account every consideration and circumstance when judging, sentencing and punishing sinners.

It is true that the just penalty for sin is death and eternal separation from God; and that if God judged us solely on the basis of His holiness and our sin there would be no hope. But, as has been repeatedly pointed out in this book, God is LOVE in the essence of His Being, which means that all His dealings with us are rooted and grounded in love. Consequently, His judgment, correction, chastening and punishment is always ministered in love, *not* for our endless torment but the destruction of everything in us that grieves Him and ruins our lives, lives He has created and loves. He is conducting and perfecting His eternal plan to save the world through His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, a plan conceived in eternity. We see it in the redemption and reconciliation of the whole world in Christ. It is anticipated in prophecy, type and shadow, beginning with Gen.3:15 and 21, where the conquest of evil and the imputation of Christ's righteousness is promised to Adam and his descendants.

Having made all people His own, through redemption and reconciliation, Christ is in the process of bringing all into the good of His salvation, by grace through faith. As their name implies, the *first-fruits* and *firstborn* are saved first (see pp.122, 123) - from condemnation, then from the power and presence of sin, through sanctification and glorification. These will live and reign as co-heirs with Christ, and will administer the kingdom of God with Him (see pp.115-117).

Before the rest of humanity experience salvation they, like the saints, will have to be brought to repentance and faith, and go through the painful process of dying to self. Punishment and chastening there will be, but it will be remedial and ministered in love (see pp.154-162).

The Larger Hope Has Little Scriptural Support

This simply is not true. In addition to the passages we have considered in the first part of this book, the following more comprehensive and thematic list of verses, compiled by Thomas Allin, testifies to the firm Scriptural basis of Christian Universalism (see also pp.195-216). Verses already considered are marked with an asterisk.

Old Testament

Ps.22:7* - '*All* the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and *all* the families of the nations shall worship before You.'

Ps.65:2 - 'O You who hear prayer, to You *all* flesh will come.'

Ps.66:4 - '*All* the earth shall worship You and sing praises to You; they shall sing praises to Your name.'

Ps.72:11-19 - 'Yes, *all* kings shall fall down before Him; *all* nations shall serve Him.'

Ps.86:9 - '*All* nations whom You have made shall come and worship before You, O Lord.'

Ps.145:9, 10* - 'The LORD is good to *all*, and His tender mercies are over *all* His works. *All* Your works shall praise You, O LORD, and Your saints shall bless You.'

Isa.45:22-24 - 'I have sworn by Myself . . . to Me *every* knee shall bow, *every* tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, "Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength." '

Isa.53:6* – ‘All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid upon Him the iniquity of us *all*.’

Isa.54:8 – ‘with a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you.’

Isa.57:16 – ‘For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made.’

Lam.3:31-33 – ‘For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.’

Mic.7:18 – ‘He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy.’

Zeph.3:8, 9 – ‘All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy. For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language, that *all* may call upon the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord.’

New Testament

The following verses are not in Scriptural sequence, but are arranged in a way that emphasizes various aspects of the Larger Hope.

Col.1:19, 20* – ‘For it pleased the Father . . . to reconcile *all* things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.’

Acts 3:21* – ‘whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of *all* things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.’

Heb.1:1, 2 – ‘God . . . has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of *all* things . . .’

John 13:3 – ‘Jesus, knowing that the Father had given *all* things into His hands, . . .’

Gal.3:8 – ‘In you *all* the nations shall be blessed.’

John 17:2 – ‘You have given Him authority over *all* flesh.’

Luke 3:6 – ‘And *all* flesh shall see the salvation of God.’

1Tim.2:3, 4* – ‘God our Saviour . . . desires [‘will have,’ AV] *all* men to be saved.’

2Pet.3:9 – ‘the Lord is . . . not willing [Gk *boulomai* = is not determining] that any should perish but that *all* should come to repentance.’

Rom.11:32 – ‘For God has committed them *all* to disobedience, that He might have mercy on *all*.’

Rom.11:36 – ‘For of Him and through Him and to Him are *all* things, to whom be glory forever.’

Eph.1:22 – ‘And He put *all* things under His feet . . .’

Eph.1:10* – ‘that . . . He might gather together in one *all* things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth – in Him . . .’

Rom.5:18, AV - 'by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon *all* men.'

John 12:32,* AV - 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw *all* men unto Me.'

Rev.21:5 - 'Behold, I make *all* things new.'

John 1:7 - 'This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that *all* through Him might believe.'

John 3:17 - 'For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that *the world* through Him might be saved.'

Tit.2:11* - 'For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to *all men*.'

John 1:29 - 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of *the world*.'

John 6:51 - 'the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of *the world*.'

Rom.11:29 - 'For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.'

John 6:33 - 'for the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to *the world*.'

John 8:12 - 'I am the light of *the world*.'

1John 2:2* - 'He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the *whole world*.'

1Tim.4:10 - 'the living God, who is the Saviour of *all* men, especially of those who believe.'

1John 3:8 - 'For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might *destroy* the works of the devil.'

Heb.2:14 - 'through death He might *destroy* him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.'

2Tim.1:10 - 'our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has *abolished* death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.'

Heb.9:26 - 'once at the end of the ages He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.'

Phil.3:21 - 'He is able to subdue *all* things to Himself' (the context shows that this involves *conforming* all to Himself).

1Pet.3:18, 19 - 'Christ was . . . made alive by the Spirit, by whom He went and preached to the spirits in prison . . .'
(so Christ takes the gospel to Hades itself).

Rev.1:18 - 'And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.'

Heb.13:8 - 'Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.'

1Pet.4:6 - 'the gospel was preached also to those who are *dead*, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit' (thus even the dead are evangelized).

Rev.20:14 - 'Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.'

1Cor.15:22 - 'For as in Adam *all* die, even so in Christ *all* shall be made alive.'

John 17:4 - 'I have finished the work which You have given Me to do.'

John 19:30 - 'It is finished!'

Acts 3:21 - 'whom heaven must receive until the restoration of *all* things.'

Rev.22:2, 3 - 'And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse.'

Phil.2:10* - '*every* knee should bow . . . *every* tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord . . . ' (the OT source of this verse, Isa.45:23, 24 (AV, NKJV) has 'to Me every knee *shall* bow . . . every tongue *shall* take an oath . . . "Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength" ').

Rom.8:21 - 'the *creation* itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.'

Rev.5:13 - 'And *every creature* which is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying, "Blessing and honour and glory and power be unto Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever." '

1Cor.15:28 - 'Now when *all things* are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put *all things* under Him, that God may be *all* in *all*.'

If these verses point to anything, it is to the truth that God wills and purposes to bless all His creatures, and bring them into the Good of His love in Christ, the Redeemer, Reconciler and Saviour of the world. Belief in the salvation of the few, or even the many, seems sadly

lacking in the light of this powerful Scriptural testimony (more than a handful of texts) to the extent of God's love, goodness and mercy toward all people, and His purpose of becoming All in All.

Some may protest that these verses do not prove universal salvation. While that may be so, taken together their spirit resonates with the Larger Hope far more than the traditional belief in the endless punishment of many of God's children.

Few People of Spiritual Stature Have Believed in Universal Salvation

It is understandable that critics of the Larger Hope raise this objection, when written critiques of it usually allude to no more than a dozen of its advocates. Like the previous objection, it is untrue, as the following list of **seventy** eminent people, from a list of almost **five hundred**, shows. The compilers of the full list state that it includes 'early Church Fathers and leaders, theologians, scholars, historians, royalty, writers, poets, statesmen, humanitarians, scientists and people from other streams of life.' Those I have selected are widely renowned, and the rest are well known in their own counties and spheres of influence.

The list 'was compiled from several sources among which are: *A Cloud of Witnesses*, by J. W. Hanson, first published in 1885 and reprinted by Concordant Publishing Concern; *Mercy and Judgment*, by Canon F. W. Farrar, published in 1881; *Christ Triumphant*, by Thomas Allin, first published in 1890 and reprinted by Concordant Publishing Concern; and *Universal Reconciliation and Evangelical Covenant Church*. Dean Hough, Editor of *Unsearchable Riches* also contributed greatly to the list.'

SOME ADVOCATES OF THE LARGER HOPE

- Clement of Alexandria, theologian (c.150-215).
- Origen, eminent Early Church scholar (c.185-254).
- Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria (c.296-373).
- Ambrose, Bishop of Milan (c.339-97).
- Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (c.347-407).
- Gregory of Nyssa, Bishop of Nyssa (c.330-95).
- Gregory of Nazianzus, Bishop of Constantinople (c.329-89).
- Eusebius, Early Church historian, Bishop of Caesarea (c.260-340).
- Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria (d.c.444).
- Diodore, Bishop of Tarsus and Jerusalem (d.c.390).
- Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia (c.350-482).
- Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus (c.393-460).
- Erigena, philosopher (c.810-77).
- Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (c.1033-1109).
- Thomas Hobbes, philosopher (1588-1679).
- Sir Isaac Newton, mathematician and natural philosopher (1642-1727).
- Daniel Defoe, writer (1660-1731).
- Isaac Watts, pastor and hymn-writer (1674-1748).
- Bishop Joseph Butler (1692-1752).
- John Donne, poet (1571-1631).
- Dr Philip Doddridge, cleric and hymn-writer (1702-51).
- Samuel Johnson, author and lexicographer (1709-84).
- Frederick the Great (1712-86).
- Immanuel Kant, philosopher (1724-1804).
- William Cowper, poet and hymn-writer (1731-1800).
- Dr Joseph Priestley, minister and scientist (1733-1804).
- T.W.Goethe, poet and novelist (1749-1832)
- William Law, spiritual writer (1686-1761)
- Anne Bronte, novelist, (1820-49).
- Whittier, Quaker poet (1807-92).

- Robert (and Elizabeth) Browning, poet (1812-89).
- Robert Burns, poet (1759-96).
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, poet (1772-1834).
- George Macdonald, novelist and children's writer (1824-1905).
- Charlotte Bronte, novelist (1816-55).
- Emily Bronte, novelist (1818-48).
- Gen. Gordon (1833-85).
- William Wordsworth, poet (1770-1850).
- Florence Nightingale, (1820- 1910).
- Ralph Waldo Emerson, philosopher and essayist (1803-82).
- Canon Charles Kingsley, social reformer, writer (1819-1901).
- Bishop Westcott, Bishop of Durham, scholar (1825-1901).
- Canon F.W.Farrar, Dean of Canterbury (1831-1903).
- F.W.Faber, Christian writer (1814-63).
- Walter Savage Landor, poet (1775-1864).
- Percy B. Shelley, poet (1792-1822).
- Nathaniel Hawthorne, novelist (1804-64).
- Hans Christian Andersen, children's writer (1805-75).
- John Stuart Mill, philosopher and economist (1806-13).
- Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, poet (1807-82).
- Alfred Tennyson, poet (1809-92).
- W.M.Thackery, novelist (1811-63).
- Harriet Beecher Stowe, abolitionist and author (1811-96).
- Charles Dickens, novelist (1812-70).
- Lewis Carroll, children's writer (1832-98).
- Franz Delitsch, OT scholar (1813-90).
- John Ruskin, art critic and social reformer (1819-1900).
- Walt Whitman, poet (1819-92).
- Matthew Arnold, poet (1822-88).
- Henry James, novelist (1843-1916).
- William Morris, designer, socialist and poet (1834-96).
- Victor Hugo, poet, novelist (1802-85).
- Schleiermacher, theologian (1768-1834).

- George Washington, it is reported that he defended a Universalist chaplain in His army (1732-99).
- Abraham Lincoln (1809-65).
- William Temple, Abp. of Canterbury (1881-1944).
- C. H. Dodd, New Testament scholar (1884-1973).
- Karl Barth, theologian (1886-1968).
- William Barclay, theologian, scholar and writer (1907-78).

The above list (only a seventh of that supplied by the aforementioned compilers) is as bright a gathering of spiritual, intellectual, sensitive, and humane personalities as you will find anywhere. This in itself does not prove the truth of Christian Universalism, but it undoubtedly shows that some of the greatest, noblest, and most creative hearts and minds of the last two thousand years have found in this understanding of God and his word that which most satisfies the deepest longings and highest aspirations of the human spirit, a fact which cannot easily be ignored or dismissed by those who insist on the narrower, less merciful creed.

CONCLUSION

In this brief work I have tried to treat the Larger Hope and the traditional view of the destiny of the wicked fairly, by examining an equal number of passages on both sides of the question. The definitions of scriptural terms associated with divine judgment have helped to show that proof texts for endless punishment can be understood in more hopeful ways. However, the evidence for the Larger Hope we have considered may not seem to lead to a theologically watertight case. In the end, it is a matter of which view seems most consistent with both the letter and the spirit of Scripture, and this is bound up with our understanding

of God's character and ways. Many believe that God's last word to those who resist His call to repentance and faith is judgment, in the form of everlasting punishment. Others, including those listed above, believe it is the victory of love and grace over the power of sin, in every single case. In traditional theology the great Judge of all often looms larger than the 'Saviour of all men,' and the great Avenger of sin more than the 'God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies.' Many view the birth of human beings as the coming into existence of people who may be predestined to endless torment, while those who rejoice in the Larger Hope believe that God has purposed to save every ruined soul. They believe that He permitted the Fall only because He had preordained the ultimate restoration of all, in Christ (Rom.8:20, 21; 11:32).

Accepting the Bible as the inspired, authoritative, all-sufficient revelation of God's will for humanity, does not exclude reasoning from human experience to the mind, character and will of God, especially when God encourages us to do so. For instance, when Jesus wanted to emphasize God's goodness to His creatures, He said, 'If *you* then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to *your* children, *how much more* will your heavenly Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!' (Matt.7:11). God gives gifts, not only to those who know and love Him, but also to the 'evil' and the 'unjust' (Matt.5:45). So, by loving *our* enemies we show that we are the sons of our Father in heaven (vv.44, 45).

These things illustrate the glorious truth that God is 'merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth' (Exod.34:6). When He is angry, it is as the Father whose love, even for His enemies, is constant. He disciplines to improve. His chastening is always for our good, not harm, no matter how severe it may be.

The acutest suffering and loss experienced in this world, including death, can be the pathway to life, for we read that God 'kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up' (1Sam.2:6). Even those banished from His presence, whether in this life or the next, can hope for restoration, for 'He devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him' (2Sam.14:14). In this incident the woman of Tekoah pleads with David for his banished son, the wicked Absalom, reminding him of God's mercy and forgiveness toward the unworthy, which is something we are inclined to forget when considering His judgment of the ungodly.

In closing, I want to emphasize the truth that God is infinitely good. As our heavenly Father, He possesses all the attributes of a good and loving human father, but to the extent and perfection only possible in a divine Being. Consequently, He never behaves less justly, kindly, or mercifully than we do. Likewise, no good and compassionate father would ever condemn his children (or for that matter anyone) to endless suffering, no matter what they had done, *but* would willingly lay down his life to prevent it happening - which is exactly what Christ has done - in that He has 'tasted death for everyone' and promised to subdue and conform all things to Himself, that in the end God might be All in All. All God's dealings with us are grounded in unchanging love, and are directed towards the full and glorious restoration of all things, when the whole creation will be brought into the fullness of His love and blessing in Christ.

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FURTHER READING

- Andrew Jukes, *The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things* (1877).
- F. W. Farrar, (i) *Eternal Hope* (1878), (ii) *Mercy and Judgment*.
- Samuel Cox, *Salvator Mundi* (1887).
- Thomas Allin, *Christ Triumphant* (1891). A reprint of the ninth edition is available from Concordant Publishing Concern, 15570 Knochaven Rd., Canyon County, CA 91351, U.S.A.
- Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Unselfishness of God and How I Discovered It: My Spiritual Autobiography*. New York: Fleming H. Revell Co. (1903).
- William Barclay, *The Apostles' Creed*, pp.97-109, Arthur James, Berkhamsted (1998). ISBN: 0-85305-471-1.
- Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, Universal Publishers, U.S.A. (1999). ISBN: 1-58112-831-2.
- Graham H. Twelftree, *Life after Death*, Monarch Books, London and Michigan (2002). ISBN: 1-85424-525-2.
- Kalen Fristad, *Destined for Salvation* (2003). ISBN: 0-9729625-0-6. P0 Box 19, Dows, IA 50071.
- Gerry Beauchemin, *Hope Beyond Hell* (2007). Malista Press, Olmito Texas, ISBN: 0-9772793-0-8.

A - Z

OF THE LARGER HOPE

This alphabetical list contains many subjects/subject areas related to the Larger Hope. It is the result of over fifteen years of fairly intense study and note taking. It should prove a useful study aid to readers of this book, and provide much food for thought for individuals and study groups interested in the scriptural and theological basis for Christian Universalism.

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A - Z

OF THE LARGER HOPE

ADAM (Saved)

'It was necessary for Him to save that very man who had been created after His image and likeness - that is, Adam.'

'In as much as man is saved, it is fitting that he who was created as the original man should be saved too.'

'Everyone who disallows Adam's salvation speaks falsely.'

Irenaeus (c.180), *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, DECB, pp.5,6).

'Jesus delivered from the lowest Hades the first man of earth, when that man was lost and bound by the chains of death.'

Hippolytus (c.205, DECB, p.6).

'Adam and Eve . . . were candidates for restoration.'

Tertullian (c.270, DECB, p.6).

ASHAMED

Heb. 'Boosh' = 'become pale, ashamed, disappointed, delayed, confounded, dry.'

(*Strong's Concordance*).

Shame - in Isa.45:24; Ezek.16:52, 54-61; Jer.31:18-20 is no indication of *endless* shame - for wicked Jerusalem, Samaria and Sodom are all promised restoration. So some (in Phil.2:10,11) may confess with shame, but all will say, 'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength' (Isa.45:24).

Even if Paul found he had something to be ashamed of at the Lord's appearing, he knew it would not affect his salvation (Phil.1:20).

BANISHED

2 Sam.14:14 shows that God is merciful to those He has banished from His presence, devising means whereby they may be restored.

BLOTTED OUT OF GOD'S BOOK

This should be studied alongside passages like Isa.45:22-25; 53:6; John 12:32; 1Tim.2:4-6; Rev.5:13 - which suggests it is membership of the company of the saints that 'blotting out of the book of life' refers to, not the generality of

the redeemed. That 'every creature' is seen worshipping God and the Lamb shows that being blotted out of the book of life leads to the loss of no one.

BREAK IN PIECES

Christ will break the nations in pieces (Rev.2:27); however, this can be done with 'words' (Job.19:2 - see Ps.2:8-9; Rev.19:15 - and Rev.22:2, where the broken nations are healed.

BRIDE OF CHRIST (Elect, Church)

The following indicate that *the world/nations* will be saved through the Church's ministry (1Chron.22:5ff; Ps.145:10-13; Isa.2:1-4; Dan.7:18,27; John 3:29; 1Cor.3:16; 6:2; 1John 2:2; Rev.2:26,27; 5:10; 21:24). With reference to 'the nations of those who are saved' - the words 'of those who are saved' are not in the best manuscripts, which suggests that *all* nations will be drawn to walk in the light of the Church/ New Jerusalem/Bride (21:2), leading, of course, to their salvation.

In the Athens of Pericles' day the *ekklesia* (the word translated 'church' in the NT), was the ruling body in a democracy of Athenian citizens. Their task was to secure and maintain the rights of all the citizens - hence they were chosen, not for their benefit alone, but for the good

of all. Paul may have had this meaning of *ekklesia* in mind when he wrote of the Church as a people 'called out' to reign with Christ for the good of others - even of *all*.

Parts of the above cited in *The New Rights of Man*, p.31, Pub. Robinson, London.

BRIMSTONE (Sulphur)

According to the *World 2001 Encyclopaedia*, sulphur was used by the ancient Greeks and Romans to cleanse and purify as a medicine, which provides an interesting, even essential, insight into Rev.20:10; 21:8.

CAST OFF

A withdrawal of God's approval, help and blessing - which need not mean being rejected for ever (Ps.108:10-13; Rom.11:1-12).

CHASTENING (God's)

In love, for our profit, to make us holy (Job 5:17,18; Prov3:24; Jer.31:18-20; Ezek.6:7-10; 24:13; Mal.3:1-3; 1Tim.1:20; Heb.12:6, 10; Rev.3:19); and because God loves His enemies - for *their* profit also (Dan.4:27, 34-37; Rom.8:18-23; 1Cor.15:23).

CONSUME

Jerome, in Allin's *Christ Triumphant*, p.134, says: 'Death shall come as a visitor to the

impious; it will not be perpetual; it will not annihilate them, but will prolong its visit, till the impiety which is in them shall be consumed.'

In Jer.8:13 God says He will consume His wicked people, but only to 'melt them, and try them'(9:7).

Compare Heb.12:29 with Deut.4:24-31. Note that God's 'utter destruction' of Israel for idolatry (v.26) means a scattering, exiling, from which they could recover through His mercy. There is no contradiction between v.26 and v.31, for God's purpose was to consume their dross (sin and evil) and recover *them*.

CORRECTION

The element of correction in God's judgments (Hab.1:12).

CURSE

God's cursing of His people was corrective, not simply punitive/retributive (Deut.ch.30).

DAMNATION

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.43, 44. In Jam.3:1 (AV) 'damnation' clearly means 'judgment,' as in the NKJV.

Luther, in his *Table Talk*, speaks of Christ dying for the 'comfort of us poor, miserable and damned creatures' - evidently not esteeming such beyond hope.

DEATH

Solomon considered the dead, the unborn and those who have never existed better off than the living (Eccl.4:2,3), which says a lot in view of the supposed endless torment of the wicked.

Advocates of Conditional Immortality maintain that the death of the wicked is their non-existence or annihilation, but consider A. Jukes' words:

...are any of the varied deaths which Scripture speaks of as incident to man, his non-existence or annihilation? Take as examples the deaths referred to by St Paul, in the sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters of the Epistle to the *Romans*. We read (ch.6:7), 'He that is dead is free from sin.' Is this 'death' that is freedom from sin, non-existence or annihilation? Again, when he says (ch.8:6), 'To be carnally minded is death,' is this 'death' non-existence or annihilation? And again, when he says (ch.8:38), 'Neither death, nor life, shall separate us,' is the 'death' here referred to annihilation? When Adam died on the day he sinned (Gen.2:17), was this annihilation? When his body died and turned to dust (Gen.5:5), was this annihilation? Is our 'death in trespasses and sins' (Eph.2:1,2) annihilation? Is our 'death to sin' (Rom.6:11), annihilation? * * Do not these and similar uses of the word prove beyond all question, that whatever else these deaths may be, not one of them is non-existence or annihilation?

Andrew Jukes, cited in *Christ Triumphant*, T. Allin, pp.184-185).

DESTRUCTION

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.47, 48.

In 1Cor.5:5 and 2Thess.1:9 'destruction' is a translation of the Greek word *oletheron*. In 1Cor.5:5 it is not the destruction of the whole person that is meant, and this may affect one's interpretation of 2Thess.1:9, i.e., that 'destruction' in this verse refers to the destruction of sin, unbelief and corruption, rather than the sinner.

DOCTRINE

F. W. Farrar says:

If, as has been said, there are two systems of religious doctrine, in one of which "sin" is the central thought; "terror," the motive power; "personal salvation" the object :- and in the other, "God as revealed in Christ," the centre; "the goodness of God," the motive power; "the restoration of His scattered children to Him" the object, - then I think that the former may be taken to represent much of the popular theology [it did in Farrar's day] and the latter the Gospel of Christ. The result of the former is too apt to be a hard and loveless religionism: the latter may, by God's grace, develop the spiritual mind.

Mercy and Judgment, pp.363-4.

The two views mentioned by Farrar, prevalent in Victorian times, are ideally illustrated in the novel *Jane Eyre*, where, with the child Jane in mind, the heartless Mr. Brocklehurst says: 'Deceit is indeed a sad fault in a child; it is

akin to falsehood, and all liars will have their portion in the lake burning with fire and brimstone...' It is a signal lesson to compare this spirit, indulged in the presence of a child, with the spirit of Helen, Jane's dying friend at Lowood School. In reply to Jane's question: 'Where is God? What is God?' she says: 'My Maker and yours, who will never destroy what he created. I rely implicitly on his power, and confide wholly in his goodness: I count the hours till that eventful one arrives which shall restore me to him, reveal him to me . . . I am sure there is a future state; I believe God is good; I can resign my immortal part to him without any misgiving. God is my father; God is my friend: I love him; I believe he loves me . . . You will come to the same region of happiness: be received by the same mighty, universal Parent, no doubt, dear Jane.'

Similar belief in the merciful fatherhood of God is expressed by another Helen, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, by Anne Bronte. She says of her husband, who has died from a life of debauchery: 'thank God I have hope - not only from a vague dependence on the possibility that penitence and pardon might have reached him at the last, but from the blessed confidence that, through whatever purging fires the erring spirit may be doomed to pass - whatever fate awaits it, still, it is not lost, and God who hateth nothing that he hath made, will bless it in the end.'

DOUBLE PUNISHMENT

Double punishment for all her sins is meted out to Israel - yet it is followed by pardon (Isa.40:1, 2).

DYING IN ONE'S SINS

Compare John 8:24 with Num. 27:1-3, and note that in the latter there is no sense of *eternal* loss. Christ has redeemed, ransomed and reconciled all, including Zelophehad, who died in his sin (Isa.53:6; 1Tim.2:6; Col.1:20).

Dying in one's sins is the common lot of people who have never heard of Christ, or have heard of Him, but have not, for various reasons, believed in Him. This would be fatal, but for the fact that Christ has ransomed all from sin and death, and will draw all people to Himself (John 12:32). It is better to believe in this life, and experience abundant life in Christ now, than to live and die in one's sins. Receiving the benefits of trusting in Christ now - forgiveness, acceptance and spiritual growth - is better than dying in one's sins and having to face the judgment, correction and restorative process of the world to come - for 'no chastening seems to be joyful but grievous' (Heb.12:11).

ELECT

See 'Bride' (above) and *The Larger Hope*, pp.28, 89-91).

Gen.20:7,17 - Abraham, God's elect servant, prayed for the heathen Abimelech, and he was healed - which exemplifies the priestly ministry of God's elect,

in their service to humanity as a whole.

Gen.27:34-40 - Esau was not condemned to endless punishment, but only to being subservient to his brother Jacob, God's choice for the right of the firstborn (Rom.9:12,13). Although rejected as firstborn, Esau and his descendants will benefit from the glorious reign of Christ and the elect in the ages to come, when all who are in bondage to futility and corruption will be delivered into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom.8:20,21). His being 'hated' (Rom.9:13), is essentially to do with being denied the right of the firstborn, *not* salvation.

Deut.21:5 - the Levitical Priesthood is typical of those chosen to reign with Christ as kings and priests (1Pet.2:9; Rev.5:10); whose ministry, as well as being to God, is to bless and judge (administer justice to) the people.

1Chron.22:5 - the Temple, the 'house of the Lord,' a type of the Church, which is destined to become 'famous and glorious throughout all countries,' a glorious 'household,' 'body,' 'kingdom,' consisting of the 'sons of God,' i.e., 'saints,' through whom all nations will be blessed (1Pet.2:4; Eph.2:19; 3:6; Luke 12:32; Rom.8:19-23).

Ps. 45 - presents a detailed picture/allegory of Christ and the redeemed, with different kinds of people mentioned in relation to the 'king' and 'queen' (v.9); including 'companions' (v.7); 'king's daughters,' and 'honourable women' (v.9); the 'daughter of Tyre,' and the 'rich among the people' (v.12); the 'virgins, the companions of the royal daughter' (vv.13,14), and the 'sons,' who are 'princes in all the earth' (v.16). This is a richer, more complex picture of the Kingdom than the one usually envisaged, i.e., Christ and the Church.

Ps.145:10-13 - the 'saints' will proclaim to the 'sons of men' God's 'mighty acts' and the 'glorious majesty of His kingdom.'

Isa.32:1 - Christ the king and His princes/the elect will rule with justice, i.e., rule and serve the whole company of the redeemed in a restored creation.

Isa.66:10-13 - Jerusalem, a type of the Church (New Jerusalem), becomes a source of nourishment, comfort and blessing to others.

Dan.7:27 - the 'saints of the Most High' will receive the 'kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven.' So the saints are to reign with Christ.

Rom.11:28 - in Paul's day only a remnant of Israel received Christ (11:5), but in v.28 he speaks of the whole nation being elect. So it appears that in v.5 Paul speaks of the elect of Israel in *his day* (those of the elect nation who received Christ at that time), and in v.26, of 'all Israel' who will ultimately be saved, showing all to be elect, even though the larger part are saved after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in (vv.25, 26; see also v.16 and Isa.41:8, 9).

1Cor.3:16 - the elect are God's Temple, Church, and House of Prayer for all nations, in that through them as the promised seed, in and with Christ, all nations shall be blessed (Gal.3:16, 29).

Tit.2:13,14 - the elect are a chosen people unto God, and good works, through whom others will glorify Him (Matt.5:13-16).

Heb.2:10-3:6 - is about Christ's 'brethren,' God's 'sons' and 'house,' i.e., the elect who have the heavenly calling to reign with Christ as kings and priests over a restored creation.

1Pet.2:12 - speaks of the honourable conduct of the church/elect leading others to glorify God 'in the day of visitation.'

Rev.2:26,27; 3:9; 5:9,10 - the

elect saints will rule/subdue the nations (see also Ps.149:5-9).

Rev.15:1-4 – the saints who triumph over the beast sing of all nations coming to worship before God.

Clement of Rome (c.96), cited in *Early Christian Writings* (1968), p.38, Penguin, speaks of an especially holy people taken from the midst of the nations: 'Behold, the Lord takes a people for Himself out of the midst of the nations, as a man takes the first-fruits of his threshing floor, and it is out of that people that the Holy of Holies shall come.'

Markus Barth says in *The Broken Wall*, p.248: 'The Church is the showpiece of the omnipotence of God's love.' She is God's called, chosen and faithful vehicle for subduing and ultimately blessing the whole creation at the 'revealing of the sons of God' (Rev.2:26, 27; 17:14; Rom.8:18-23).

ESAU

In Rom.9:13 Esau is said to be 'hated' of God. However, see Jer.12:7, 8, where the people of Judah are said to be the object of God's love *and* hatred. However, God's hatred did not prevent His love from winning through in the end (Jer.30:12,17). Cannot the same be said with regard to His love for Esau – and all sinners? God's hatred of

sinners (in the sense in which He hated Judah), does not limit His will/ability to save them in the end.

In Deut.2:1-12 God gave Esau Mt Seir and the territory of the Horites. Esau's descendants were to be left alone by the Israelites. God's provision for and protection of Esau and His descendants presents a somewhat different picture from the traditional one, for in *that* God rejects and damns them. In Rom.9:13 Esau is 'hated' by God, but only in the sense that he was denied the right of the firstborn. The firstborn son in every Hebrew family was given a 'double portion' of the family inheritance (Deut.21:17). He was not blessed simply for his own sake, but was to draw on his double portion to minister to the needs of his brethren.

With regard to the Church: it is through the 'church of the firstborn' (Heb.12:23) that all people, even the 'whole creation,' will be 'delivered from corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:18-23).

We may draw from Jacob's warm reception of Esau (who had sought his life) after years of separation, the spirit of God's great Firstborn towards His enemies (Gen.ch.33).

ESPECIALLY

The Greek word *malista* is translated 'especially' in Gal.6:10; 1Tim.4:10 and 2Tim.4:13. In 1Tim.4:10 (AV) we read that God is 'the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe,' and some think this means that God is the Saviour of the elect, but not all people without exception. However in this and the other verses mentioned above, Paul uses 'especially' in an *inclusive sense*. In Gal.6:10 the 'all' to whom Paul and the Galatian believers are to 'do good,' clearly *includes* 'those who are of the household of faith,' and in 2Tim.4:13, Paul asks Timothy to especially *include* the 'parchments' with the other things he wants him to bring him from Troas.

With regard to 1Tim.4:10, we are meant to understand that whilst believers already know God as Saviour, hence are especially blessed through faith in Christ, this in no way alters the fact that God is the Saviour of humanity as a whole, and that one day He will be 'all in all' (1Cor.15:28).

ETERNAL/ETERNITY/EVER

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.51-53.

Eternal means absolutely endless only when referring to, or describing, someone or something whose very nature is

eternal, such as God and His attributes.

The basic meaning of the Greek word *aiwn* ('eternal'/'everlasting,' AV) is 'an age.' 'Forever' can mean 'unto the age.' It sometimes occurs in the New Testament in its plural form, e.g., 'in the ages to come' (Eph.2:7); 'throughout all ages' (Eph.3:21).

Farrar, in *Mercy and Judgment*, p.52, shows that 'for ever,' in the Old Testament, (Heb. *olam*), often signifies an indefinite period of time.

Ps.74:1 - the Psalmist's 'forever' reveals that *olam* can mean something other than forever in its absolute sense, for God continued, and continues, to love and deal with His covenant people (Rom.11:1, 25,26, 28-32).

Isa.32:13-15 - 'forever,' with regard to the desolation of Israel and their land, is only 'until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high' (v.15).

Jer.17:4 - 'Forever' is used to describe God's anger in relation to His people at the time of the Exile, but the Exile lasted only seventy years.

Jer.25:12 - 'Perpetual desolation' (Heb. *olam*), is used with regard to Babylonia, yet the area, modern Iraq, has been rebuilt, which illustrates the restricted meaning of *olam*.

Joel 2:2 - 'ever,' here, is seen to be the equivalent of 'many successive generations.'

Amos 1:11- 'perpetually,' and 'forever' are used to describe Edom's anger and ruthlessness in a way that seems to mean something less than 'forever' in its absolute sense.

Amos 5:2 - Israel is said to 'rise no more' - yet there are many prophecies of her restoration.

John 17:3; 1John 1:1,2; 2:24,25 - 'eternal life' in the New Testament sometimes has a *qualitative* meaning, i.e., the life of God/Christ experienced by believers.

Heb.6:2, 5 - 'eternal judgment' is linked to the 'age to come'(v.5), hence could be thought of as the judgment of 'a coming age' (which is the literal translation of the Greek of v.5, in *Nestle's Greek - English Interlinear New Testament*).

The Community Rule of the Essenes - like one of the three rabbinical views of the judgment of the wicked - speaks of eternal torment *coming to an end* with shameful extinction: 'The times of all their generations shall be spent in sorrowful mourning and bitter misery, and in calamities of darkness *until they are destroyed* without remnant or survivor.' Whilst this describes severe

judgment, it is almost infinitely more merciful than the endless conscious torment taught by the traditional school (cited in Paula Clifford's *A Brief History of the End Time*, p.47).

The above is highly significant in that it is an example of 'eternal torment' being used in New Testament times in a way that indicates something less than everlasting conscious punishment.

Leckie, in *The World to Come*, p.112, draws attention to the way the words 'eternal punishment' were used by Jewish writers: 'We have to remember that the phrase "aeonian punishment" is used with great freedom by many Jewish writers, as illustrated by a passage in Philo (*Fragmenta*), wherein this very expression describes a purely temporal and earthly penalty. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* also states that women who adorn themselves unduly are reserved for "eternal punishment" (*kolasis aionios*). And surely no one can adopt rigour to this pronouncement' (Reuben 5:5). (See also scholars' comments on *kolasis* in these notes, pp.160-61).

Philo also says that although the lower creatures are our enemies to 'an illimitable eternity,' they will eventually be reconciled to humanity.

FALL (The Fall)

Our first parents' fall from innocence is usually referred to as 'the Fall.' Primarily it speaks of *their* fall, but more profoundly it signifies the fall of the human race *in* them, in that the whole race was in them when they fell, leading to the race being corrupted, hence the doctrine of original sin, i.e., sin being inherited by every descendant of Adam (Rom.5:12-14). Consequently, the complete rectification of the Fall required a remedy that would entail the restoration of the whole of humanity. For God to be the 'Saviour of all men' (1Tim.4:10), the whole race would have to be redeemed, reconciled and restored in the second Adam, Christ. The Larger Hope embraces the restoration of all to God, in and through Christ.

FATHER (God as)

God is revealed in Scripture as Israel's Father - Deut.32:6, 18; Isa.63:16; 64:8; Jer.3:19; 31:9; Mal.1:6.

He is the Father of individuals also - Ps.89:26; Jer.3:4; Ezek.16:21.

He is the Father of all people - Ps.68:5; 146:9; Mal.2:10; Acts 17:28,29. With regard to the last reference, the Roman philosopher and emperor, Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121-180), writes in *Meditations*: 'It is time

now to realize the nature of the universe to which you belong, and of that controlling power whose offspring you are' (2 4). Marcus Aurelius was evidently familiar with the poets Paul quotes in Acts 17:28.

Note that in Mal.2:10 Creator and Father are mentioned together, showing that the Creator of all is the Father of all - hence in Matt.5:1; 6:9; 23:1, 9 (where the 'multitudes' are addressed and taught to pray 'Our Father . . .' with Jesus' disciples); See also Num.16:22; Heb.12:9).

Lactantius (c.314) says in his address to a pagan audience: 'If only God were worshipped there would not be dissensions and wars. For men would know that they are the sons of one God' (DECB, p.137).

It is true that God becomes Father to us in a personal, spiritual and experiential way through the new birth, but He is nevertheless the Father of all His offspring, in that in Christ He is the Creator, Preserver, Saviour and Restorer of all (Neh.9:6; Col.1:15-18; Job 7:20 (A.V.); 1Tim.4:10; Acts 3:21).

FIRE

Does not essentially harm God's redeemed - Isa.43:2; 1Cor.3:11-15.

By fire and sword the Lord

will judge all flesh (Isa.66:16).

All will be seasoned with fire (Mark 9:49)

Fire used for trial, refining, purification (Isa.1:25; 6:6,7; Zeph.3:8,9; Mal.3:2,3; 1Cor.3:12-15; 1Pet.1:6,7; 4:12).

Fire a figure of God's jealous anger (Ps.89:46; Zeph.1:18; 3:8,9). N.B. that in Zeph.3:8,9 God's fiery judgment leads to the peoples having a pure language restored to them - hence here divine jealousy, anger and fire are for purification and restoration.

It is often the case in the O.T. that the blessing *and* chastening of Israel and other nations were that they might 'know the Lord' - so punishment was educational as well as retributive (Exod.6:7; 16:12; 1Kings 20:28; Ezek.6:7, 10-13; 36:23; Isa.37:20).

Fire as destruction (2Sam.23:6,7; Isa.9:19; 30:33; 47:13-15; Ezek.5:1-4), arguably of the 'flesh,' to destroy/consume the old sinful nature - compare Heb.12:29 with Zeph.3:8,9 and 2Thess.1:7-8, and note the purificatory motive for the 'destruction' of the wicked. The principle of corrective judgment in 1Cor.5:5 - the flesh being destroyed that the spirit may be saved - applied in the case of a fallen believer - arguably applies universally, for God

'will have' (A.V.) or 'desires' (NKJV) all men to be saved' (1Tim.2:4).

The infliction of continuous, conscious, retributive suffering by fire is never contemplated by God - never enters His heart or mind (Jer.7:31; 32:35). This only happened among the heathen, and in Israel when God's people copied their ways (Lev.18:21; 2Kings 23:10; 2Chron.33:6; Jer.19:5; Ezek.16:20,21; Dan.3:6).

The context of Deut.4:24 shows that God 'consumed'/'destroyed' disobedient Israel in order to deliver her from sin and restore her to Himself - hence a remedial fire/judgment.

John Donne wrote: 'Burn me, O Lord, with a fiery zeale of Thee and Thy house, which doth in eating (consuming) heale' (in *Love's Redeeming Work*, p.141, Oxford).

At Passover the first-fruits of the barley harvest were taken to the Temple, where they were lightly beaten, scorched with fire, winnowed and ground into flour; typical, maybe, of the trial, refining and purification of the Christian 'first-fruits' (Rom.8:23; Jam.1:18; Rev.14:4; 1Pet.1:6,7; 4:12, 17).

FIRE (Unquenchable)

R. T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on Matthew*, IVP, p.93, says on 3:12:

'The wheat is separated off as it is thrown up with the *winnowing fork* (better 'shovel') for the wind to blow away the *chaff*, which is then gathered and burnt in the fire which is *unquenchable*, because its fierceness will destroy all that is put in it (the word is not, and does not necessarily imply, 'everlasting', which would not fit the threshing floor imagery).'

The following texts that contain the imagery of unquenchable fire/wrath, clearly refer to judgments of God which continue *only until they are accomplished* (2Kings 22:17; 2Chron.34:25; Isa.1:31; 34:5, 10; 66:24 (see *The Larger Hope*, p.56); Jer.4:4; 17:27; Ezek.20:45-48). Job's words in 31:12 express the true meaning of 'unquenchable fire,' i.e., a fire, or judgment, which keeps burning and will not be quenched until it has fulfilled its purpose - which exposes the gross misunderstanding of those who teach God's employment of fire in endless torment.

Jer.11:11 - God's refusal to hear the prayers of his people under judgment/punishment demonstrates the principle of 'unquenchable fire,' in that His judgment continues inexorably, but only until it is fully accomplished.

FIRSTBORN/FIRSTFRUITS

Christ is called the 'firstborn,' in that He is i) the 'firstborn over all creation' (Col.1:15; NKJV); and ii) the 'firstborn from the dead' (Col.1:18).

In O.T. times the firstborn son in a family had the right, privilege and sacred responsibility of being set apart unto God - as priest, judge, leader and representative of his family/tribe (Exod.13:2; 24:5). He could redeem his brother from slavery and raise up a seed to his deceased brethren (Gen.38:8; Deut.25:5-10; Ruth 4:6-10). He was helped to perform these duties by being given a 'double portion' of the family inheritance (Deut.21:17).

All this suggests/foreshadows the privilege, role and responsibility of the 'church of the firstborn' who are 'registered in heaven' (Heb.12:23), in that the Church/first-fruits/elect sons of God will, with and under Christ, be God's channel of blessing to the whole creation in the age/ages to come (Rom.8:18-23).

The people of Israel are called in Scripture God's 'firstborn' (Exod.4:22) and 'first-fruits' (Jer.2:3); pointing to an expected harvest/fullness - when 'every knee will bow' and 'every tongue take an oath' . . .

Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength' (Isa.45:23,24).

Due to Israel's failure to become God's means of blessing to the world, due to her apostasy, exclusiveness and rejection of Christ, our Lord and His faithful followers have taken on the mantle of a holy, overcoming firstborn and first-fruits, fulfilling their commission to minister the Good News to humanity - in this life and in the age/ages to come - until all things are subdued/conformed to Christ (Luke 2:23; Col.1:15; Heb.12:23; Jam.1:18; Rev.14:14; 1Cor.15:28; Phil.3:21). Again, these things point to an eventual harvest, even to 'every creature' being brought to know and worship God and the Lamb (Rev.5:13).

Andrew Jukes, in his *The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things*, pp.30-48, admirably describes the nature and role of the first-fruits and firstborn in Scripture. These are not simply blessed for their own sakes, but *with, in and through* Christ, as God's appointed means of blessing all people, even the 'whole creation' (Rom.8:18-23).

See Clement of Rome's view of the special nature/role of the saints - under 'ELECT' in these notes.

FUTILITY

God, in His eternal love and wisdom, has subjected the creation to futility, in *hope* (Rom.8:20; Eccl.6:12). Similarly, He has committed all to disobedience and adversity, but with a view to having *mercy on all* (Rom.11:32; Job.5:7; Jer.45:5).

This sinful world has become futile in its thoughts, and darkened in its heart and mind (Rom.1:21; Ps.94:11; 1Cor.3:20).

God has permitted this in order to impress on us the folly and wretchedness of trying to live without Him; i.e., to teach us through our own experience, so universally prized, that we cannot be good, holy, blessed and happy without Him; so that at last, having learned the lesson, however slowly and reluctantly, we might, by His grace, come to our senses and return to Him - which is perfectly illustrated in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

His wise and loving purpose is that we may, sooner or later, learn that life without Him is intolerable. In the end all will acknowledge this, and Him, and the Saviour who has redeemed, reconciled all to God (Isa.45:22-25; 52:15; Phil.2:9-11; 1Cor.15:27-28).

Petrarch, in his *Letter to Posterity*, says: 'The Author of all ages and times permits us

miserable mortals, puffed up with emptiness, thus to wander about, until, finally, coming to a tardy consciousness of our sins, we shall learn to know ourselves'(Acts 14:15,16).

GEHENNA

J. H. Leckie, in *The World to Come*, p.72, says: 'The rabbis did not distinguish between *hades* and *gehenna*, but many of them believed that punishment in the place of fire would, at least in the case of many, last for only a limited time.'

He says also: 'There can be no doubt that all the rabbis of N.T. times believed that *gehenna* was a state from which release was possible. They did not hold that everyone who entered it had met his final doom. Rather did they hope that most of those who went down into the place of bondage would finally come up again. The *gehenna* of the thoughtful Jew of those days is, therefore, not to be identified with the hell of later Christian theology. If it was hell it was also purgatory [a place of purification]. There was no inscription over its gates - "All hope abandon ye who enter here"(p.143).

Farrar, in *Mercy and Judgment*, pp. 374-5, says of *gehenna*:

The Valley of Hinnom [from which the word *gehenna* is derived] is

mentioned thirteen times in the Old Testament . . . In not one of those thirteen passages does it mean "hell."

Five times it is used of a valley outside Jerusalem which in ancient days had been, and in subsequent ages again became, "the pleasant valley of Hinnom"(Josh.15:8, *bis*; 18:16, *bis*; Neh.11:30).

Three times it is mentioned as having been defiled by the burning of human beings alive in the Moloch worship of Ahaz and Manasseh (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; 2 Kings 23:10).

Five times in connection with God's wrath against the abomination of cruelly burning human beings, and especially infants, with fire; of which He expresses His abhorrence as a thing "which never came into His mind"(Jer.7:31,32; 19:1-15; 32:35). In two of these passages it is spoken of as a place of carcases.

In the New Testament Gehenna is alluded to by our Lord seven times in St Matthew (5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33); three times in St Mark; once in St Luke (12:5); once in St James (3:6). In not one of these passages is it called "endless." The only possible inducement to attach such a notion to it is the addition in Mark 9:43 of "quenchless fire and deathless worm," expressions purely metaphorical and directly borrowed from a metaphor of Isaiah respecting earthly consequences. Seven of the ten allusions to Gehenna come out of one single passage of one single discourse (Matt. 5, repeated partly in Matt.18 and Mark 9), and it is extremely questionable whether in all seven the primary allusion is not to an earthly Jewish punishment.

The word does not occur once in all the thirteen Epistles of St Paul, and Hades only once, though he had declared to his converts "the whole counsel of God." Nor does it occur once in the pages of him who leaned on the Lord's bosom; nor in the Epistle to the Hebrews; nor in the Epistles of the Chief of the Apostles.

All this provides a most revealing insight into the meaning and limited usage of *gehenna* in the Bible. It helps to dispel the horrors Christendom has historically imposed upon *gehenna* – in the form of unjustifiable connotations heaped on the Anglo-Saxon word 'hell.'

GOODNESS (God's)

God is good and His goodness is invariably linked with His mercy (1 Chron.16:34; 2Chron.5:13; 7:3; Ezra 3:11; Ps.100:5; 106:1; 107:1; 118:29; 136:1; 145:9; Jer.33:11).

In Ps.145:9 we read that 'God is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works.' So there is no limit/selectivity with regard to His goodness.

His goodness, like Himself, is everywhere, for we read that 'the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD' (Ps.33:5).

God is good and *does* good (Ps.119:68). The 'evil' He creates (Isa.45:7, A.V.) is not moral evil, but 'calamity'(NKJV), punish-

ment as retribution for sin, but also as a means of bringing sinners to repentance – hence calamity/affliction that is corrective and remedial.

Didymus (c.313-98) says that those who perceive that God's judgments are designed to amend the sinner 'confess Him to be good' (Allin, in *Christ Triumphant*, pp.199-200).

In Exod.33:18,19 God assures Moses that His goodness and glory are essentially one: a truth which calls for our utmost attention and appreciation, because so many imagine that God's glory is the brightness of His presence – which it is, in one of its manifestations – but once grasp that God's glory is in some way His goodness, and vice versa, i.e., that He relates to His creatures, even the least worthy, as goodness itself (Matt.5:43-48), then this can radically alter our perception of His nature and dealings with us.

God our Father wants us to know that He is good and merciful in the essence of His Being. To really believe this brings peace, joy, thankfulness praise and worship in spirit and truth. God's goodness, like His love, is the key to understanding His word and ways.

None of this in any way

conflicts with or undermines God's justice, judgment and holy anger, for these work in harmony with and are the expression of His goodness, in that through them He is able to subdue and turn sinners to repentance.

GOOD PLEASURE (God's)

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.31,32.

If God wills, wants, desires something, such as the salvation of all people (1Tim.2:4), He can accomplish it according to His good pleasure, for if not, His will/desire would be frustrated, which is unthinkable in One who is omnipotent, with whom 'all things are possible' (Job 23:13; Isa.44:28; 46:10; Luke 12:32; Eph.1:5,9, 10; Phil.2:13; 2Thess 1:11; Matt.19:26).

Jesus wanted to gather the people of Jerusalem to Himself, as a hen gathers her chicks (Matt.23:37-39), but *at that time* they 'would not.' God often wanted to do the same with Israel, and with individual Hebrews, in O.T. times, and had to chastise them until they were humbled and made willing to turn to Him (2 Chron. 33:9-13, 19; Jer.7:13; 13:11 with ch.30). So, as Jesus says, the time will come when the people of Jerusalem (and the whole of Israel) will bless and welcome Him as Lord (Zech.12:10-14;

Rom.11:25,26; Phil.2:9-11).

The fulfilment of His purpose may appear to be frustrated or delayed, but it is never thwarted ultimately. His love for His covenant people (and all people) is constant. It will win through in the end (Isa.45:22-25).

The following is a list of Bible verses on the sovereignty of God's will and good pleasure:-

Num.23:18-20 – even the sit-on-the-fence Balaam was right when he said that God always fulfils His word/promise – and by extension – desire and good pleasure. There may, as we have said, be some delay, as when the people of Jerusalem would not at first come to Christ, but in the end He will draw them and all people to Himself – as many prophecies declare (see also John 12:32).

Ps.135:6 – there is no clearer, declaration in Scripture of the truth that God does whatever He pleases.

Ecc.8:3 – what is true of absolute monarchs like Solomon, i.e., they do as they please, is true also of Almighty God; the difference being that what God is pleased to do is always for our eternal spiritual benefit (Ps.145:9).

Isa.53:10 – if it pleased God to bruise His beloved Son for our spiritual healing/benefit; if He

went to such incredible lengths to demonstrate His love for us, will He not be pleased to bring all His offspring into the good of His love in Christ? Moreover, we see that God's good pleasure 'prosper' in Christ's hands. In other words, Christ will surely accomplish whatever God wills, wants or desires, even the salvation of all (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9).

Isa.55:11 – God accomplishes His declared purpose – all He is pleased to do – every word and promise that leaves His mouth. So it is difficult, even impossible, to separate God's 'will' from His 'good pleasure.' Hence, from verses like 1Tim.2:4, we may hope for the widest salvation. Instead of interpreting this verse in the light of others that seem to limit salvation to a few, or to many, why not, as Thomas Talbot, in his *The Inescapable Love of God*, suggests, interpret the narrower, less hopeful passages in the light of the broader, more hopeful ones – sin in the light of abundant grace?

Ezek.33:11 – God tells Israel He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and says to them, 'Why should you die?' If He had no pleasure in their destruction, at the hands of the Babylonians, conversely, it means that He had pleasure in

their life, deliverance and restoration, promised in many places, including Ezek.16:44-63 and 36:16-29.

2Cor.1:20 – God will keep His promises – Christ is their seal and guarantee – all He has said He will do according to His good pleasure.

Eph.1:9-10 – here God's 'will' is essentially linked with His 'good pleasure' and eternal 'purpose.' They are virtually interchangeable, making it wrong to try and separate them, and set one against the other, as traditionalists often do, evidently in ignorance of the unity of God's purpose, will and good pleasure.

Rev.4:11 – all things were created according to God's 'will' – note that here the word *thelo* ('will') is the same word translated 'will' (AV), 'desires' (NKJV, NIV) in 1Tim.2:4, which shows that translations can be arbitrary and misleading. However, these translations (Rev.4:11 and 1Tim.2:4) show how God's 'will' to create and save is His determined will (and not just something He *wanted* to do). Consequently, the AV's 'who *will* have all men to be saved...' (1Tim.2:4) is not only a legitimate translation, but can be seen to express God's sovereign purpose to save all people.

HADES

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.39-41, 73-76). Also *The Apostles' Creed*, William Barclay, pp.97-109, published by Arthur James, Berkhamsted, ISBN 0-85305-471-1.

Christ's descent into Hades after His crucifixion has been understood in different ways:-

i) Some of the early Church Fathers believed He went to preach to the spirits of OT worthies in Hades and lead them to heaven.

ii) Other Fathers went as far as to believe that Christ preached to *all* the dead (including those who rebelled in the days of Noah) and brought hope to all (1Pet.3:18-20).

iii) A view held among conservative evangelicals is that in 1Pet.3:18-20 Peter is saying that Christ preached to the antediluvians through Noah (2Pet.2:4,5).

It is difficult to draw firm conclusions on this subject. Barclay's summary of the views is worth reading, and it is important to remember that many of the most saintly and learned ante-Nicene Fathers took Peter's words to mean an actual visit of Christ to Hades.

The fact that Christ holds the keys of Hades and Death (Rev.1:18,19) is suggestive of hope for all people, not the

contrary. These verses express the spirit of total victory over death and the realm of the dead, not a lesser, partial victory, which results in some, even most, of God's creatures suffering the consequences of sin and death forever.

With respect to Hades, John Wenham (who embraces Conditional Immortality) records an interesting interpretation of the Parable of Lazarus and Dives in his *The Enigma of Evil*, p.88, published by Eagle, Guilford, Surrey, ISBN 0-86347-111-0.

HOPE

The believer's hope is the gift of God, hence is living and certain rather than mere wishful thinking (Ps.119:49; 2Thess.2:16; 1Pet.1:3).

God/Christ is our hope (Ps.71:5; Jer.14:8; 1Tim.1:1).

Dispersed Israel can hope for restoration (Jer.31:17; Hos.2:15, 14-23).

All who have been subjected to futility by God, even the whole creation, can hope for His mercy (Rom.8:19-22; 11:32).

We are to hope and pray that even those who oppose the Gospel and persecute God's people may be granted repentance and the knowledge of Him (1Tim.2:1-6; 2Tim.2:24-26; passages like 2Thess.1:7-10

should be seen in the light of these verses. See also pp.79-81 in *The Larger Hope*.

We can hope in God even when He hides His face from us (Isa.8:16, 17).

The Romans used to say '*spiro spero*,' i.e., 'where there's life there's hope.' Applying this to what Paul says in Rom.8:20, although God has 'subjected the creation to futility,' He has done so 'in hope,' the hope of 'mercy,' for 'mercy triumphs over judgment' (Jam.2:13). According to Jam.2:13, those who show no mercy will receive 'judgment without mercy,' but there is nothing in this expression to prevent such judgment, although certain, being remedial, rather than purely retributive and endless. After all, do not loving parents who quickly forgive one child who genuinely says 'sorry' and seeks forgiveness, wisely delay an open expression of forgiveness from another child who is unrepentant? - But only until they too are sorry. It is inconceivable that the second child should never be shown mercy. In such a case, the chastening itself is a mercy, meant for the child's good. James is saying that it is better for us to be merciful than receive God's chastening for withholding our mercy.

Even though someone's prospect of salvation may seem hopeless, we are told that 'Love ... hopes all things' (1Cor.13:7).

Paul's words in Eph.2:12 and 1Thess.4:13 about people having no hope, do not mean that unbelievers have no hope of salvation, but that sinners in their unconverted state know nothing of the hope that faith brings. Of course, we should hope and pray for all people, especially our unbelieving loved ones (Matt.19:23-26; 1Cor.7:16; 1Tim.2:1-3).

HUMAN REASONING (The Place For)

Despite the Fall, which, among other things, has corrupted our understanding of the things of God, Jesus encourages us to reason from the human to the divine. The following examples make this clear. -

Matt.7:9-12 - reasoning from the care and kindness of parents toward their children, to the unstinting goodness and generosity of God our Father.

Luke 15:4-7 - reasoning from a shepherd's concern for every last one of his sheep, to Christ's loving concern for every sinner.

Luke 15:8-10 - drawing a parallel between a woman's determination to find her lost coin, and Christ's unrelenting search for every lost soul.

Luke 15:11-32 – reasoning from the love and forgiveness of a human father towards his wilful and wayward child, to the love of God for His children.

There are numerous examples in Scripture of people drawing helpful parallels between human behaviour, qualities, traits and responses, and the divine. They can be seen in its typology, symbolism and parable throughout the Bible, and in its history, culture and ritual. To a large extent it is through such inspired language and imagery that God has revealed Himself to us and enabled us to express our thoughts of Him.

Admittedly, God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours, but not altogether different, else how could we understand anything about Him? We can understand, but only 'in part,' when He reveals them to us and helps us to appreciate His goodness, wisdom and perfection. Without this revelation God would be largely a mystery to us, and, of course, much about Him and His ways still remains unknown to us (Rom.11:33-35). Still, He has enabled everyone to detect His presence and power in the created order (Rom.1:20).

Since the canon of Scripture is closed and complete, all

ideas of God must be tested against His word. However, thoughts that square with Scripture, but are not necessarily framed in scriptural language or form, are acceptable, as long as they faithfully express scriptural principles. This gives us scope for imagination and creativity, for the Bible presents us with an amazing medley of truth. The Puritans were adept at teaching its many aspects, showing how all contribute to one glorious whole.

IGNORANCE (Of God's Will)

Paul makes clear that the evidence of God's existence, power, wisdom and providence in the created order leaves unbelievers without excuse. Nevertheless, God makes some allowance for ignorance of His will. This is demonstrated in the following ways:-

Matt.11:20-24 – Tyre, Sidon and Sodom, all ancient centres of wickedness, would, we are assured, have 'repented and remained long ago in sackcloth and ashes' if Jesus' works had been done in them: which raises the question of whether their inhabitants will be condemned to endless punishment for lack of revelation? Ezek16:44-63 sheds light on this. See also S. Cox's *Salvator Mundi*, ch.1.

Luke 23:34 - Jesus forgave His executioners because they did not realize the full import of what they were doing, and to whom they were doing it. Will not the ignorance of the vast majority of people - with regard to Jesus' identity and claims as the Son of God, and His loving purpose in laying down His life for this sinful world - draw from Him the prayer of forgiveness uttered from the Cross?

Luke 12:35-48 - the different degrees of punishment dealt to the servants in this parable shows that God makes allowance for ignorance of His will.

Acts 3:17 - those who acted in ignorance when they 'killed the Prince of life' (v.15), are exhorted to reconsider and believe in Him.

Rom.10:3 - in ignorance of God's righteousness the Jews sought to establish their own, rather than submitting to the righteousness of God in Christ. We may see hope in this verse, for Paul himself acted in ignorance when he persecuted the Church, leading to God having mercy on him. Paul says that his conversion was a 'pattern' to all who would believe in Christ, i.e., a pattern of grace and mercy (1Tim.1:12-17). See *The Larger Hope*, p.68.

1Cor.2:7,8 - the rulers of this world played their part in putting to death the Lord of glory, but they would not have killed Him if they had known who He really was.

Heb.9:7 - atonement was made in Israel for those who sinned in ignorance, suggesting that Christ's atoning sacrifice covers all who have similarly sinned. Is there not, in fact, a degree of universal ignorance of the One sinned against? Further, could we, on receiving perfect knowledge of God and His love for us, and of the absolute sinfulness of sin and its consequences, choose to reject Him? (see *The Inescapable Love of God*, Thomas Talbott, pp.181-199).

Eph.4:17,18 - shows that ignorance of God and His will can be accompanied by hardness of heart, bringing greater culpability. However, the above passages clearly teach that ignorance of God's will, Christ's identity, and the significance of His saving work, is taken into account when it comes to being granted further opportunities of coming to faith.

IMPOSSIBLE?

Gen.18:14 - 'Is anything too hard for the LORD?'

Jer.32:17 - 'There is nothing too hard for You.'

Jer.32:27 - 'Is there anything too hard for Me?'

Zech.8:6 - things too marvellous for us to believe are not too marvellous for God.

Matt.19:26 - 'With men this is impossible [salvation], but with God all things are possible.'

Luke 1:37 - 'For with God nothing will be impossible.'

IMPROVEMENT

Suffering is permitted/inflicted for our spiritual improvement, just as fire refines base metal (Mal.3:2,3; Acts 9:15,16). We are exhorted to purify ourselves if we hope to see and reign with Christ (2Cor.7:1; 1John 3:3; Rom.8:17; 2Tim.2:12, AV).

Loving and wise parents chasten their children for no reason but that of correcting and improving them. If this is true in the case of fallen human beings, how much more so of God our wise, good and merciful heavenly Father.

The very expression, 'the restoration of all things' (Acts 3:21) speaks of the improvement of God's fallen creation, in and through Christ, until it becomes what He intends it to be.

So, God's anger, wrath, and punishment of His creatures, are part of His responsible, determined, gracious and loving strategy for the improvement, renewal and

recovery, in Christ, of all that has been damaged by the Fall.

INCURABLE

In several places in Scripture people and nations are said to be 'incurable,' with respect to their physical/spiritual/moral sickness - and yet are 'cured' or 'delivered' (Job. 34:6; Jer.15:18-21; 30:12,15, 17; Mic.1:9 with 4:6,7 and 7:8,9, 18-20) - all of which inspires hope of God's forgiveness and restoration of those we may deem incurable and incorrigible sinners, even the worst offenders (Ezek.16:44-63; 1Tim.1:15).

INVENTIONS

God forgave Israel, but took vengeance on her 'inventions' (Ps.99:8, AV; 'deeds,' NKJV). His vengeance is seen in Ezek.6:1-10, and His forgiveness in Ezek.16:53-63. This is essentially the same as God loving the sinner whilst hating his sin, even destroying the 'flesh' that the spirit may be saved (1Cor.5:5); and chastening offenders for their profit, that they may 'partake of His holiness' (Heb.12:10).

ISRAEL

Israel is beloved of God - Deut.4:37; 2Chron.9:8; Isa.48:14; Jer.11:15; 12:7; 31:3; Rom.11:28.

Israel redeemed, ransomed,

atoned for - Deut.9:26; 21:8; Ps.74:2; Isa.43:1; 53:6; 44:22; Zech.10:8, AV; John 1:29; 1John 2:2

Israel are the children of the LORD, a chosen people, a holy people, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth - Deut.14:1,2.

Both the 'first-fruit' of Israel (those of Israel who receive Christ in this age) and the 'lump' (whole nation) are holy - Rom.11:16.

All Israel will receive mercy and be saved - Isa.45:25; Rom.11:25-32; Heb.8:7-13.

JUDAS

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.68-71. See also Andrew Jukes, *The Restoration of All Things* (1877), p.132, and footnote - where he shows that Ps.69:23,25 is applied in Rom.11:10 and Acts 1:19,20 to both Judas and Israel - with the inference that if Israel is to be restored, then we may hope even for Judas.

JUDGMENT

Sadly in the minds of many, even Christians, divine judgment is usually seen in a negative way, as condemnatory, with few hopeful exceptions. The following aspects of judgment in Scripture should help to reveal the word in a truer light.

Judgment Accompanied by Mercy, Correction, Healing and Restoration

God combines judgment with mercy in order to instruct and restore - 2Chron.33:10-13; Ps.119:75-76, 175; Isa.16:5; 19:22; 26:9; 30:18,19; 42:1-4; 51:4,5; Hos.5:14,15; 6:1,2; Hab.1:12; Zeph.3:8,9.

Jerome's comments on Zeph.3:8-9 are helpful: 'The nations, even the multitude of the nations, are gathered to the Judgment, but the kings . . . are led up for punishment, in order that on them may be poured out *all the wrath of the fury of the Lord*. And this is not done from any cruelty, . . . but in *pity*, and with a design to *heal* * * For the nations being assembled for judgment, and the kings for punishment, in order that wrath may be poured out on them: not in part but in whole, and both *wrath and fury being united* (in order that) whatever is earthy may be consumed in the whole world.'

Allin adds: 'The Day of Wrath that is to *burn like fire*, and to *consume* the adversaries of God, burns up only what is earthy, bringing to every sinner salvation' (Allin, *Christ Triumphant*, p.198).

Judgment as Justice

God's judgment always

involves justice - Job.37:23,24;
Isa.45:21; 56:1, AV; Jer.23:5, AV;
Zech.8:16; 9:9.

True judgment involves
spiritual discernment - 1Kings
3:9, 16-28.

God's Judgment of Israel

Apostate Israel was judged and
sentenced to the sword, famine
and death, but with no mention
of endless punishment in a fiery
hell - Jer.15:1-3; Hos.9:17.

God's judgment of His
disobedient people was severe,
but His thoughts were of *peace*
towards the captives in Babylon
- Jer.29:7, 11-14.

Israel's bruise was 'incurable,'
he wound 'grievous,' but God
was able to cure and heal her -
Jer.30:12, 17.

The valley of dry bones
teaches us that those who had
sinned and had experienced
temporal judgment, and were
like dry bones, were given new
life through God's mercy -
Ezek.ch.37.

Ps.119:20, 75, 175 - the
Psalmist was afraid of God's
judgments, which are always
pure, righteous and searching,
but for our good. We fear the
pain/shame of exposure and
correction, and of the spiritual
surgery it involves, even though
we know it is beneficial and
necessary if we are to partake of
God's holiness (Heb.12:10).

God's Judgments are Educational and Reformative

This is seen in Isa.26:9, where
Isaiah comes to realize the need
of God's judgments in the earth
if its inhabitants are to *learn*
righteousness.

Suffering the Ultimate Temporal Judgment

Our first parents suffered the
ultimate *temporal* judgment, i.e.,
death; but it says nothing about
eternity; for they *and the human
race in them* were redeemed,
which is indicated/symbolized
by God's covering of them with
the skin of a sacrificed animal -
Gen.3:15, 21; 1Cor.15:22.

This principle applies to all
Adam's offspring, for although
all are born 'dead in trespasses
and sins,' all are redeemed.
What is more, Adam and Eve
were more guilty before God
than their children have been,
for although they were not
created in bondage to sin, Satan,
the world and the flesh, they
still sinned. Yet God has
mercifully redeemed them -
and all their progeny in them -
which is a token of hope for us
all.

Some judgments recorded in
the Bible seem to leave the
wicked devoid of hope, such as
the judgment of Sodom and
Gomorrah, the Antediluvians,
and the wicked at the Last

Judgment, the latter even being raised from the dead only to be cast into the lake of fire (Rev.20:11-15; 21:8). However, if, as I believe, God punishes essentially to improve, refine and renew, it is conceivable that even those who suffer the lake of fire, the second death (remembering the highly symbolic nature of the language here, and elsewhere in the Book of Revelation) will suffer in order to have every trace of sin, evil, corruption, moral and spiritual impurity destroyed, so they may be saved 'yet so as through fire' (1Cor.3:14,15; 5:5; 1Tim.1:20). These will suffer in a more severe way what believers have suffered in *this life*, i.e., mortification of the flesh, the old sinful nature (Rom.8:13; Col.3:5); refining, by the fires of persecution, due to faithfulness to Christ in a hostile world (1Pet.1:6,7; 4:12-14); cleansing from every defilement of flesh and spirit, in order that they may become partakers of God's holiness (2Cor.7:1; Heb.12:10).

God, we are told, 'scourges every son whom He receives (Heb.12:6), and His sons are willing, out of love for and obedience to Him, to suffer with Christ that they may reign with Him. This helps us to understand Jesus' words,

'everyone will be seasoned with fire' (Mark 9:49). Those who reject Christ now, or have no real opportunity to believe in and follow Him in this life, will suffer God's searching, judgment in the next world, in order to be able to join the ranks of believers in the new heavens and new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2Pet.3:13).

So divine judgment has different aspects. It is sometimes retributive, but it usually involves an element of justice, mercy, correction, education and reform. Although we tend to polarize God's goodness and severity, they are both aspects of His love, both instruments for bringing about the eternal good of His creatures (See *The Larger Hope*, pp. 44-46).

KINGDOM OF GOD / HEAVEN

The kingdom of God has many facets of meaning. It can be seen to be past, present and future, and *eternal*, for God is eternally omnipotent and omni-present, always the sovereign Lord of creation.

However God's sovereign, and eternal reign over all things is not always acknowledged or willingly submitted to. Even when lip-service is paid to it,

it is another matter to invite God to reign in the heart and life. For this reason Jesus taught us to pray, 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.' Of course, God's will is done at all times, either willingly or unwillingly, on our part, for He is sovereign; but it is only when the whole creation gladly and lovingly extols God, and obeys His perfect will, that the kingdom of God and its benefits will be fully realized, experienced and enjoyed universally.

Paul describes the kingdom of God as 'righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' (Rom.14:17), which tells us that the kingdom is a matter, not just of divine authority, but the experience and quality of life enjoyed by true believers.

The Kingdom in Terms of the Special Role of the Saints, Elect, and Sons of God

This aspect of the kingdom is little known or understood in the Church as a whole. It may be that it is avoided due to the way it suggests that some Christians have a special place/role/responsibility in the outworking of God's will and purpose (see Elect, Firstborn and First-fruits)

This subject needs to be handled humbly, reverently,

sensitively, if it is not to disturb some people. The following are a few pointers to it: -

Jesus said to His disciples, 'you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel' (Luke 22:28-30; see also 12:32). Two things should be noted here, i) that it is those who 'endure' (NKJV), 'suffer with' (AV) Christ who will reign with Him in glory (2Tim.2:12); and ii) the kingdom bestowed on the twelve disciples (and, by inference, all the faithful) entails the privilege and responsibility of judging and ruling the nations.

In 1Cor.6:1-3, Paul speaks of the saints judging the world, even judging angels, in the age to come, which echoes Dan.7:18, 27, where it is foretold that the saints of the Most High will be given the kingdom and will reign over 'all dominions' with Christ. Similarly, the Book of Revelation speaks of i) the overcomers receiving power over the nations, to rule/shepherd (Gk) them with a rod of iron (Rev.2:26,27; and ii) of them sitting with Christ on His throne (3:21). Then we read of the

twenty-four elders being around the throne, who are given white robes and crowns of gold, made kings and priests, and destined to reign on the earth (4:4, 10; 5:9-10).

Then there are the 'virgins' (possibly the same saints), i.e., the undefiled, footstep followers of Christ, who are also 'first-fruits to God and to the Lamb' (14:4,5).

Also mentioned are the blessed ones who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9), which possibly relates to the 'kingdom' parables of the Wedding Feast (Matt.22:1-14) and the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matt.25:1-13); and to the fact that neither the improperly dressed gate-crasher in the former, nor the Foolish Virgins in the latter, were admitted to the wedding feast.

Although there are various interpretations of the twenty four elders destined to reign on the earth, it is conceivable that they represent the 'church of the firstborn' (Heb.12:23) - twelve being associated with the elect patriarchs, tribes, and Apostles - twice twelve speaking of the double portion given to firstborn sons in Bible times, to help them govern, represent and serve their brethren (Deut.21:17).

This is to some extent

conjecture, but not, I believe, without some scriptural foundation. For all the above passages suggest that it is Christ's tried and tested faithful servants who will reign with Him - ruling, judging and serving the greater company of the redeemed (the whole of creation) in the ages to come - a 'high calling' indeed (Phil.3:14). Paul calls this a 'prize,' whilst eternal life is a gift, which suggests he was referring to the privilege, not only being with and like Christ, but qualified to reign with Him in the glorious administration of His kingdom (Matt.25:19-23; Luke 19:16-19).

All these aspects of the kingdom should challenge us to be vigilant and diligent as Christians: to watch, pray and wait for God's Son from heaven. We are to occupy ourselves with the work He has given us to do, until He comes (Matt.26:41; 1Thess.1:10; Luke 19:13). Salvation is 'by grace through faith,' but from the above we get the distinct impression that it is the faithful, vigilant, diligent, persevering, over-coming saints (Rev.ch.2-3), those who earnestly love and seek the Lord (2 Tim.4:8), who will enjoy the marriage feast of the Lamb, and reign with Him in the ages to come. We should all be exercised by these things.

KNOWLEDGE (Of God)

God reveals Himself in many ways – through creation, the Bible, conscience, and to some extent providence, events and circumstances. If Scripture, the testimony of creation, providence and the witness of conscience fail to gain our attention and turn us to God, He will bring us to know Him through judgment, wrath, chastening, punishment or even death. This is spelled out in Ezek.ch.6,7, where the words 'then you/they shall know that I am the LORD' are repeated seven times, each time after judgments announced by God. So it was God's purpose to bring Israel to know Him and submit to Him one way or another, in order that He might bless them.

God's chastening of His children, which is the sharp side of His love, is inflicted in order that we might know, love and obey Him, for His glory and our eternal good. In the end, He, His love, mercy and goodness, will be praised by every creature (Rev.5:13).

KNOWLEDGE (Of God's Will)

Even Spirit-filled believers may remain ignorant of aspects of God's will.

In Acts 11:1-18 we see how the first Christians, even the

Apostles, were largely ignorant of God's will with regard to His acceptance of Gentiles into the Church. It was vital truth those Jewish believers were ignorant of – God in His love embracing all people regardless of race – and it may be that there are vital truths today that Christians are to some degree ignorant of – such as God's purpose to save all people. Although the Old Testament contains a number of references to the reception of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God, the Jews, and even the pre-Cornelius Church (which was almost entirely Jewish), at first failed to recognize this. Similarly, despite 2,000 yrs of Christianity, many Christians have a blind spot with regard to passages in both Testaments about God's purpose to restore all things in and through Christ.

The revelation of God's purpose to save the Gentiles was a revelation of the greatness and extent of God's redeeming love. Likewise, the truth concerning the salvation of all people involves a revelation of the universal nature/scope of God's redeeming and reconciling love in Christ.

Peter needed courage to share what he had seen and heard on the rooftop at Joppa, and what he had said and done at the house of Cornelius. His Jewish

brethren from Jerusalem were offended at first, but had to acknowledge the truth of Peter's testimony. However, some remained spiritually blinkered and later tried to impose circumcision on Gentile converts to Christianity, so deeply rooted was their shadowy Old Testament understanding of things. This helps us to understand and empathize with our more traditional brethren today, who cannot envisage how God's love will ensure the salvation of all people.

We all need to guard against bigotry, for if we could understand all mysteries and yet had not love we, as Paul says, would profit nothing.

LOST

Being 'lost,' in a spiritual sense, is variously understood by Christians. Apart from describing the general state of fallen humanity, being 'lost' (with regard to the final state) is held to mean, i) being endlessly separated from God, while suffering various forms of retributive punishment (the traditional view); ii) being condemned to endless oblivion/destruction/annihilation (Conditional Immortality); iii) being alienated from God, but only until His finds, saves and

restores us to Himself in and through Christ, either in this life or in the world to come. Punishment, in this last view, is seen by many to be essentially remedial, albeit with a retributive element (Universal Salvation/Ultimate Reconciliation/The Larger Hope).

The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:1-7) shows that apart from lost-ness being linked with sin and guilt, it is God Himself, the Good Shepherd, who *has lost us*, His sheep. Our being lost is God's loss, and He has graciously and lovingly (and we may say, responsibly) purposed in Christ to seek, find and restore all people to Himself, so that in the end not one of His sheep will be lost. Like the shepherd in the parable, He searches for us 'until' every last one of us is found (Luke 15:4); first the first-fruits and then the harvest.

Suffering 'loss' (1Cor.3:15) and 'destruction' (1Cor.5:5) are related, in that they describe not final loss, but the loss/destruction of our 'flesh' (sinful nature) in order that we may partake of God's holiness (Heb.12:10).

In 1Cor.9:24-27, in the analogy of the 'the race' and 'the fight,' Christians have to endure. The word 'castaway' (v.27, AV) has been interpreted

differently. Bible commentators Matthew Poole and Matthew Henry make it eternal loss, as though Paul feared that neglecting his walk with Christ could lead to forfeiting his salvation. However, Leon Morris maintains that being 'cast away' (AV) 'disqualified' (NKJV) means *not* the loss of eternal life, but rather having one's Christian work and service in some way discounted or rendered invalid.

From 1Tim.1:18-20 we gather that Christians may suffer 'shipwreck,' through rejecting 'faith and a good conscience' (v.19). However, this 'shipwreck' cannot mean the loss of salvation, because Hymenaeus and Alexander (the offenders) were delivered to Satan in order that they might 'learn not to blaspheme.' Clearly, their punishment was corrective and educational, designed to remedy their fault and restore them to the Christian community.

Christians presented with the Larger Hope often have difficulty understanding how the Gospel can be meaningful without any real possibility that unbelievers can be lost, i.e., separated from God for ever. It is as though wanting people to avoid this has become their main motivation for preaching

the Gospel. Whilst it is true that to forever reject God's love in Christ would mean being separated from God for ever, the difference between Christian Universalists and those of the more traditional school on this issue is that the former believe that God is so great, good, loving and all-merciful that He can and will win all His children to Himself in the end. Dr Leslie Weatherhead says: 'I know there is the theoretical possibility that a soul with free will may finally say "No" to God and refuse to belong to the family.' However, with him, we ask: 'But can the love of God ultimately fail? The woman sought the lost coin *until she found it*. The shepherd sought over the dark mountains the lost sheep *until he found it*.' (*In Search of a Kingdom*, p.186).

A related aspect of being 'lost' is that until people come to faith in Christ they are *already* lost. Jesus came 'to seek and to save that which was lost.' He came, not to condemn or destroy us, but to save us from our sins (John 3:17; Luke 9:56; Matt.1:21); i.e., save us not only from the condemnation attached to sin, but the power of sin and ultimately the presence of sin – in other words to bring us into abundant life *now* as well as in the world to come (John 10:10).

So it is receiving and relishing new life now, and as our ongoing experience, that is the main thrust of Jesus' teaching about saving the lost, rather than salvation from endless punishment – although there is a place for fear of punishment, but only as it is understood in the light of Scripture as a whole.

The *gehenna* ('hell', AV) that Jesus warned of is a serious consideration. Unbelievers will experience the anguish of falling into the hands of the living God. The fact that punishment will be administered by the God who 'is love' in the essence of His Being, will add to, rather than diminish, its unpleasantness; but the outcome will be positive, in that it will result in the purification, reform and restoration of every wayward and rebellious soul, until all acknowledge and worship God and the Lamb (Phil.2:9-11; Rev.5:13).

It will be a 'fearful thing,' and grievous, for persistent sinners to fall into God's hands because, i) they will have to confess to their holy, loving, and gracious Creator, who is worthy of all their praise, the grievous catalogue of their sins, and be made to realize the terrible consequences for their lives and the lives of others; ii) they will be compelled to face the God

they have never known or loved, which in itself must constitute much of the horror they will experience, until He graciously reveals Himself as the Father who loves them and chastens because He loves; and iii) they will have to suffer the 'fire' of His disciplinary and remedial judgment, whatever form that may take.

These things are fearful to contemplate, but are made tolerable, even laudable, to all who know they spring from the loving heart of God and His eternal purpose to bless His erring creatures, though it be through the fires of discipline, purification and renewal, until we become like His Son. All who have this hope 'purify themselves,' by putting to death the old, sinful nature, but the rest, who are indifferent or even hostile to God/godliness, will be brought to repentance and faith through *tailored* judgment (1John 3:2,3; 2Chron.33:10-13).

We should want people to be saved from the traumatic path to God and His blessing described, very inadequately, above; but this desire should not spring from the falsely grounded, withering fear that God will banish some/many of His children to endless torment.

What glorious hope accompanies the conviction that

God will in the end receive and bless all His offspring; that He will seek all His lost sheep until He has found them.

LOVE

God is love (1John 4:8,16) – love in the essence of his Being. Love is not just an attribute of God, but is the root, motivation, nature and goal of all He is and does. Hence, God cannot be anything other than loving in all He purposes and does. Even His sharpest judgments and punishments are grounded in and spring from His unchanging love for His creatures.

Paterson Smyth, author of the popular *A People's Life of Christ*, and who was favourable to the Larger Hope but not entirely convinced of it, wrote: 'Love is the plant that must top all others in the whole kingdom of God' (*The Gospel of the Hereafter*, p.99).

'Love does no harm to a neighbour' (Rom.13:10), and 'Love covers all sins' (Prov.10:12). These verses about human love and forgiveness surely reflect the heart and mind of God, even towards His enemies; a heart and mind He wants to see in us. To so love, is to display our Father's likeness. It shows we are His children (Matt.5:43-48).

'God,' we read in John 3:16, 'so loved the world' (the world of humanity), and because unchanging, always loves it. He promises that all who believe in Christ, His love gift to the world, will not perish. This has led many to think that the contrary is true, i.e., that all who do not believe will perish eternally. However, the truer understanding, based on the whole counsel of God, is, I suggest, that the One who so loves the world's people does not merely offer the means of salvation and leave it to their spiritually impotent hearts and minds to respond in faith, but will sooner or later draw them to Himself and graciously lead them to drink of the water of life. For of what use is the *offer* of life unless people are given the *will* and the *faith* to receive it? Don't we read that God *gives* the ability to believe, to 'will and to do His good pleasure'? (Eph.2:8; Phil.2:12,13). The Church, the first-fruits, are given it in this age, but what is true of the *first-fruits* will be seen to be true of the great harvest of souls, pictured by God's dealings with Israel (Rom.11:15, 16, 25-31).

God is 'kind to the unthankful and the evil' (Luke 6:35); consequently we may surely reason, on the basis of

the testimony of Scripture to God's tender mercies being over 'all His works' (Ps.145:9), that He will not limit His kindness to meeting people's material needs, including the needs of the unthankful and the evil, but will meet their infinitely greater need of being *restored to Him*; otherwise it would be like providing food and clothing for people in prison, but forever withholding the keys of liberty – in the case of salvation, the keys of repentance and faith in Christ – both gifts of His grace (Jer.24:7; 31:18; 33:25,26; Acts 5:31; 11:18; Jam.1:17; see below for Paul's comments about God's sovereignty in the matter of granting mercy in Rom.ch.9).

There are many instances in Scripture of God turning the wicked to Himself (Manasseh, Nebuchadnezzar and Saul of Tarsus), vividly illustrating His 'will' and ability to save all people, all He has ransomed, even the 'chief of sinners' (1Tim.2:4-6; 1:15).

We read in Prov.10:12 that 'Love covers all offences,' a truth depicted by God's covering our first parents (and the human race in them) with garments made from the skin of a sacrificed animal (Gen.3:21). In His love He has embraced the whole race, redeeming and reconciling all to Himself in

Christ, and has promised the restoration of all things in Him, beginning with the first-fruits and ending with the harvest, when the whole creation will be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom.8:21).

Rom.5:6-8 reveals that God's love for the 'ungodly' (i.e., for all who have sinned and fallen short of His glory), led Him to send His Son to die for us, even while we were yet sinners. Some in the Reformed Evangelical school deny that God loves all people 'savingly,' but Paul, in these verses, paints a different picture, for if Christ died 'for the ungodly,' and is 'the propitiation 'for the sins of the whole world' (1John 1:2, AV), then who can be left out of the sweep of His gracious and generous purpose? The love which embraces the elect first-fruits in this age will be seen ultimately to embrace all people, as His purpose for the whole creation is worked out.

What God does, with regard to believers in this age, is a foretaste of what He will do for *all* in the ages to come. His 'hatred' of Esau (Rom.9:13) is, I believe, just another way of saying that He *chose* Jacob rather than Esau for the rights of the firstborn in his family, i.e., the

the privilege and responsibility of leading, counselling, shepherding and representing his people before God, and in Jacob's case, furthering the Messianic line.

God loves Israel despite all she has done/failed to do (Rom.11:28), showing that His love, even for the 'ungodly', is everlasting (see notes on Israel). One passage may at first seem to cast doubt on this (Hos.9:15), where God says of Israel, 'I have hated them . . . I will love them no more.' However, a little further on (14:4), God says of His backsliding people, 'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely.'

Evidently God can both 'hate' and 'love' at the same time, i.e., hate sin and its results, whilst loving the sinner (See Ps.99:8; Jer.12:7,8; 1Cor.5:5). This truth is a vital key to understanding God's dealings with Israel, and with people in general.

The Love of God

Love afflicts, only to heal (Isa.19:22).

Love employs the devil, only to teach (1Tim.1:20).

Love scourges, only for our good (Heb.12:5,6).

Love banishes, only to restore (2Sam.14:14).

Love exiles, only to bring home (Isa.43:1-21).

Love kills, only to make alive (1Sam.2:6).

Love burns, only to purify (Mal.3:1-3).

Love breaks, only to remake (Jer.18:1-4).

Love destroys, only to save (1Cor.5:5).

Love exposes, only to cover (Gen.3:9-11, 21; Prov.10:12).

Love imprisons, only to release (Isa.24:21,22; 42:6,7).

Love avenges, only to forgive (Jude 7; Ezek.16:53-63)

Love uproots, only to replant (Jer.24:6)

Love acts, only for the benefit of others (1Cor.10:24; Phil.2:4).

Love does no harm (Rom.13:10).

Love is kind to the unthankful and evil (Luke 6:35).

Love should motivate all we do (1Cor.16:14).

Love is the more excellent way (1Cor.12:31-13:13).

Love is the essence of God's Being (1John 4:8, 16).

Love, when perfected, casts out fear (1John 4:18).

MANY

The word 'many' in verses relating to redemption, salvation and judgment needs to be understood carefully, for in some contexts it means less than 'all' in an absolute sense. However, in many instances where the writers speak of the redemption/salvation of 'many' there is no reason to believe they mean anything less than 'everyone without exception' (except where the context and common sense indicate otherwise).

To give a general example, when speaking of the number of human beings on earth being 'many' we are referring to the earth's total population - 'many' and 'all,' in this case, clearly being synonymous.

The following examples illustrate the synonymity of 'all' and 'many' (Isa.53:6, 11; in the context of Israel, and by extension, all people - John 1:29; Rom.5:18, 19; Heb.9:27, 28; 1Tim.2:6; 1John 2:2). In these passages, 'the world,' 'many,' 'all,' and 'men,' naturally appear to mean all people without exception. To try to

make these words mean 'some' seems contrived. And yet the attempt is made by Calvinists.

In Heb.9:27 Paul tells us that men are appointed to die once, obviously meaning 'all' people without exception. He then declares the divine remedy of Christ being offered to bear the sins of 'many' (v.28) which, if it doesn't mean 'all without exception,' makes the scope of God's redemption more limited than His appointment of all to die, which contradicts Paul's clear teaching that grace abounds *much more* than sin and its effects (Rom.5:20,21).

It is true that in a few instances we are told that Jesus died/gave Himself, for 'many' (Matt.20:28; 26:28), but these are clarified and shown to mean 'all' without exception by numerous other passages.

Examples of 'All' Meaning Everyone Without Exception

Isa.25:6-8 - 'all' occurs five times in these promises of salvation. It is difficult to imagine Isaiah meaning anything other than all people without exception.

Isa.40:5 - all flesh shall see the glory of the Lord. Regardless of whether or not this means that all will be saved, all will see God's glory.

Isa.45:23, 24 - to God 'every

knee shall bow . . . every tongue take an oath . . . "Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength" ' - which is a clear testimony that the whole world will acknowledge and worship God and His Son (see Phil.2:9-11).

Isa.52:7-10 - 'all the ends of the earth' will see the salvation of God' (see Luke 3:6).

Jer.31:34 - every member of the house of Israel and Judah (v.31) will know the Lord and be forgiven.

Dan.7:13,14 - 'all peoples, nations and languages' will serve Christ. It is inconceivable (in the light of these verses, and v.27) that any will fail to serve Him.

Acts 22:15 - not strictly 'all men,' for Paul could not witness to everyone in the world, or even the Roman Empire - yet we could say he did so *intentionally*, in that he would have done so if it were possible.

Rom.11:32 - 'God has committed . . . all to disobedience,' with the express intention of having 'mercy on all.' His withholding mercy from some, for a period (Rom.9:15), is no indication that He will withhold it for ever. He withholds it 'until' certain conditions have been met, lessons learned, developments taken place (Rom.11: 25, 26);

in reality the withholding of blessing for a season is a necessary discipline meant for our ultimate good.

1Cor.15:25-28 - 'all enemies' and 'all things' in these verses include all people without exception. It is to these, Paul says, God will become 'all in all.'

Phil.3:21 - Christ is able to transform and conform our lowly bodies to His glorious body, just as He is able to subdue all things to Himself, i.e., all things without exception.

1Tim.2:6 - Christ 'gave Himself a ransom for all' - which clarifies what Jesus said about giving His life a 'ransom 'for many' (Mark 10:45). Bearing in mind the infinite greatness of God's goodness, love and power, it is surely wrong insist on the *seemingly* more restrictive of these two sayings; for have we not seen that in Scripture 'many' often means 'all.'

Heb.1:2,3 - Christ is the 'heir of all things.' It is difficult to understand this as anything other than all things in an absolute sense, i.e., all things without exception.

Examples of 'All' Meaning Less than 'All' without Exception.

Matt.3:5 - 'all Judea, and all the

region around the Jordan went out to Him,' clearly means that *many* from those regions, but not all, went to see Jesus.

'Everyone,' in Mark 1:37, probably means *many*, or perhaps *most* of the people of Capernaum who went looking for Jesus, but not *all*.

Luke 15:1 - by 'all the tax collectors and the sinners' who drew near to Jesus to hear Him is probably meant *many*.

John 3:26 - 'all' in this verse most likely means *most* or *the majority*, as at least some would still be attracted to the Baptist (see 4:1).

John 8:2 - 'all,' i.e., *most*; clearly not every single person in Jerusalem.

Acts 22:15 - Ananias meant that Paul would be a witness to all who would hear him, or of him, or read his writings, but not to everyone in the world.

Col.1:6 - 'all the world' means something like 'far and wide' rather than every country, city, town and village.

So when the opponents of the Larger Hope assure us that not all the 'alls' in Scripture refer to every single person, we can agree with them, whilst showing that in some passages on redemption, reconciliation and salvation, 'all' can, and often does, mean everyone without exception.

MERCY

There are too many references to God's mercy in the Bible to comment on them all, but we can focus on some of them.

God's Merciful Nature

Exod.34:6 - 'the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth' (see also Ps. 86:15; Neh.9:17). The first thing God declared about Himself as He passed before Moses is that He was 'merciful.' He went on to say that He would not clear the guilty, and that their iniquity would be visited on their children to the third and fourth generation (v.7); but repentance is always possible (Ps.51; Acts 3:19; 1John 1:9); and there is no mention here (or in any other OT warning of judgment) of endless torment in hell. The consequences of sin, even sin that has been forgiven, can persist for a lifetime, or longer, as in the case of Solomon and the division of the kingdom. However, it is through God's unchanging mercy that we are 'not consumed' (Mal.3:6), showing that divine judgment, punishment and chastening, though containing an element of retribution, spring from God's love and mercy, and are essentially remedial.

Ps.118:1-4 - a fourfold declaration that God's mercy 'endures forever' - which tells us that mercy is an unchanging part of His character.

Ps.145:9 - speaks of God's tender mercies being over 'all His works,' i.e., including all people, all the souls He has made (Isa.57:16; Num.16:22; Job 34:19; Ps.138:8; Ps.139:14; Col.1:16).

2Cor.1:3 - God is the 'Father of mercies,' consequently, when we think of His fatherhood His mercy should immediately spring to mind and heart, and fill us with hope.

Further Aspects of God's Mercy

Deut.24:7 - in the light of this OT death sentence on all who kidnap and sell their brethren into slavery, Joseph's brethren deserved to die (Gen.37:27, 28). However, God, through Joseph, was merciful to them, assuring them that selling their brother into slavery was part of His purpose to save them and their father's house (and the people of Egypt). So while we all deserve to die, the greater Joseph, our Lord Jesus Christ, has borne our suffering and death, and out of His everlasting love and mercy has redeemed and reconciled us to God. This story admirably

illustrates the Larger Hope - God's mercy towards those who deserve His judgment.

Judges 10:15,16 - God could not bear to see His people suffer. After a period of chastening He granted them repentance and forgiveness. Unlike His mercy, His wrath does not endure forever. So if, after a few years of witnessing His people's earthly misery under His judgment, He was moved to forgive and deliver them, is it conceivable that He could endure to see His creatures suffer endlessly in some fiery hell? (see also Judges 2:18).

2Sam.18:5 - if David ordered his generals to deal gently with his son, the rebellious, usurping Absalom, will not the greater David, our Lord Jesus Christ, show mercy to all who, like Absalom, deserve to be banished from His presence? (see, from 2Sam.14:14, how God devises means to restore His banished ones to Himself, i.e., by means of Christ). Notice how David continued to seek his son's welfare, even after he showed no appreciation for being forgiven, but instead rose up against his father - illustrating God's unchanging attitude of mercy towards His wayward and undeserving children.

1Chron.21:13 - David preferred to fall into the hands of the Lord rather than suffer other punishments - because the Lord's mercies 'are very great.'

Job.6:14 - mercy and kindness are to be shown to the afflicted, *even though they forsake the fear of the Almighty*. A clear example of God's mercy to His enemies.

Job.42:10 - it was when Job prayed for his misguided friends that God restored his losses and blessed Him - an attitude of concern, forgiveness and mercy God desires to see in all of us.

Ps.30:5 - God's anger is 'but for a moment,' but 'His favour is for life.'

Ps.90 - the whole Psalm is an expansion of the theme of mercy expressed in Rom.11:32. It shows that mercy, grace and love - not merit, works and human achievement - are at the heart of salvation.

Ps.99:8 - God forgives sinners, but takes vengeance on their 'inventions' (AV), 'deeds' (NKJV).

Ps.130:3,4 - the Psalmist rejoices that there is forgiveness with God. For He is a God who does not mark iniquities, at least not forever, but has dealt with them in His Son.

Ps.136:25 - will the God who 'gives food to all flesh' because

'His mercy endures forever,' withhold the greater mercy of salvation from any of His creatures?

Prov. 21:13 - those who show no mercy will be shown no mercy, e.g., the rich man in the Parable (Luke 16:19-31). But chastening, however severe, will come to an end when those being chastened have been exercised/trained by it; for the Lord will not be angry forever (Heb.12:10,11; Mic.7:18, 19).

Prov.24:17,18; 1Kings 3:11 - we should not rejoice over the fall of our enemies. Some preachers and teachers have taught that the saints will rejoice when they see the wicked tormented in hell (i.e., the hell they believed in). But these verses show that God never intended us to do such a thing.

Prov.24:29; 1Pet.3:9 - we are told not to return evil for evil, so will God return evil for evil? Will not His punishment of wrongdoers be in fact a 'good,' designed and inflicted for their eternal benefit? (Heb.12:3-11).

Prov. 25:21-22 - we are to give our enemies food and drink, so how does this square with the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus? For water is withheld from the Rich Man in Hades. This shows it to be but a *parable*, possibly about the way Israel/Israel's leaders, typified

by the Rich Man, treated the Gentiles, and what happened to them in consequence. The Gentiles are now spiritually blessed, through the Gospel, whilst Israel is spiritually famished, but only 'until the fullness of the gentiles has come in,' then 'all Israel will be saved' (Rom.11:25,26).

Isa.19:18-25 - a wonderful example of God's forgiving and restoring mercy to Israel's longstanding enemies.

Jer.32:16-44 - this detailed passage teaches one essential truth - that God will bless His erring, undeserving people, simply out of His sovereign love and mercy.

Jer.33:1-11; Joel 3:21 - God's promise of mercy and restoration, even to the wicked of Israel.

Lam.3:31-33 - God will not cast off forever, but will have mercy. 'He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies, for He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men,' the last clause extending the promise of mercy beyond Israel to humanity in general.

Ezek.5:7-11 - God's withdrawal of His pity from Israel was for a season only, after which He would return in mercy, as the above passage (and many others) shows.

Ezek.20:44 - God does not deal with Israel as she deserves. She will come to know Him through His dealings with her, including her restoration to the land, demonstrating the corrective, hence merciful, nature of His discipline.

Ezek.39:25 - God will have mercy on the *whole house* of Israel, and if on Israel, who had sunk lower than Sodom and Gomorrah (Ezek.16:44-53), then surely on the whole world, for Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1John 2:2).

Dan.9:3-19 - Daniel begins his prayer with the statement that God keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him and keep His commandments - but goes on to admit that Israel has not done this, hence deserves His judgment. Even so, he appeals to God for mercy. Daniel's spirit in this great intercessory prayer reminds us of our great high priest, Jesus Christ, who loved us while we were yet sinners, showing that all people, though undeserving, can hope for God's mercy - for mercy means being kind to the unworthy.

Hos.9:15 - tells us of God's hatred for His wayward people, and His declaration that He will *love them no more*. But this, as has been explained elsewhere, is

only hatred of their sin, for we read that God will 'ransom them from the power of the grave,' and 'redeem them from death' (Hos.13:14; Isa.53:6).

Amos 7:1-6 - God's mercy is granted in answer to prayer - an encouragement to pray for all people (1Tim.2:1-4).

Mic.6:8 - we are exhorted to 'love mercy' - which implies that God Himself does, and that He wants us to emulate Him. Do we really love mercy when it comes to contemplating the traditional view of the fate of the wicked?

Jesus showed mercy to i) the woman caught in adultery; ii) Thomas who doubted Him; iii) Peter who denied Him; iv) Saul who persecuted Him, and v) those who crucified Him. So God is merciful to the undeserving - to adulterers, doubters, deniers, persecutors and executioners - in other words - to all.

Hab.3:2 - we can pray with Habakkuk, 'O LORD . . . in wrath remember mercy,' which indicates that God's wrath is not necessarily a barrier to His mercy, but may be a preparation for and even an expression of mercy.

Rom.5:20 - sin and death reign in all, but grace and righteousness come to all super-abundantly in and through

Christ (vv.17-19).

Rom.10:1; 1Tim.2:1 - Paul prayed for the salvation of all Israel, just as in 1Tim.2:1 he exhorted believers to pray for all people - all for whom Christ gave Himself a ransom (v.6). Why would Paul pray for all Israel if he did not hope for the salvation of the whole nation and, by inference, all people? We too must pray for Israel and all people, for God is able to graft Israel and all people into the community of the redeemed. He tells us to pray for all people because God's saving grace can reach even the worst sinners (1Tim.1:15).

Rom.11:32 - God has committed all to disobedience, that He 'might have mercy on all.' Here is the essence of God's purpose in salvation - that all might be saved through His mercy and grace in Christ - not through anything we are capable of, for even repentance and faith are His gifts.

Rom.12:14 - if we are to bless and not curse our persecutors to show we are children of our heavenly Father (Matt.5:43-45), will He not do the same, as He did with Saul of Tarsus?

2Cor.2:5-11 - if a believer who sinned so grossly against the light (after a manner not even mentioned among the unbelieving Gentiles) was

mercifully disciplined and restored to church fellowship, will not those who have never known the light, hence are less culpable, be denied mercy?

1Tim.1:15 - mercy was extended to Saul of Tarsus, the chief of sinners, as it was to other grievously wicked sinners, such as Manasseh and Nebuchadnezzar (2Chron.33:10-20; Dan.4:28-37). All these were brought to repentance and faith by the sovereign merciful will of God, showing that God can subdue even the worst offenders to Himself. Doesn't this suggest the possibility of hope for all?

Heb.8:10-12 - mercy is at the heart of the New Covenant.

An old Jewish saying: 'Trust in the mercy of God, even if the sharp sword be at your throat; He forsakes none of His creatures, to give them up to destruction,' expresses the true spirit of Scripture.

The above passages paint a remarkably powerful picture of God's mercy towards His offspring, made in His image, and even encourage, I suggest, firm hope in the ultimate triumph of mercy in every single life.

PERISH

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.48-50. With regard to 'perish' in the

Old Testament, *The New International Encyclopedia of Bible Words*, Zondervan, p.483, says: 'In most cases, and perhaps all, physical death rather than eternal punishment is in view,' which speaks volumes about this subject, and is almost sufficient by itself to dismiss the view that 'perish' means to suffer endlessly in hell.

There is, of course, life after death, and various forms of punishment for the wicked, but the Old Testament, which Jesus assures us is truth (John 17:17), rarely probes beyond physical death. The following Bible references confirm the above comments on 'perish.'

Job 4:7,9,11 - people and animals perish - people through war, disease, famine, divine judgment, or natural causes; and animals through being killed by other animals, by people, or through disease or lack of food - all these resulting in *physical* death.

Job 4:19-20 - 'those who dwell in houses of clay . . . perish forever, with no one regarding.' The word 'forever' in v.20 is relative, i.e., seen from the observer's position. It appears that the dead have to all intents and purposes perished forever, but the full revelation of Scripture shows otherwise (John 5:24-30).

Job 34:10-15 - Elihu says 'all flesh would perish together and man would return to dust' (v.15) if God 'should gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath' (v.14). In other words all would die.

Job 36:5-12 - Elihu equates 'perishing' with death by the sword, i.e., the termination of natural life, with no reference to what happens beyond this life (Matt.26:52).

Prov.10:28 - the 'expectation of the wicked will perish' - meaning their earthly plans and purposes will come to nought, as did those of the rich fool (Luke 12:13-21).

Prov.11:10 - when the wicked perish there is rejoicing - which simply reflects people's response to the death of the wicked, for little if anything was known in Old Testament times about the state of the wicked in the afterlife.

Isa.41:11 - perishing and becoming as nothing, with regard to Israel's enemies, clearly means physical death.

Isa.57:1,2 - a rare OT glimpse into life after death. The righteous 'perish,' sometimes violently, but benefit in that they are removed from evil. They rest, and are at peace, and even 'walk in their uprightness.'

Jer.6:21 - God lays stumbling blocks before His lawless

people that they might fall and perish - die physically.

Amos 1:8 - the Philistines perished, in that they were destroyed in battle.

John 3:16 - 'perish' here means 'die in ones sins,' without experiencing new life in Christ (but see Num. 27:1-3).

1Cor.8:11-13 - 'perish' (v.11) means being spiritually 'wounded' or 'made to stumble' (vv.12,13), for it seems unlikely that Paul meant that an offended believer would suffer endless loss simply due to the insensitivity of others.

2Cor.4:3 - this verse needs to be understood in the context of 3:7-18, where Paul speaks of the veil that remains over the eyes of Israel as a nation. In that sense Israel is 'perishing,' but not eternally, for their blindness/hardness is only 'until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,' then 'all Israel shall be saved' (Rom.11:25,26).

2Cor.4:16; 5:1-5 - 'perishing' and 'destruction' in these verses is of the outward man, hence a purely physical thing.

Jam.1:9-10 - wealth and beauty perish like flowers in the heat. So the end of transient things is meant, not endless punishment.

Because God is good to the unjust and unworthy, we may hope that the principle spelt out

in Isa.57:1,2, that death rescues from evil, may apply with regard to the wicked as well as the righteous, for Christ came to call the unrighteous to repentance. See Rom.6:7.

PUNISHMENT

In Connection With Old Testament Judgments

The death sentence announced in Eden meant the spiritual and eventual physical death of our first parents (Gen.2:16,17; 3:19; 5:5).

Through Adam death came to all, for 'all have sinned' (Rom.5:12-14). However, redemption, reconciliation, and restoration were announced immediately after the Fall (Gen.3:15), signified by the covering of skin provided for Adam and Eve (3:21). Punishment there was, but the remedy in Christ was promised and prefigured, even from the foundation of the world (Rev.13:8). There is no mention of any endless hell, either before or after our first parents fell.

The death sentence on sinful humanity, announced in Eden, was summarily carried out on a whole generation at the Flood (Gen.ch.6-8), but the account of the Deluge contains no hint, warning or threat of everlasting punishment.

We read in Exod.20:5 that the

iniquity of the fathers would be visited *only* as far as the third and fourth generation of those who hated God. So in the record of the Ten Commandments there is no mention of endless punishment for people who broke them.

Punishment that is Essentially, Corrective, Purificatory, and Remedial

The Larger Hope, pp.39-53, shows how punishment in Scripture is essentially temporal and remedial, even when it is described as 'eternal.' There are so many instances of this, that all I can do here is list the following verses, with the briefest of comment, and then some which appear to be exceptions to the rule.

Old Testament

Exodus 22:9 - punishment in Israel, with regard to the loss or damage of other people's animals or possessions, was limited to paying 'double' the value of what was lost or damaged.

Num.12:14-16 - Miriam bore her shame for 'seven days' and was then restored.

Deut.25:1-3 - In Israel punishment was often proportionate and measured, so that the one being punished

may not be excessively humiliated before onlookers (v.3). So mercy and moderation are enjoined, even in the punishment of the wicked (vv.1,2).

Job.37:13 - God thunders with His voice in nature and in His judgments (vv.1-12). His reasons include 'correction' and 'mercy.' He 'does not oppress' - His clemency leads people to fear Him, i.e., learn of Him, respect and obey Him (vv.23, 24).

Ps.83:16-18 - Asaph prays that Israel's enemies become filled with shame, that they seek God's name and learn that He is the Most High over all the earth. In this he manifests the spirit of Solomon, who was commended by God for not seeking the death of His enemies (1Kings 3:11).

Prov.20:30 - 'Blows' and 'stripes' 'cleanse away evil,' and the 'inner depths of the heart,' revealing that *purification* and *improvement* - not torment or destruction - constitute the highest purpose of punishment.

Eccl.3:3 - this verse suggests that killing and breaking down *precede* healing and building up (see Deut.32:39; 1Sam.2:6).

Isa.19:22 - after being punished, Egypt is healed, made one with Israel, and even called "My people"(v.25).

Isa.29:9, 13, 23, 24 - blind and insincere Israel (vv.9-10,13), who 'erred in spirit' and 'murmured'(v.24), will 'hallow the Holy One of Jacob' and 'come to understanding' - speaking of Israel's final restoration after long chastening (v.23).

Isa.30:8-18,26 - rebellious Israel (vv.9-11) has her iniquity accounted to her (v.13), and is broken in pieces (vv.13,14); but the Lord then promises a day when He will graciously and mercifully 'bind up the bruise of His people, and heal the stroke of their wound (vv.18,19, 26).

Isa.40:2 - pardon comes to Jerusalem after she has received 'double' punishment for all her sins. Clearly punishment for sin is finite, for 'double' is a relative and finite term - being less than treble, quadruple, etc., hence much less than everlasting.

Isa.48:9,11 - God's punishment of Israel, His refining of her in the furnace of affliction, is for the honour of His own name, i.e., to demonstrate His faithfulness to His covenant people. Elsewhere He does it out of love, and for His people's good; however, in both, the punishment is corrective and remedial.

Jer.2:19 - Israel's backsliding proved to be corrective as well as punitive.

Jer.24:5,6,8-10 - the Exile resulted in the 'good figs' experiencing 'good' from God, that they might learn to know and love Him through it. In contrast, the consignment of the 'bad figs' to trouble refers only to God's ultimate *temporal* judgment, i.e., death - not endless punishment after death.

Jer.31:18-20 - the chastening of Ephraim (the 10 tribe kingdom) was fruitful. God yearned for him and in His mercy (v.20) chastened him 'like an untrained bull' (v.18) in order to improve him.

Ezek.39:24-29 - Israel is sent into exile for her 'uncleanness' and 'transgressions' committed when she dwelt in safety in the land of promise (vv.24, 26); but after suffering the consequences of her sin she is mercifully restored to God and her homeland. Notice that the 'whole house of Israel' (v.25), i.e., everyone who went into captivity (v.28), is shown mercy. No redemption / forgiveness / restoration could be broader in scope than this.

Ezek.44:10-16 - the punishment of the unfaithful Levites is severe (vv.10-13). However, they are not rejected altogether, but made keepers of the house of God (v.14).

Dan.4:27-37 - Nebuchadnezzar is chastened until he

acknowledges and praises God as sovereign Lord, hence the punishment of one of the world's greatest tyrants was instructive and reformatory. It brought him to his senses, and to faith in the true God.

Hos.5:1-15 - Israel and Judah are judged for their spiritual harlotry (vv.3,4), pride (v.5), treachery (v.7) and following man-made precepts (v.11). They are allowed to stew in their own juice, but only until they acknowledge their offence and seek the Lord (v.15).

Hos.13:7-10 - God 'tears Israel open' (v.8) and pleads with them to return to Him as their King, Helper and God (vv.9,10; 14:1,2), after which he promises to 'heal their backsliding' and 'love them freely' (14:4). The severity of God is followed by His goodness, but in reality, both His severity and His goodness are aspects of His love for His disobedient people.

New Testament

Matt.1:21 - Christ 'will save His people from their sins.' This is not merely something He will *attempt*, but is a declaration of His sovereign will. Having redeemed His people, He *will save them*. Though they suffer trial and chastening, in the end 'all Israel will be saved' (Ezek.39:25, 28; Rom.11:26, 32).

God loves His enemies and exhorts us to love ours (Matt.5:43-48); love 'does no harm' (Rom.13:10); 'love covers all sins' (Prov.10:12); love does not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but *blesses* (1Pet.3:8,9); God 'is good to all' (Ps.145:9); God asks us to pray for our enemies, evidently intending to answer our prayers (Matt.5:44). God's heart of love and mercy, even towards His (and our) enemies, is constant, hence we can hope for the salvation of all.

Matt.23:37-39; Luke 19:44 - at His first 'visitation' the Jews (as a nation) would not come to Christ, but they will welcome Him and call Him blessed when He comes again, after they have experienced a period of spiritual 'blindness' (Rom.11:25,26, AV).

Luke 15:1-32 - these three parables indicate that Christ searches for all who have gone astray *until* He finds *every last one* of them (vv.4, 8, 32). It is God, depicted by the 'shepherd,' the 'woman,' and the 'father' in the parables, who has lost *what is His*, hence He diligently searches for His lost ones until He finds them. Isaiah says, '*all we* like sheep have gone astray' (53:6), i.e., not just a few, but the whole house of Israel, and, by implication, all people (Rom.5:12-21).

Acts 13:8-12 - wicked Elymas was punished/chastened by God/Paul - but only for a season - hence remedially.

Rom.ch.11 - Israel chastened for their rejection of Christ, but only 'until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in' (vv.25,26).

1Cor.5:5-8 - a brother in Christ who commits a sin 'not even named among the Gentiles' (v.1) is severely disciplined, but then restored; hence recovery (the purpose of the chastening) was realised.

1Tim.1:20; 2Tim.2:17,18 - Paul hands two offending brethren to Satan, that they may '*learn* not to blaspheme' - an educative punishment, with Satan as the divinely appointed agent - which shows that Satan is under God's sovereign control, even being employed for our eternal good. This exposes the error of the dualism that seems to underlie much in traditional teaching on hell.

These passages, from both Testaments, provide us with a very hopeful picture of divine punishment, chastening and judgment, even when suffered by God's enemies. However, there are some passages that appear to rule out all hope for the wicked, twenty of which are considered in *The Larger Hope*, pp.54-88. The following also seem to come into this category.

Bible Passages which Appear to Rule Out All Hope for the Wicked

Ps.34:16 - the cutting off of remembrance from the earth of those who do evil may seem an irreversible judgment, but there are many instances in Scripture of the wicked being destroyed, yet of whom it is said they were/will be restored (e.g., Ezek.16:44-63). So this being cut off from memory must be understood in a limited, temporal sense, i.e., until such are restored. They may be forgotten by their generation, and succeeding generations, but not by God.

Ps.92:7, 9 - the wicked are 'destroyed forever' and 'perish,' but this should be seen in the light of the meaning of these words (see *The Larger Hope*, pp.47-50, 51-53).

Ps.104:35 - the Psalmist prays that the wicked might 'be no more.' But consider this in the light of what some early Christian Fathers had to say about God's destruction of sin/the flesh/the old nature, but *not the sinner* (*The Larger Hope*, pp. 48-50).

Prov.11:7 - the 'expectation' and 'hope' of the unjust is said to perish at death. As the Hebrews had an unclear view of life after death, Solomon may have meant that death curtails

the *earthly* plans of the wicked. This seems to be the case, for in v.8 God's deliverance of the righteous (in this life) parallels the punishment of the wicked (v.7).

Isa.24:21, 22 - Isaiah describes a day of judgment, when the 'host of exalted ones' (presumably the fallen angels), and the proud 'kings of the earth' will be imprisoned and after 'many days . . . visited' (AV) 'punished' (NKJV). The Hebrew word is uniformly translated 'visited' in the AV. The Amplified Version says in its footnote: 'The Hebrew word used here may mean *visit in mercy* as well as *visit in punishment*, but the context does not seem to indicate the possibility of mercy in this case;' - Isa.52:15 may shed light on this, for it depicts heathen 'kings' being purified and compelled to 'consider' the Person and work of Christ. The fact that there is no note of condemnation in this verse, which is in a context of redemption (52:13-53:12), suggests that truth and mercy will ultimately be extended to the heathen kings of Isa.24:21, 22.

Supporting this, we read in Isa.25:6-8 that God will destroy the covering (of death) over 'all people' and 'swallow up death

for ever,' and that He will 'wipe away tears from *all* faces,' which surely includes the prisoners in ch.24:22 (see also ch.61:1,2). A salvation universal in its scope seems to be described by Isaiah in these verses.

Jer.6:26-30 - after failing to purify His people through the ministry of His prophets, God declares that He has rejected them (v.30). However, this does not indicate He has rejected them forever, for His appeals to them often fell on deaf ears (Isa.30:15; Jer.13:11; 6:16,17), resulting in judgment and promises of restoration (Ezek. ch.16; Hos.5:14,15; Mic.7:18-20; Zech.2:6-13). It was the same in Jesus' day (Matt.23:37-39), but notice that in v.39 He speaks of their ultimate acceptance of Him, but only after a long period of spiritual blindness and unbelief (Rom.11:25,26,32).

The same principle applies even when God's judgment and rejection of His people are at their most severe (Jer.23:38-40); for as we have seen, promises of forgiveness and restoration permeate Scripture - not only with regard to Israel, but all nations (see *The Larger Hope*, p.47).

Jer.24:9,10 - Judah's being delivered to 'trouble' . . . 'for their harm' appears to undermine that God's punish-

ments are essentially remedial. They *are* remedial, but contain an element of retribution, which is only just. So both justice and mercy combine to work repentance: the hurt, pain, harm, suffered as a consequence of sin, being but the sharp side of God's love and mercy, as He brings people to their senses.

Luke 12:54-59 - debtors to God, who fail to 'settle' with Him, will be punished *until* they have 'paid the last mite' (vv.58, 59); just as prisoners may be kept in prison until the very last day of their sentence. Painful though this may be, it is a mercy: for after 'committing *all* to disobedience' (and its inevitable consequences), God makes mercy a possibility for *all* (Rom.11:32); so His severest chastening for disobedience does not rule out mercy and restoration.

2Thess.1:6-9 - see *The Larger Hope*, pp.79-81. Paul says that the Jews of Thessalonica who 'troubled,' i.e., persecuted the church, would be 'troubled' by God. This by itself hardly suggests endless punishment in hell. The Jews in that city fell into the same category as the Jews in Jerusalem, along with their leaders, who also rejected Christ and persecuted the church. Both Peter and Paul tell us that the Jews did it out of

ignorance of Jesus' identity as God's Son (Acts 3:17,18; 1Cor.2:8). Paul, in 1Tim.1:13, makes ignorance a mitigating factor in his initial opposition to Christ and the Church. Many who at first rejected Christ later became believers (Acts 6:7). So Paul's words in 2Thess.1:6-9 may be understood in the light and spirit of these things, and in the spirit of Christ's own words about loving and praying for enemies (Matt.5:43-48). Both our Lord, and Stephen the first Christian martyr, prayed that those who *troubled* them, even unto death, might be forgiven. Persistent rejection of Christ brings judgment, but Christ is able to 'subdue all things to Himself,' bring all people to 'bow the knee,' and 'confess Him Lord,' in preparation for the time when God will be 'all in all' (Phil.3:21; 1Cor.15:28).

Rev.18:6 - Babylon the great is to receive 'double' for all her wickedness, just as apostate Israel received double for all her sins (Isa.40:1,2). It is important to note that Israel was *comforted* and *promised restoration* after receiving 'double' for her sins, and that 'double' is a finite measure, or amount, seemingly incompatible with infinite guilt and endless punishment. This does not minimize guilt, or sin; it simply leaves room for hope.

Comments of Greek Scholars on the 'Punishment' Words Used in Scripture

William Barclay, in *The Apostles' Creed* (1998), p189, Arthur James, says: 'The word for punishment [in Matt.25:46] is *kolasis*. This word was originally a gardening word, and its original meaning was *pruning trees*. In Greek there are two words for punishment, *timoria* and *kolasis*, and there is quite a definite distinction between them. Aristotle defines the difference; *kolasis* is for the sake of the one who suffers it; *timoria* is for the sake of the one who inflicts it (*Rhetoric* 1.10). Plato says that no one punishes (*kolazei*) a wrongdoer simply because he has done wrong - that would be to take unreasonable vengeance (*timoreitai*). We punish (*kolazei*) a wrongdoer in order that he may not do wrong again (*Protagoras* 323 E.). Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* 4.14; 7.16) defines *kolasis* as pure *discipline*, and *timoria* as the return of evil for evil. Aulus Gellius says that *kolasis* is given that a man may be corrected; *timoria* is given that dignity and authority may be vindicated (*The Attic Nights* 7.14). The difference is quite clear in Greek and it is always observed. *Timoria* is retributive

punishment; *kolasis* is remedial discipline. *Kolasis* is always given to amend and cure.'

These things are highly relevant in the interpretation of Matt.25:46, which is usually cited as evidence of the endless retributive punishment of the wicked. Barclay shows this to be unjustified. The 'goats' are punished with the *kolasis aionios* (corrective punishment of the age/ages to come) designed to improve and reform (see *The Larger Hope*, pp.64, 65).

W. E. Vine maintains that what Barclay says about *kolasis* does not apply with common (koine) Greek (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (1973), p.231). Even if this be the case, and *kolasis* in this verse conveys the thought of nothing but retributive punishment, its antecedent *aionion* ('eternal'), can mean either 'of the age,' 'age-long,' or 'age-during,' rather than simply 'endless' (see *The Larger Hope*, pp.51-53).

With regard to the other instances of *kolasis* in the New Testament, none of them bear the sense of purely retributive punishment. In Acts 4:21 it is used of the corrective punishment the Sanhedrin wanted to inflict on the Apostles. In 2Pet.2:9 the unjust are reserved under punishment

'for' (NKJV) 'until' (Nestle's RSV Interlinear) 'the day of judgment.' Even if such punishment extends beyond the day of judgment, there is nothing in this verse to suggest that it is anything other than remedial in nature. Lastly, in 1John 4:18, the Apostle, speaking to believers, simply says that whilst perfect love casts out fear, 'fear involves torment' (*kolasin*). Moulton, in his *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, has 'chastisement' and 'disquietude' as alternative meanings of *kolasin*, which, I suggest, more appropriately describe the fear sometimes felt by believers who have not been perfected in love. In none of these instances does *kolasis* carry the thought of endless torment.

Clement, Bishop of Alexandria (c.195) says: 'God's punishments are saving and disciplinary, leading to conversion.' He says this in his commentary on Christ's descent into Hades to preach to the spirits in prison (1Pet.3:18-20), showing that he, like many of the early Church fathers, believed that God's mercy could be experienced in the world to come.

Leckie, in *The World to Come*, p.72, says: 'In the Books of Adam and Eve, punishment occurs in *sheol* [the Hebrew

equivalent of the Greek *hades*] until the end of the age' – hence, not endlessly.

The general impression we derive from Scripture, and from the meaning of Bible words connected with punishment, is that God's motive and purpose in judging, chastening, and punishing His creatures, is not simply to be just, but to restore Israel and the rest of humanity to Himself.

PURIFICATION

Job 7:17,20 – 'man' in v.17 seems to mean humanity/all human beings. All are 'visited' and 'tried' in order to test, refine and improve. It is interesting to note that the word translated 'visit,' in v.18 (NKJV), is rendered 'punished' in Isa.24:22, whilst the AV has 'visit' and 'visited' respectively (see these notes, p.158).

If this divine visitation, for the purpose of trying and testing (refining) us, is true of the few, short years of this life (very few for many people), will not God continue to visit the works of His hands (over whom are His tender mercies (Ps.145:9), in the world to come, until His image is perfectly restored in us? In other words, will not this refining continue after death? Does God set His heart on us simply for the

duration of this life? It is difficult to think so. Our weak human affections follow *our* loved ones after death has taken them from us, and often never fade. Is God less loving and faithful to those He has made for Himself, His own offspring, made in His image? (Prov.16:4; Acts 17:28,29).

Job 23:10 – the trials of this life are to refine us and restore us to God's likeness. This is certainly true of believers, as Job declares. But is it true of all people? Malachi foretells how Christ will come as a refiner of silver to spiritually debased Israel (Mal.3:1-4). Our refining as believers is an ongoing process, we suffer with Christ that we may be like Him, and live and reign with Him (2Tim. 2:12; 1John 3:2,3). If, as Scripture indicates, the saints, under Christ, will liberate, judge, rule and serve humanity in the age/ages to come, humanity will continue to be purified and transformed until God becomes 'all in all' to all.

Ps.10:15 – the Psalmist enunciates a principle that underlies God's dealings with persistent sinners. He not only chastises the wicked, but aims to root out from them everything that offends, until they too partake of His holiness. In the end there will be no

wickedness found in anyone, for all will have been purified, resulting in a fully restored creation as pristinely pure as it was before the Fall.

Isa.4:4 - God's judgment of apostate Jerusalem, by the 'spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning,' is its washing and purification prior to His dwelling there.

Isa.6:5-7 - when Isaiah saw the Lord in His holiness he became immediately aware of his, and his people's, sin (vv.3-5). He feared being 'undone' (Heb. 'cut off'). However, the Lord's response was *mercy* and *purification*. So, despite being worthy of death, Isaiah received mercy through God's gracious initiative. Can we not hope for the same mercy to be extended to all who are ultimately brought face to face with God and His holiness? Cannot all people, like the prophet, be made to feel both the weight and curse of their sin, and yet receive the warmth of God's love and forgiveness? We read that it is 'a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' (1Tim.1:15) - even Paul, 'the chief of sinners.' Consequently, will not Christ thoroughly accomplish what He came to do, so that if in the end one sinner remains unsaved, He

will to that extent have failed in His mission? (Luke 9:55,56; 19:10; John 3:17; 12:47).

Isa.19:4, 18-25 - Egypt is to be punished, but when purified will 'swear to the LORD of hosts' and be called His people (v.25). This does not appear to be simply about Egypt and the nations coming into the blessing of Christ through the Gospel, although it is in some way tied up with it. There is to be a time when Egypt will undergo remedial and restorative punishment - she will be 'struck,' then 'healed' (v.22).

Isa.22:14 - God seems to be saying that there will be no atonement for Jerusalem/the Jews. But this would contradict many scriptures that speak of Israel's eventual restoration. The sense seems to be that because Israel refused to repent (vv.12, 13), they would not be forgiven in this life, resulting in punishment, exile and death: which suggests that it will be in the world to come that they will experience forgiveness, cleansing and restoration, along with other nations, including Assyria, Egypt, Sodom and Samaria (Isa.19:18-25; Ezek. 16:44-63; see *The Larger Hope*, p.47).

Isa.29:23, 24 - those of Israel who 'erred in spirit . . . and murmured' will 'come to

understanding and will learn doctrine' - revealing God's purpose in chastening.

Isa.48:9,10 - Israel 'tested' and 'refined' in the 'furnace of affliction' - the corrective nature of punishment is again evident.

Jer.2:19 - Israel's wickedness and backsliding (and the consequences) become God's means of correction.

Jer.9:7, 9-11 - God's severe judgment of His people (vv.9-11) is to 'try' and 'refine' them (v.7). So even His most severe punishments have an essentially remedial and purificatory purpose.

Dan.4:27, 34-37 - affliction and humiliation are part of God's chastening and restorative process for this *pagan* king, showing that God's purpose to restore through affliction extends *beyond Israel*, His covenant nation; and that He is able to subdue the hardest, proudest, and most wilful people to Himself. Hence, 'to subdue' means, not destruction, but transformation and conformation to God's will (1Cor.15:28; Phil. 3:21).

1Cor.3:11-15 - all that is of no spiritual value in us will be removed, 'burned,' consumed - just as dross is purged from silver. The method/process is in God's hands, and will be in keeping with His love.

1Cor.5:5, 7, 8 - the 'flesh,' i.e., the old sinful nature, must be destroyed if we are to partake of God's holiness.

2Cor.7:1 - we are exhorted to purify *ourselves* from 'all filthiness of flesh and spirit,' thereby 'perfecting holiness in the fear of God.' Failure to do this (with God's help), necessitates being handed over to Satan 'for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus' (1Cor.5:5; 1Tim.1:20). The believer's positive response to this exhortation (in addition to their righteous standing by grace through faith in Christ), will lead to their being presented 'faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy' (Jude v.24; 1John 3:2, 3).

Heb.12:29 - God is a 'consuming fire,' and 'it is fearful to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb.10:31). These sobering truths are found in a context of the inspired writer's exhortations to believers. They are not, I suggest, about hell fire, but teach that God, our heavenly Father, chastises us for our disobedience and neglect, our dross being purged from us in the crucible of His holy, consuming love.

Does God relate in parental

love (a love that punishes to refine, purify and improve) toward the saints *only*, or, more hopefully, all people. This is a vital consideration with regard to the fate of the wicked. We know God loves His enemies, and that He wills/desires the salvation of all people, so it seems inconceivable that His punishment of the ungodly is different in essence and purpose from His chastening of His saints, for all people are His offspring (Acts 17:28,29). Jesus makes it clear that He came to call, not the righteous, but sinners to repentance, which confirms His love for those most alienated from Him.

God's determined purpose with regard to the elect - to save them and conform them to His Son - must apply to all. Surely God wills/wants the best for all His creatures, and will work through His elect, His corporate channel of blessing, to subdue and restore all things to Himself, so that in the end, He will be 'all in all' (1Cor.15:28). Then, all that is 'of Him and through Him,' will be drawn 'to Him' (Rom.11:36; John 12:32).

RANSOM

This word - in both Testaments - means to 'buy back' or 'redeem' that which has been

lost, forfeited, or brought into bondage/slavery. There is some difference of opinion amongst Christians about the *extent* of redemption: one school teaching that Christ has ransomed only the elect, and that only the elect will be saved; a larger school teaching that Christ has ransomed all people, but that only those who believe in Him in this life will be saved; and a third, smaller school, teaching - like some of the early Church Fathers - that Christ has ransomed all and will save all. This book, you will have gathered, seeks to present the case for the last of these views.

Isa.25:6-8 - it is difficult to square these verses with the narrow view that only a limited number will be saved, for in them we see that God will make a feast for 'all people, . . . destroy the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations, . . . swallow up death forever, . . . and . . . wipe away the tears from all faces.'

Isa.51:10,11 - here the words 'ransomed' and 'redeemed' are shown to be synonymous: in this case, with respect to the nation of Israel, but in the light of both Testaments, we see that *all* people are ransomed (Isa.45:22-25; Zeph.3:8,9; John 1:29; 1Tim.2:6; cf. Jer.31:11).

Hos.13:14 - although Israel experienced destruction for their sins (v.9), the Lord promised to 'ransom them from the power of the grave'(*sheol*), and 'redeem them from death.' Notice how 'ransom' and 'redeem' are linked with 'death' and 'the grave.' So the destruction of Israel (their sinful nature and deeds) precedes their redemption and restoration: which finds a parallel with the 'destruction' of those who, along with 'Death and Hades,' are cast into the 'lake of fire' in Rev.20:14, suggesting that it is the destruction of all ungodliness in the wicked (with a view to their purification and salvation) that is meant by this vivid imagery, not their destruction or endless torment.

Mark 10:45; 1Tim.2:6 - in order to support their belief that Christ came to save the elect *alone*, Christians of the Reformed school quote Mark 10:45, which says that the Son of Man came to 'give His life a ransom for *many*.' In response to 1Tim.2:6, where Paul says that Christ 'gave Himself a ransom for *all*,' they argue that 'all,' in this verse, means *all without distinction*, i.e., *some* Gentiles as well as *some* Jews. However, as we have seen, 'many' in Scripture, especially

in passages about redemption/salvation, e.g., Isa.53:6, 11; Rom.5:15, 19, clearly means '*all*,' even *all without exception*. Moreover, that the 'all' in 1Tim.2:6 refers to the ransom of *all without exception*, is evident from v.5, where Paul says, 'For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus,' the word 'men' referring to humanity as a whole, i.e., *all people without exception*. After declaring Christ's mediation 'between God and *men*' (*all people without exception*), Paul says that Christ 'gave Himself a ransom for *all*.' Consequently, a natural, unstrained reading of these verses leads to the conclusion that Christ gave Himself a ransom for *all people without exception*.

RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation means the restoration of fellowship between two or more alienated parties. In Scripture it speaks mainly of the reconciliation of human beings (even all people) to God in Christ, and the removal from them of the imputation of sin (2Cor.5:18, 19). This reconciliation includes i) *believers* - in v.18 Paul says to his Corinthian brethren in the Faith, 'Now all things are of God who has reconciled *us* to

Himself,' and ii) 'the world' (v.19); hence it is a *universal reconciliation*. In Col.1:19, 20 we see that 'it pleased the father that in Him [Christ] all fullness should dwell (cf.2:9), and by Him to reconcile *all things* to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.' So through Christ God has reconciled to Himself i) the Church, ii) the world (Jews and Gentiles), and iii) *all things* on earth and in heaven, not reckoning their sins to them. Having reconciled everyone to Himself, by removing every obstacle to our reunion with Him, God exhorts us to be reconciled to Him, through entering by faith into all He has accomplished for us in Christ (2Cor.5:20).

REDEMPTION

All Israel Redeemed

Neh.1:10 - Nehemiah declares in prayer that Israel are God's redeemed people.

Isa.43:1 - Israel created, redeemed and owned by God.

Isa.60:21 - *all* the people of Israel shall be righteous and inherit the land, which could not happen if they were not redeemed.

Jer.31:11 - God has redeemed

and ransomed Israel, showing that 'redeem' and 'ransom' are the same thing (see Isa.51:10,11).

Hos.3:1, 2 - Hosea enacts with his wife God's redemption of Israel.

Hos.7:13 - Israel transgressed against God and were 'destroyed,' but God remained faithful to them; promising to 'ransom them from the grave' and 'redeem them from death' (13:9,10,14).

John 11:49-52 - the high priest prophesied that Jesus 'would die for the nation,' and not for Israel only, but for 'all the children of God who were scattered abroad,' probably meaning the Jews of the Diaspora/Dispersion whose sin is 'taken away' with 'the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

Redemption Irreversible

God is often recorded as judging Israel, even disowning and cursing them (e.g., Isa.43:28; Jer.24:9,10; Dan.9:11). However, this does not nullify their redemption, but shows that they enter into the good of it through chastening - for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Num.23:19,20; Eccles.3:14; Rom.11:29).

Ps.49:7-9 - the Psalmist implies that redemption, when accomplished, is 'eternal' (see Heb.9:12). Redemption is

impossible for fallen people to achieve: only the precious, 'costly' sacrifice of Christ can, and has, accomplished it (1Pet.1:18,19).

Universal Redemption

Gen.3:21 - the redemption of Adam and Eve, and all who have sprung from them, typified by the coverings/tunics of skin, from a sacrificed animal, that God provided for them.

Isa.52:15 - 'many nations,' i.e., all nations 'sprinkled,' i.e., cleansed by Christ (1John 2:2).

John 1:29 - The Lamb of God takes away the sin of *the world*, not just Israel (Isa.53:6).

2Cor.5:14, 15 - Christ died for *all*. God has reconciled *the world* to Himself in Him (v.19).

Heb.2:9 - the Son of God became a man that He 'might taste death for *everyone*.' This 'might' does not indicate uncertainty, for it can be rendered 'in order to,' hence, 'in order that He should . . .' (Phillips). This was accomplished in the eternal purpose of God from the foundation of the world (Rev.13:8). Notice the universality of God's purpose in His Son, for He has 'put *all things* in subjection under His feet.' The writer of Hebrews says that 'we do not yet see all things put under Him,' but goes

on to speak of Christ tasting death for everyone, thereby laying the foundation for all to be conformed to Him and restored to God (Phil.3:21).

Heb.7:27 - the greater fulfilment of the Jewish high priest's work of atoning for Israel's sin, is seen in Christ's offering Himself for the sin of *all* people.

2Pet.2:1 - even those who go on to deny Christ are still redeemed by Him, though they may have to suffer the 'destruction of the flesh' that 'the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus' (1Cor.5:5).

Heb.ch.2 - the whole chapter speaks of the redemption and subjugation of 'everyone' (v.9); including the elect, Christ's 'brethren' - God's 'sons' and 'children' (Rom.8:28-30).

It is clear, from all this evidence, from both Testaments, that the redemption Christ has accomplished is *universal*, not particular or limited. Many have misunderstood redemption as limited, because they have not been able to grasp that Christ has redeemed both the elect *and* people in general - the elect not being an end in themselves, but God's channel of blessing to all humanity. Once God's purpose of blessing *all* through the chosen 'seed' is appreciated, the two apparently

contradictory strands of Bible teaching – the salvation of *some*, and the salvation of *all* – can be harmonized.

Some Early Church Fathers on Redemption

Athanasius (c.296-373) says: 'because all [people] were under penalty of the corruption of death He gave it [His body] over to death in the stead of all, and offered it to the Father . . .' (R. E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, p.170).

Justin Martyr (c.100-165) says: 'The Father of all wished His Christ, for the whole human family, to take upon Him the curses of all . . . His Father wished Him to suffer this, in order that by His stripes the human race might be healed' (David W. Bercot, Ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, p.42).

The following quotations are from the same source.

Melito (c.190) says: 'He suffered for the sake of those who suffer, and He was bound for the sake of Adam's race, which was imprisoned' (p.42).

Origen (c.185-254) says: 'He takes away sin until every enemy will be destroyed and death last of all – in order that the whole world may be set free from sin' (p.45).

Victorinus (c.304) says: 'For

man's salvation, He was made man in order to overcome death and set all men free' (p.46).

REPENTANCE (God's Gift)

Like faith and salvation, repentance is God's gracious gift, hence we can hope that, being a God who wills/desires the salvation of all (1Tim.2:4), He will grant this indispensable boon to all His offspring. The fact that God 'commands all men everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30; Luke 24:47), suggests that He is able and willing to provide the will to repent and the repentance He commands. The following verses show that repentance is a gift of God: -

Jer.24:7 – God promises to give Israel a new heart and the ability to return to Him.

Jer.31:18,19 – an admission of dependence on God for repentance and restoration.

Jer.33:25,26 – God promises, in His mercy, to 'cause' the captives of Israel to return.

Acts 5:31 – God in Christ promises to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.

Acts 11:18 – God grants to the Gentiles repentance and life.

Rom.2:4 – the goodness of God leads to repentance.

Jam.1:17 – every good and perfect gift (including repentance) comes from God.

The Meaning of Repentance

Isa.55:6, 7 - seeking the Lord, calling on Him, forsaking wicked ways and unrighteous thoughts, and returning to the Lord.

Jer.3:17 - walking no more after the stubbornness of our evil heart.

Jer.4:1 - returning to the Lord and putting away our abominations from His sight.

Jer.18:11 - forsaking our evil ways and returning to God; making our ways and doings good.

Ezek.18:21,27,28 - turning from all our sins, keeping God's statutes, doing what is lawful and right, and turning from our transgressions.

Joel 2:12-14 - a comprehensive description of repentance.

Clearly, only God can grant such a radical change of heart and direction - anything else is self-generated and powerless. Only God can lead/bring us to the deep and sincere heart-cry of the Publican in the Temple, 'God be merciful to me, a sinner,' and to the genuine change of heart and life experienced by Zacchaeus. It takes something of God's life, love and power to generate true repentance in the unregenerate heart - the Spirit's conviction of 'sin, righteousness and judgment.'

RESTORATION

There are many instances of the restoration of individuals and nations in Scripture, but the Larger Hope is concerned with the restoration of all things ruined by the Fall. That such a comprehensive and universal restoration can be hoped for is evident from many passages of Scripture, a key one being Acts 3:20, 21 - 'Jesus Christ . . . whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.'

Notice that the restoration of all things is a recurrent theme in the Old Testament. It is found in *all* the prophets - see the list of verses in *The Larger Hope*, pp.25.

Another key verse referring to the restoration of all things is Rev.21:5 - 'Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."'

By His words 'in the regeneration. . .' (Matt.19:28), Jesus appears to speak of the restoration of all things. The Greek word translated 'regeneration' means *born again/new birth*. It is used of individuals (Tit.3:5, cf. John 3:3,5); but in Matt.19:28, the sense is far wider, possibly universal - the rebirth of a fallen

world, the whole human race. God, I believe, allowed our first parents, and through them the whole of humanity, to fall into sin and death *only* because He purposed something better for us in Christ – a new creation based, not on works, or obedience, but on love and grace. Many Bible passages declare the restoration of all things, either specifically or inferentially, such as:- Ps.22:27-29; Prov.10:12; Isa.25:6-8; 45:22-25; John12:32; Acts 3:21; Rom.8:19-21; 11:32, 36; 1Cor.15:27,28; 2Cor.5:19; Eph.1:9-11; Col.1:19-21; Rev.5: 13; 21:5, see under 'Many' in these notes.

SAINTS (See Elect)

SALVATION

Whilst salvation in the Bible contains an element of being saved from 'the wrath to come' (Rom.5:9; 1Thess.1:10), i) there is nothing in these passages about *endless* wrath, and ii) it is said repeatedly in the Old Testament that God will not be wrathful or angry with the wicked forever (Ps.30:5; Isa.57:16; Jer.3:12; Mic.7:18).

The more general meaning of salvation in Scripture is deliverance from sin, evil and the damaging effects of the Fall. Nowhere is this spelt out more clearly and powerfully than in

Ezek.36:24-33, where the salvation of Israel involves being brought near to God and into their heritage once more, after a period of exile. It also means cleansing from all her spiritual uncleanness and idolatry; being given a new heart and spirit; being given God's Spirit and being enabled to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments.

Other passages on this theme include:-

Matt.1:21 – Jesus saves His people from *their sins*.

Acts 3:26 – Jesus turns away everyone from *their iniquities*.

Rom.8:21 – the creation will be delivered from the bondage of *corruption*.

Gal.1:4 – deliverance from this present *evil age*.

Tit.2:14 – being redeemed from *every lawless deed*.

Heb.9:26 – *sin* being put away by the sacrifice of Christ.

So the main purpose of salvation is *deliverance from sin*. A person who is being saved is someone who is redeemed, is being delivered from sin and its consequences, and is being brought into fullness of life in Christ. This is described by the familiar process, i) saved from the consequences of sin (ii) being saved from the power of sin, and iii) ultimately saved from the presence of sin.

Salvation (Extent of)

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.10-36, and under 'Many' and 'Redemption' in these notes.

SATAN

A virtual dualism, with regard to God and Satan, has been taught or implied by many throughout Church History. Satan is perceived as having almost the same power as God, even the power to take with him untold billions into hell, which suggests some kind of victory of evil over good, in that the Prince of evil has been permitted to overcome and destroy so many of God's offspring.

However, there is no dualism in the Bible. God is the sovereign Lord of all, who only permits Satan to operate within strict bounds, for the ultimate good of His children, as the following verses demonstrate:-

Job ch.1-2 - is a clear instance of God's sovereignty over Satan. He allows him to afflict Job, but only within prescribed limits, for His glory/eternal purpose, and Job's ultimate benefit.

Luke 13:16-17 - a woman is afflicted/bound by Satan for eighteen years, but only that God/Christ might be glorified and the woman eventually delivered - a foretaste of the deliverance of the whole

creation from the bondage of corruption (Rom.8:21).

Luke 22:31 - Jesus allowed Satan some scope with Peter, to separate the 'chaff' from the 'wheat' in his life - that which was fleshly and sinful from that which was spiritual - but Christ prayed for, kept and strengthened him, so that in turn he might strengthen his brethren. Peter's propensity to act impetuously, and fall, is seen in vv.33, 34, and in Matt.16:21-23 - failures which taught him vital lessons for his life and ministry - a principle repeated in the following passages:-

1Cor.5:5 - a believer at Corinth is disciplined for committing gross sin. He is handed over to Satan, for 'the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.' Notice that Satan is involved, but in a remedial and educational capacity, to 'destroy' the man's sinful nature with a view to him being restored to God and the fellowship of the church. God is in complete control. Satan is simply His agent for the offender's ultimate good.

1Tim.1:20 - a similar case to the one above: Hymenaeus and Alexander, two believers, are 'delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.'

God permits Satan to work, but only until Christ destroys both Him and His works (Gen.3:15; Col.2:15; Heb.2:14; 1John.3:8).

Satan's end is in the 'lake of fire' (Rev.20:10), along with those not found written in the Book of Life (20:14). Just what this means, in view of the truth that *all* creatures are destined to worship God and the Lamb (Rev.5:13), and to say, 'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength' (Isa.45:24), when God is eventually 'all in all' (1Cor.15:28) is difficult to say. Some of the early Church Fathers, particularly in the Eastern Church, held out the hope of all creatures, heavenly and earthly, being ultimately restored to God. This would have to be the case if all that has gone wrong with God's creation, from the time that Satan rebelled, is to be remedied. For this to happen, the 'lake of fire,' like the rest of God's punishments, must be *remedial*, a protracted chastening; devils and evil men will suffer, but not a fate without remedy. The 'forever and ever' (Rev.20:10) could possibly mean from 'age to age,' until the reformation and restoration of the offenders is accomplished (see 'Eternal' in these notes, and in *The Larger Hope*, pp.51-53).

Satan (Children of)

There are a few passages of Scripture in which people are called 'Satan,' 'Brood of vipers,' 'of your father the devil,' and 'son of the devil' (Matt.16:23; Matt.3:7; John 8:40-44; Acts 13:10). People in different situations are so addressed due to their behaving *like* Satan. For example, Peter, thinking to save Jesus from the Cross, says, "Far be it from You Lord; this shall not happen to you!" Jesus' rebuke, 'Satan!' was severe, but it is clear what He meant – not that His beloved disciple was Satan – but that by unwittingly endeavouring to hinder God's purpose he was behaving *like* Satan (Matt.16:23).

Similarly, in Matt.3:7, the Baptist's description of the Pharisees and Sadducees ('the multitudes,' in the parallel account in Luke's Gospel (3:7) who came out to see him as a 'brood of vipers,' expresses his censure of their lack of godliness, but it in no way indicates that they could not repent and be saved (see Acts 6:7). The same can be said of Jesus' rebuke levelled at the Jews who sought to kill Him (John 8:40-44).

Of those who displayed satanic traits, Elymas the sorcerer (Acts 13:10) was most evidently in the grip of Satan.

However, the judgment he suffered was 'for a time,' presumably only until he acknowledged his offence and mended his ways.

The above examples suggest that we may hope for people who display evil traits, even those who are in Satan's grip.

SHEEP

Christians of the Reformed school fasten onto certain verses, such as John 10:2-3, 11, 14, 25-30, and insist that they show that Christ came to save a limited number of people, i.e., His 'sheep.' Taken at face value, without considering the teaching of Scripture as a whole, they do seem to limit the scope of salvation to Christ's sheep. But when God's purpose for the elect is understood, it becomes clear that rather than being the only ones to be saved, the 'elect'/'sheep' are actually God's chosen *means* of blessing the *whole of humanity* (see 'Elect' and 'Kingdom' in these notes; and pp.89-91 in *The Larger Hope*).

In some instances the Bible widens the idea of the Lord's 'sheep' to include *many more* than a comparatively small number of 'elect.' For instance, in Isa.ch.53 it is the whole people of Israel, God's 'sheep' who have 'gone astray'(v6), and

have their iniquity laid on Christ (cf. Jer.50:6; Matt.15:24).

In Ps.100 God equates 'all you lands' (Lit. 'all the earth,' margin, v.1, AV), and the work of His hands, with the 'sheep of His pasture'(v.3), showing that *all of us* are His offspring, however erring, hence *all* the object of his love. This becomes evident from God's love for '*the world*' (John 3:16); Christ's being the '*Saviour of the world*' (John 4:42; 1 John 4:8,14,16); God's '*will that all should be saved*' (1 Tim.2:4, AV); and, in the end, *every creature's* praise of God and the Lamb (Rev.5:13).

SHEOL

See *The Larger Hope*, p.40.

Isa.5:14,15 – *sheol* (the Hebrew equivalent of *hades*) in this verse is a place to which people are 'brought . . . and humbled . . . but the LORD of hosts shall be exalted in judgment.' Here we see more than a hint of the purpose of *sheol*, i.e., a place/state in which all human pride vanishes in the light of God's holiness. In this sense *sheol* is a mercy for the wicked, because it is through death that they experience deliverance from sin and self, the necessary preparation for their restoration to God in Christ.

Our first parents were sentenced to death and kept

from eating from the tree of life, so that they would not live forever in their sin (Gen.3:22). In this sense death was a mercy to them, indicating that God had something better for them (in Christ) than endless life in sin. Little is said in Scripture about the nature of life/existence in *sheol/hades*, but we may deduce from the above that it is part of the process of judgment, and the preparation of souls for life in Christ. The fact that Adam and Eve (and all in them) received the token of redemption (the coverings of skin provided by God, Gen.3:21) points to a hopeful future for all who have died and entered *sheol/hades*.

SIN

Sin is breaking the law of God and falling short of His glory - Rom.5:20; 3:19, 20, 23.

We are surrounded and affected by sin from our conception in the womb - Job 14:4; Ps.51:5; 58:3; Isa.48:8.

All have sinned - 2 Chron. 6:36; Prov.20:9; Eccl.7:20; Isa.64:6; Rom.3:9, 19, 23; 1John1:8-10.

Sin affects all classes of society - Isa.9:13-17.

Sin has been 'taken away,' 'put away,' and 'borne' by Christ - John 1:29; Heb.9:26; 1Pet.2:24.

People may sin through ignorance - Luke 12:48; 23:34; John 4:10; Acts 3:17; Rom. 10:3; 1Cor. 2:7, 8; Eph. 4:17, 18; 1Tim. 1:13; Heb.9:7.

Sin Against the Holy Spirit

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.65-68.

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

See *The Larger Hope*, pp.19, 20.

SONS OF GOD - THE CHURCH AND HOUSE OF GOD

People become the sons/children of God through the new birth, when the Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are the children of God - Rom.8:12-17.

The sons of God 'walk according to the Spirit' (Rom.8:1); 'live according to the Spirit' (vv.5, 12, 13); are 'led by the Spirit' (v.14); are 'spiritually minded' (v.6; 1Cor.2:16); have 'received the Spirit of adoption' (v.15); have the 'witness of the Spirit' (v.16), and are 'heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ' - with the proviso that they 'suffer with Him' that they 'may be glorified with Him' (v.17).

According to Heb.2:10 - 3:6, the sons of God are also Christ's 'brethren' (2:11, 12, 17); have a 'heavenly calling' (3:1), and are the 'house of God/Christ' (v.6), - with the proviso of faithfulness.

The sons of God are the seed of Abraham in and with Christ (Gal.3:16, 29). Through them all nations, tribes and tongues will be blessed (Gen.22:18). The form this blessing will take is not spelled out in Scripture, but it will involve judging, ruling and instructing the world in righteousness (Ps.148:5-9; Acts 17:31; 1Cor.6:2; Dan.7:18,27; Rev.5:10; Ps.145:10-13; Isa.2:2-4; Heb.3:6).

That the sons of God will be involved in the 'restoration of all things' (Acts 3:21) is clear from Rom.8:19-23, where Paul envisages the deliverance of the whole of creation 'from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (v.21) - at the 'manifestation of the sons of God' (v.19). They are the Church, Temple, Priesthood, House, and City of God, the Bride of Christ - all instrumental, with and under Christ, in enlightening, blessing, and healing the nations (Isa.2:2-4; Matt.5:14-16; Eph.3:8-11; 1Pet. 2:4; Rev.21:22-24; 22:2, 17).

SOVEREIGNTY (God's)

God's sovereignty in all things runs throughout Scripture.

Gen.45:5-9; 50:15-20 - God's sovereign purpose for blessing Israel and all nations through Christ is typified in the story of Joseph.

God always does what He says He will do - Num.23:19, 20; 2Chron.6:4; 10:15; Isa.48:3.

God ordains events and outcomes according to His will and purpose - 1Kings 12:15; 2Kings 14:6, 27; 2Chron.11:4; 25:8; Job 42:2; Ps.106:15; Jer.27:4-6; 32:28; Ezek.36:24-33; Dan.4:35.

God does according to His good pleasure - 1Sam.3:18; Isa.44:28; 46:10, 11; 53:10; 55:11; Luke 12:32; Eph.1:5, 9; Phil.1:6; 2:13; 2Thess.1:11.

God's sovereign dealings with individuals - Prov.16:9; 20:24; 21:1; Jer.17:14; 31:18; John 6:65; 19:11; Rom.14:4.

With God all things are possible - Job 42:1, 2; Jer.32:17, 27; Mark 10:23-27.

God has a purpose and reason for all He does - Ezek.14:23; Jer.22:8, 9.

SPIRITS IN PRISON

There has been much difference of opinion about the meaning of Peter's words in 1Pet.3:19-20, where he speaks of Christ going in the Spirit to preach 'to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water.'

Reformed scholars tend to interpret Peter's words to mean

that it was through Noah and his preaching (2Pet.2:4-5) that Christ preached to antediluvians. The natural sense of 1 Pet. 3:18-20 appears to be that Christ preached to the 'spirits in prison' (whoever they were) in and by the Holy Spirit after His crucifixion. Some of the early Church Fathers held that it was to the spirits of men, not evil spirits, that Christ preached; a minority teaching that *every soul* was liberated from Hades as a result (see Thomas Allin in *Christ Triumphant*, pp. 118, 143).

Eight verses further on (4:6) Peter tells us that the 'gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.' If 2:18-20 and 4:6 are thematically connected they seem to teach that the saving power of the Gospel extends beyond death, bringing hope to the unconverted in Hades.

William Barclay, in *The Apostle's Creed* (1998), pp.97-109, deals with this question in some detail and is worth reading.

SUBDUE / SUBJECT

It is vital to understand the *positive* sense of these words in their contexts. I say 'positive,' because passages containing them are often held to be

descriptive or predictive of God's retributive judgment of His enemies.

While some instances of 'subdue'/'subject,' in the context of Israel's conflict with her enemies, may give this impression (1Chron.17:10; Zech.9:15), they speak merely of a temporal and physical subjugation, and say nothing about God's *eternal* purpose for the subjugated.

Micah (7:19) tells us that God will subdue Israel's 'iniquities,' but save *them*, which illustrates the truth that God loves sinners even while hating their sin. This is illustrated in 1Cor.5:5, where a grossly sinful believer is handed over to Satan 'for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.' In the restoration of Israel, through the subduing of her sins; and the restoration of the Corinthian offender, through remedial chastening; God's *mercy* is seen. In both instances, the principle of the 'triumph of mercy over judgment' is clearly demonstrated (Jam. 2:13).

It may be argued that the above may apply with respect to God's Old and New Covenant people, but not to the unconverted. However,

there are many Bible verses and passages which refer to *all* things and *all* people eventually being subdued and restored to God (See *The Larger Hope*, pp.96-101). Of these, four come to mind - Isa. 45:22-25; 1Cor.15:25-28; Phil.3:21, and Rev.5:13.

In Isa.45:22 the 'ends of the earth' are commanded to look to God and be saved. This is ultimately fulfilled, as recorded in vv.23-25, even to the extent of 'every knee' bowing, and 'every tongue' (every person) saying, 'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength' (v.24). In other words, the time will come when all people will be made subject to Christ. All will declare Him to be their righteousness, and confess Him as their Lord (Phil.2:11).

In 1Cor.15:25-28 we read of the glorious subjection of all things to God in Christ. In the end all things will be made subject to God, so that He may be 'all in all' (v.28). Note that in the matter of subjection to God in this verse, the Greek verb *hupotasso* is used in relation to i) *all things* being made subject to God, and ii) Christ's *own* subjection to God, which dispels any thought of anyone being made subject to God by force.

In Phil.3:21 we read that Christ is able 'even to subdue all things to Himself. This is said

primarily in connexion with the transformation of our old bodies that they may be conformed to Christ's glorious body, but His limitless power to subdue *all things* to Himself is clearly stated, not merely as a possibility, but with the implicit intention of doing so. The process involved in the transformation of our bodies may differ from that required to subdue all things to Himself, but Christ's power to do both is undeniable.

Rev.5:13 furnishes us with one of the clearest statements in Scripture of the 'restoration of all things' (Acts 3:21); for John sees 'every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them' worship God and the Lamb. John emphasizes the universalism of this restoration of all things to God by his 'and *all that were in them*, I heard saying . . .'

Whatever process of purification and beatification the creatures in John's vision had undergone, *every single one of them* was praising and worshipping God. This implies, even necessitates, that all God's judgments, punishments and chastenings are in essence remedial and restorative, manifesting His love and mercy.

Other verses that shed light on the meaning of 'subdue' are:

Gen.1:28 - Adam and Eve were to 'subdue' the earth - not destroy it. Christ and the Church will fulfil this commission in the ages to come, when the whole creation will be subdued and liberated from bondage to corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom.8:21).

Ps.66:3 - the subjugation of God's enemies leads the Psalmist to sing, 'All the earth shall worship You and sing praises unto You; they shall sing praises to Your name (v.4); presumably God's subdued enemies also.

Isa.52:13-15 - the power and glory of the risen Christ will subdue kings into silence, while they behold and consider things they hadn't seen or heard. There is no hint of forcible subjugation, only an unwonted speechlessness due to wonder and awe at Christ.

Rev.11:15 - Christ is to rule, not utterly destroy, the nations He subdues - and His saints will reign with Him (Isa.45:23, 24; Dan.7:18, 26, 27; Rev.5:10).

In Old Testament times Israel's enemies were subdued by force of arms, but the Christian's warfare is *spiritual*, involving the sword of the Spirit, the word of God.

TARTARUS

See *The Larger Hope*, p.41.

Tartarus is a part of Greek Mythology. Tartarus was the son of Gaia (Earth) and Aither (Sky); and father of Typhon by his own mother (Gaia). Later Tartarus became the name of the lowest part of the underworld, a place of spiritual darkness, to which the Titans, and the souls of all who committed gross evil, were banished forever.

It occurs once only in Scripture (2Pet.2:4), and there appears to be a parallel text in Jude 6. It is difficult to understand why the Apostle, if he was the author of the second epistle bearing His name, should resort to using a term from Greek mythology, unless it parallels an actual place or condition of punishment in God's scheme of things.

In Scripture Tartarus is a place/condition of restraint for certain wicked spirits - not the souls of human beings. The 'lake of fire' (Rev.20:10, 15) is a place of punishment for the wicked, both angels *and* people; but it is possible that even this severe punishment may have the purpose of consuming in the wicked all that is opposed to God - a final purification that brings them to repentance and restoration.

TERROR (Of the Lord)

'Many make the text, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2Cor.5:11) the keynote in their religion and their preaching,' says F. W. Farrar, in *Mercy and Judgment*, p.363. He goes on to say:

That "text" like most of the others adduced to for a similar purpose, is mistranslated and most egregiously misapplied. It does not so much as touch on the outermost sphere of the subject we have been examining [the doctrine of everlasting punishment]. The context almost demonstrates its meaning to be simply this - "knowing that the fear of God is the principle of my own life, I try to persuade you that it is so, and that I am no hypocrite; my sincerity is known to God, and I strive to make it known to you."

The outline of the revelation of God which polarises my own thoughts is very different from that which uses terror as an object of persuasion. It is that God is love; that the object of true religion is to be like Him; that destruction is to fall from that foundation and fail of that end; that salvation is the deliverance from that error and from that sin; and that God the Saviour is manifested in the name of Jesus because He saves His people from their sins.

TESTIMONIES (To the Larger Hope in the Writings of the Early Church Fathers).

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (345-430) says there were 'very many' in his day who believed in the salvation of all people.

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA (c.150-c.215) says: 'Christ saves all men. Some He converts by penalties, others who follow Him of their own will * * that every knee be bent to Him, of those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, i.e., angels, men, and souls, who, before His coming, passed away from this mortal life' (Allin, *Christ Triumphant*, p.108).

METHODIUS (d. c.311) - Christ died and rose again that He might 'be by all created things equally adored' (Allin, p.112).

MARCELLUS OF ANCYRA (d. c.374) - 'For what else do the words mean, "Until the times of restitution" (Acts 3:21) but that the Apostle designed to point out that time, in which all things partake of that perfect restoration' (Allin, p.112).

ATHANASIUS (c.296-373) - 'Christ captured over again the souls captured by the devil, for that He promised in saying, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to Me" ' (Allin, p.113).

HILARY OF POITIERS (c.315-67/8) - 'When the poor in spirit shall have been set in the heavenly kingdom, then *every creature*, together groaning and mourning, is to be set free from the bondage of corruption.' 'In this way God will bruise and break the nations of His inheritance, so as to reform them.' 'Far be it for Him to desire that he [the sinner] should be slain. But the sinner is slain *when he dies to the world* * * in this way is the sinner slain, when the birth of spiritual life is renewed, by the death of all vices and sins' (Allin, p.114).

F. M. VICTORINUS (d. c.304) - 'and because Christ is the life, He is that by Whom (in *quem into Whom*) all things have been made, for *all things cleansed by Him return into eternal life*.' 'He is Jesus Christ, because He will save all things unto life.' 'Thus the mystery was completed by the Saviour in order that, perfection having been completed throughout *all things* and *in all things* by Christ *all universally should be made one through Christ and in Christ*.' (Allin, p.116).

TITUS OF BOSTRA (4th cent)-in a passage about evil spirits, says: 'The very pit itself is a place of torments and of chastisement,

but is not eternal * * It was made that it might be *a medicine and help to those who sin*. Sacred are the stripes *which are medicine* to those who have sinned. * * "Therefore we do not complain of the pits (of hell) - *abyssis* - but rather know that they are places of torment, and chastisement, being for the correction (amendment of those who have sinned" ' 'Death is not appointed by God to cause men hurt, but is appointed for the great benefit both to the *righteous and the unrighteous*' (Allin, p.116, 117).

EPHREM OF SYRUS (c.306-73) - 'Christ burst open the most voracious belly of hades * * seeing this Death trembled * * and sent forth *all* whom from the first man up to that time he had kept in bonds' (Allin, p.117).

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS (329-389) - 'To-day salvation has been brought to the universe, to *whatsoever* is visible and *whatsoever* is invisible.' Christ is man that He that He may be 'like leaven for the entire mass (of mankind), and having made that which was condemned (or 'damned'), one with Himself, frees the whole from condemnation (damnation).' 'Everything (*ta panta*) shall be subdued to Christ, and they

shall be subdued by a full knowledge (*epignosis*) of Him, and by a remodelling * * Now God will be All in All at the time of restitution.' Of the heretical Novatians, he says: 'Perhaps there (in the other world), they shall be baptized with the fire, the last and more laborious, and more protracted baptism, which devours the substance like hay, and consumes the lightness of all evil.' (Allin, pp.118, 119).

BASIL THE GREAT (c.330-79) - 'For *all* things shall be made subject to Him, and *all* things shall acknowledge His empire; and when God shall be All in All, those who excite discords by revolts, having been quite pacified (*all things*) shall praise God in peaceful concord.' 'Therefore, since *all* are to be subject to Christ's rule according to the saying, "He must reign until He put His enemies under His feet"... the things made subject to His rule are to *obtain restoration*.' He explains the words: "My fury shall not cease on my enemies... I will burn them, in order that I may purify. Thus it is that God is angry in order to bestow benefits on sinners." 'For we have often observed that it is the *sins* which are consumed, not the very persons to whom (the sins) have

happened.'

GREGORY OF NYSSA (c.330-c.395) - 'At some time the nature of evil shall pass to *extinction*, being fully and completely removed from existence; and divine unmixed goodness shall embrace in itself *every rational nature*: nothing that has been made by God falling away from the kingdom of God: when, all the evil that is blended with existence * * being consumed by the melting action of the cleansing fire, everything that has had its being from God, shall become such as it was at first, when as yet untainted by evil.' 'The evil are to look for great severity from the Judge; but after due curative treatment, and when the fire shall have destroyed all foreign matter, then the nature, even of these, shall improve by the copious nurture they receive, and at length they too shall regain the divine impress.' Allin points out: 'this Father expressly attributes [in the Greek, but not in the later Latin translation] cleansing properties to the "eternal" fire.' Gregory also rejoices in that in the end: '*every created being shall be harmonised into one choir* * * and when, like a cymbal, the reasonable creation, and that which is now severed by sin * * shall pour

forth a pleasing strain, due to mutual harmony * * Then comes the praise of every spirit for ever * * abounding with increase unto eternity' (Allin, pp.122-124).

DIDYMUS (c.313-98) - 'that as by the Son all things endowed with reason received their being, so by Him the salvation of all of them has been wrought out * * For Christ brought peace to all things through the blood of His Cross, whether in heaven or on earth * * For as men, by giving up their sins, are made subject to Him, so, too, *the higher intelligences*, freed by correction from their wilful sins (*correcta spontaneis culpis*) are made subject to Him, on the completion of the dispensation ordered for the salvation of all.' Christ 'descends to hades and brings back the souls, there detained *on account of their sins*' (Allin, pp.125, 126).

AMBROSE OF MILAN (c.339-97) - 'in God's saying to the adversaries of Jerusalem, "they shall be as though they were not," * * you are to understand they shall exist substantially and as *converted* (to God), but shall not exist as (God's) enemies.' 'How then shall (all things) be subject to Christ? In the very way in which the Lord

Himself said, "Take My yoke upon you." For it is not the untamed who bear the yoke, but the humble and gentle * * so that in Jesus' name every knee shall bend.' He proceeds to discuss Christ's subjection to the Father. 'Is this subjection of Christ now completed? Not at all. Because the subjection of Christ consists not in *few*, but in *all* (becoming obedient) * * Christ will be subject to God in us by means of the obedience of *all* * * (then) when vices having been cast away, and sin reduced to submission, one spirit of *all* people, in one sentiment, shall with one accord begin to cleave to God, then God will be All in All.' 'All nations shall come and worship before Thee * * for *all* flesh shall come to Thee, no longer subject to the world, but united to the spirit.' 'The mercy of the Lord is to all flesh, in order that *all flesh* * * may ascend to the Lord.' 'So the Son of Man came to save that which was lost, *i.e., all*, for as in Adam *all* die, so too in Christ, shall all be made alive' (Allin, pp.130-132).

JEROME (c.345-420) - 'Christ will, in the ages to come, show, not to one, but to the *whole number of rational creatures*, His glory, and the riches (of His grace).' In the end of (all) things

* * the whole body which had been dissipated and torn into diverse parts shall be restored. * * Let us understand the *whole number of rational creatures* under the figure of a single rational animal * * let us imagine this animal to be torn * * so that no bone adheres to bone, nor nerve to nerve.' 'So in the restitution of all things, when the true physician, Jesus Christ, shall have come to heal the body of the whole Church, *every one* * * shall receive his proper place * * What I mean is, the *fallen angel* will begin to be that which he was created, and man, who has been expelled from Paradise, will once more be restored to the tilling of Paradise. These things, then, will take place *universally*.' 'With God no rational creature perishes eternally.' 'Death shall come as a visitor to the impious; it will not be perpetual; it will not annihilate them; but will prolong its visit, till the impiety which is in them shall be consumed.' 'The Cross of Christ has benefited not earth only but heaven * * and *every creature* has been cleansed by the blood of its Lord.' 'By every knee bending in Jesus name is meant, 'the obedience of the heart.' Jerome says that Christ's coming is 'to destroy *sins*' (not sinners). 'At the consummation of the world, every creature shall have been set free.' Jerome

says that God does not strike sinners in order to destroy for ever, but in order 'to amend.' Again, he says, 'He will destroy, not for their ruin, but for their amendment.' And again, 'He created all things out of nothing . . . not in order to destroy that which He had created, but in order that by His mercy the things created should be saved' (Allin, pp.134-136).

DIODORUS (d. c.390) - 'For the wicked there are punishments not perpetual, * * but they are to be tormented for a certain brief period, * * according to the amount of malice in their works. They shall therefore suffer punishment for a short space, but *immortal blessedness*, having no end awaits them; * * the penalties to be inflicted for their many and grave crimes are very far surpassed by the magnitude of the mercy to be shown them. The Resurrection, therefore, is regarded as a blessing not only to the good but also to the evil' (Allin, p.137).

PAULINUS (353-431) - taught that the destruction of the heathen by Christ is really their *cure*. His iron rod 'breaks their hearts as though vessels formed of clay, in order to remake them (for the) better' (Allin, p.138).

CHRYSOStOM (c.347-407) - speaking of the result of Christ's work, says: 'By this is inevitably shown that death is plucked up root and branch; * * not only was the sin (of Adam) *abolished*, but also *all other sins whatsoever*.' He speaks of the coming unity when 'all things shall have been brought under one head.' 'God does all things through love, as, e.g., to benefit man He set him in Paradise, and to benefit him He turned him out of Paradise. * * To benefit him He sent that fire on Sodom.' 'Our Lord, when He was in hades, set free *all* who were kept prisoners by death' (Allin, pp.139-141).

THEODORE OF MOPSUESTIA (c.350-428) - God 'recapitulated all things in Christ * * as though making a compendious renewal, and *restoration of the whole creation*, through Him, * * Now this will take place in a future age, when *all mankind and ALL POWERS (virtues) POSSESSED OF REASON*, look up to Him, as is right, and obtain mutual concord and firm peace' (Allin, pp.142-143).

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA (d.444) - 'It is, perhaps, not improbable to think, that those who have been entangled in sins, are, as it were, homicides of their own souls; * * So, then,

the wretched soul of man is punished by exile from the world and the body, and *residing in the recesses of death as in a city of Refuge*, was spending these long ages: but was with difficulty set free when Christ, the High Priest died, * * and went down to hades and loosed their bonds.' 'Through Christ has been saved the holy crowd of the Fathers, nay, the whole human race altogether, which was earlier in time (than Christ's death) for He died for all, and the death of all was done away in Him' (Allin, p.143).

MAXIMUS OF TURIN (d.408) - 'We read in the Scripture, that the salvation of the entire human race, was won by the redemption of the Saviour * * the everlasting safety of the entire world' (Allin, p.144).

THEODORET (c.393-c.460) - 'Afterwards the Psalmist speaks more plainly: "All the kings of the earth shall adore Him." Some, indeed, in the present life willingly, but all the rest after the Resurrection; for not yet do we see *all things* subject to Him, but then every knee shall bow to Him.' 'Thou,' says Christ to satan, 'art justly despoiled of *all* thy subjects * * thou shalt vomit forth *all* that thou hast already swallowed * * I shall free all

from death * * for I paid the debt for the race. * * As the debt has been paid. It is right that those confined on account of it should be set free from their prison.' 'After His anger, God will bring an end to His judgment, for He will not be angry unto the end, nor keep His wrath to eternity' (Allin, pp.145, 146).

CHRYSOLOGUS (c.400-450) - on the parable of the hundred sheep, he says that the one lost sheep represents 'the whole human race lost in Adam,' and so the Good Shepherd 'follows the one, seeks the one, in order that in the one He may restore all' (Allin, p.140).

The above quotations, which proclaim or strongly suggest the Larger Hope, are only a sample from the writings of the 'very many' in Augustine's day who believed in the ultimate restoration of all things. Allin suggests that due to the doctrine of 'reserve' - the belief that it was not expedient to teach universal salvation openly - the Larger Hope was probably more widespread in the early centuries than is generally supposed. A careful study of the above quotations will leave the unbiased student with the distinct impression that the

the Larger Hope was not merely tolerated in the Church of the first six centuries, but was dominant, especially in the Eastern tradition.

More Recent Testimonies to the Larger Hope

WILLIAM LAW (1686-1761) - 'The goodness of God breaking forth into a desire to communicate good was the cause and the beginning of the creation. Hence it follows that to all eternity God can have no thought or intent towards the creature but to communicate good; because He made the creature for this sole end, to receive good. The first motive towards the creature is unchangeable; it takes its rise from God's desire to communicate good, and it is an eternal impossibility that anything can ever come from God as His will and purpose towards the creature but that same love and goodness which first created it; He must always will that to it which He willed at the creation of it. This is the amiable nature of God. He is the Good, the unchangeable, overflowing fountain of good that sends forth nothing but good to all eternity. He is the Love itself, the unmixed, unmeasurable Love, doing

nothing but from love, giving nothing but gifts of love to everything that He has made; requiring nothing of all His creatures but the spirit and fruits of that love which brought them into being. Oh, how sweet is this contemplation of the height and depth of the riches of Divine Love! With what attraction must it draw every thoughtful man to return love for love to this overflowing fountain of boundless goodness! (From *Selected Mystical Writings of William Law*, ed. by Stephen Hobhouse).

ABRAHAM LINCOLN (1809-65)
- 'Abraham Lincoln did not nor could not believe in the endless punishment of any one of the human race. He understood punishment for sin to be a Bible doctrine, that the punishment was parental in its object, aim, and design, and intended for the good of the offender; hence it must cease when justice is satisfied. All that was lost by the transgression of Adam was made good by the atonement' (Cited by Gerry Beauchemin in *Hope Beyond Hell* (2007), p.16, Malista Press, Texas).

CHARLES KINGSLEY (1819-75)
- 'This world is strange and often terrible; but be not afraid, all will come right at last. Rest

will conquer Restlessness; Faith will conquer Fear; Order will conquer Disorder; Health will conquer Sickness; Joy will conquer Sorrow; Pleasure will conquer Pain; Life will conquer Death; Right will conquer Wrong. *All will be well at last*' (Cited by Thomas Allin in *Christ Triumphant* (1891), p.285, Concordant Publishing Concern, U.S.A.).

JOHN FOSTER - 'Far be it from me to make light of the demerit of sin. But endless punishment - I admit my inability (I would say it reverently) to admit this belief together with a belief in the divine goodness - the belief that God is Love, that His tender mercies are over all His works' (Cited by Thomas Allin in *Christ Triumphant*, p.52).

HINTON - 'And here I may briefly say, that to my own mind, the language of the New Testament appears *unequivocally* to affirm the redemption of all men; their actual redemption from this evil and diseased state in which we now are; the actual raising up of all to a perfect life. To my mind this *universality* seems to be clearly expressed in Scripture' (Cited by Thomas Allin in *Christ Triumphant*, p.220).

EDNA LYALL (1857-1903) - 'How is it possible that those who know the depths of sin and ignorance, those who hear the character of God slandered by believers and unbelievers, those who *love* the ones who pass unrepentant into the Unseen - how is it possible that they should rest satisfied, while retaining in their hearts even a shadow of a doubt that, "as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive?"' (In Thomas Allin, *Christ Triumphant*, p.vi.).

ANDREW JUKES - 'And yet the love that brought forth the existence of all things changes not through the fall of its creatures, but is continually at work to bring back all fallen natures and creatures. All that passes for a time between God and His fallen creatures is but one and the same thing, working for one and the same end, and though this is called 'wrath,' and that called 'punishment,' 'curse,' and 'death,' it is all from the beginning to the end nothing but the work of the first creative Love, and means nothing else, and does nothing else, but those works of purifying fire, which must and alone can burn away all that dark evil which separates the creature from its first created union with God.

God's providence, from the fall to the restitution of all things, is doing the same thing as when He said to the dark chaos of fallen nature, "Let there be light." He still says, and will continue saying, the same thing, till there is no evil of darkness left in nature and creature. God creating, God illuminating, God sanctifying, God threatening and punishing, God forgiving and redeeming, are all but one and the same essential, immutable, never-ceasing working of the Divine Nature. That in God, which illuminates and glorifies saints and angels in heaven, is that very same working of the Divine Nature, which wounds, pains, punishes, and purifies, sinners upon earth. And every number of destroyed sinners, whether thrown by Noah's flood or Sodom's brimstone into the terrible furnace of a life insensible of anything but new forms of misery until the judgment day, must through the all-working, all-redeeming love of God, which never ceases, come at last to know that they had lost and have found again such a God of love as this' (*The Second Death and the Restitution of All Things* (1877), pp.164, 165, London, Longmans, Green, and Co.).

F. N. OXENHAM - 'I have tried to show that there are no sufficient grounds on which the popular doctrine, here dealt with [i.e., everlasting punishment], can rightly claim any place as a necessary article of the Christian faith. I have ventured to assert, that the popular doctrine, if not certainly false, is certainly unwarrantable, that it is not "*de fide*;" and I have done so with the desire of helping to lift the veil of hopeless misery, and to quiet the risings up of horrified and indignant rebellion, which are two at least of the sad but sure results of believing that the God of Scripture and of Christianity is such a God as this popular doctrine of everlasting punishment represents Him to be' (*What is the Truth as to Everlasting Punishment?* (1881), p.202, Rivingtons).

SAMUEL COX (1826-1893) - 'no sooner do we begin to look at the New Testament more closely, than, beneath its surface-current of meaning, we detect glimpses of a deeper and more spiritual meaning. Of this undercurrent we become conscious as we consider all those passages which affirm the universal extent and the universal efficacy of the

Redemption wrought by Christ; or which imply that the love of God is more than all our sins, an eternal unchangeable love, that does not alter where it alteration finds; or in which an inspired Apostle argues that "all Israel shall be saved," and that "the fullness of the Gentiles shall be brought in," declares that "the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable," or concludes that God has "shut up all men in unbelief, that He may have mercy upon all" ' (*Salvator Mundi* (1890), p234, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd).

THOMAS ALLIN - 'I believe - in the sole true catholicity of the Church of Christ, as destined to embrace all mankind - in the power of His Redemption, as something no will can resist, to which all things must yield one day in perfect submission, love and harmony. I plead for an acceptance of this central truth as the great hope of the Gospel, that the victory of Jesus Christ must be final and complete, i.e., that nothing can impair the power of His Cross and Passion to save the entire human race. I believe that He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. And I feel assured that less than a world saved, a universe restored, could not

satisfy the heart of Jesus Christ, or the love of our Father. I ask all fair and reasonable minds to reject as immoral, and incredible, the picture of a heavenly Parent, Who, being absolutely free and absolute in power and goodness, creates any children of His own, whom He knows to be, in fact, certain to go to endless sin and ruin. Therefore in these pages I have pleaded for the larger hope. Therefore I believe in the vision, glorious beyond all power of human thought fully to realise, of a "Paradise regained," of a universe from which every stain of sin shall have been swept away, in which every heart shall be full of blessedness, and in which "God shall be All and in All." - *Amen*' (*Christ Triumphant* (1891), pp.320, 321).

J. H. LECKIE - 'But whatever we may think of Universalist teaching, in the rigour of its dogmatic form, we must gladly admit that it stands for a priceless element in our religion - for the assurance that truth is stronger than error, good than evil, light than darkness; and that God has a purpose of redemption in His Son which exceeds in sweep and depth and beauty all that we have ever dreamed. Christian faith in all ages has cherished a secret hope

richer and more tender than it has been able to express, and has always been the prophet of the victory of God. The things that finally abide in the light of the face of Christ are not fear and pain and death, but faith and hope and love. And God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we are able either to ask or to think' (*The World to Come - And Final Destiny* (1918), p.290, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark).

WILLIAM TEMPLE (1881-1944) - 'And how can there be paradise for any while there is hell, conceived as unending torment, for some? Each supposedly damned soul was born into the world as a mother's child; and paradise cannot be paradise for her if her child is in such a hell. The scheme [conscious, endless punishment] is unworkable in practice even by omniscience, and moreover it offends against the deepest Christian sentiments' (In *Resurrection and Immortality* (1979), ed. C. S. Duthie, Samuel Bagster & Sons, Ltd).

PERCY DEARMER (1867-1936) - 'He came indeed as the embodiment of the divine love; and in his own person he exhibited that love, not as inflicting punishment but as

innocently enduring it: he pictured God, no longer as a mere king, still less as a capricious and vindictive sultan, but as a father, loving all his children; and in the story of the Prodigal Son he showed what sort of father he had in mind. His teaching was of mercy and forgiveness; he bade men harbour no thoughts of vengeance or retribution, but forgave utterly because that is the way God forgives: he destroyed the terrors of the Law, and he saw God as one who is always seeking the hearts of erring men that he may bring them to health. Rarely had tenderness been combined with great power in the ancient world: he combined them as never before; and it is his infinite kindness that has drawn all men to him and has led the hesitating world to a moral conception of God' (*The Legend of Hell* (1929), p.291).

LESLIE WEATHERHEAD (1893-1976) - 'There can be no kingdom of heaven on earth if any class or individual is left out. There can surely be no heaven of heavens if the son or daughter of one saint inside is left outside in the hell of isolation from God and the beloved community. I know there is the theoretical

possibility that a soul with free will may finally say 'No' to God and refuse to belong to the family. But can the love of God ultimately fail? The woman sought the lost coin *until she found it*. The shepherd sought over the dark mountains the lost sheep *until he found it*' (*In Search of a Kingdom*, p.183).

HERBERT H. FARMER (1892 - 1981) - 'There seems no conclusive reason why we should not follow the logic of our belief in the love and sovereignty of God and affirm the restoration of all into unity with God and with one another; but if we do affirm it, we must not regard the bare idea of restoration as an adequate description of the final consummation. We are bound to add that it will be a restoration which contains within it both an infinite cost to God and also the unimpaired significance of human choices and decisions in time' (*God and Men* (1948), p.150, London, Nisbet & Co., Ltd).

C. H. DODD (1884-1973) - 'Those who turn in faith to God through Him are incorporate in Christ, in His Body: first the handful of Jewish believers, then the Gentile converts who began to stream into the

Church. The inclusive process cannot stop before the rest of mankind is gathered in: first the Gentiles, then the Jews, until at the last there will be life from the dead for the entire race. And then the vision broadens, to include the physical universe out of which man sprang . . . And so at last all things are gathered up in Christ (Eph.1:10): the divine purpose reaches its consummation: God is all in all' (1Cor.15:28). Note: - Dodd provides an excellent diagram (p.187) which charts the unfolding of God's plan of salvation from the Creation of man to 'all things in heaven and earth being gathered up in Christ' (Eph.1:10). (*The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (1932), pp.186-7, Moffatt Series N/T Commentaries).

WILLIAM BARCLAY (1907-78) - 'I am a convinced universalist. I believe that in the end all men will be gathered into the love of God. In the early days Origen was the great name connected with universalism. I would believe with Origen that universalism is no easy thing. Origen believed that after death there were many who would need prolonged instruction, the sternest discipline, even the severest punishment before they were fit for the presence of

God. Origen did not eliminate hell; he believed that some people would have to go to heaven via hell. He believed that even at the end of the day there would be some on whom the scars remained. He did not believe in eternal *punishment*, but he did see the possibility of eternal *penalty*. And so the choice is whether we accept God's offer and invitation willingly, or take the long and terrible way round through the ages of purification' (*William Barclay - A Spiritual Autobiography* (1977), p.65, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan).

TOM SMAIL - 'What the Spirit has already done for some he seeks to do for all, because it was for all that the Father sent his Son and it was for all that the Son offered himself on the cross. Such a universal hope has, as we have tried to show, good grounding in the New Testament Scriptures. The God who does not reject anyone, and does not abandon us to our own choices, has in his Son and his Spirit the love that is mighty enough to bring us all home to himself. All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well, but only because Jesus has died for the world and risen again' (*Once and for All* (1998),

Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd).

JOHN ROBINSON (1919-1983) - 'Hell, so limitless to the man who has chosen it, is still bounded by the 'nevertheless' of divine love. And that love must win. "Hereby shall we . . . assure our heart before him, *whereinsoever* our heart condemn us, because God is greater than our heart" (1John 3:19-20). The incredible must happen, because the incredible in Christ has happened. "Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken and we are delivered" (Ps.124:7). The world *has been* redeemed. Hell has been harrowed, and none can finally make it their home. The shadow of the Cross has fallen aslant it: the halls of death are condemned property. . . In a universe of love there can be no heaven which tolerates a chamber of horrors, no hell for any which does not at the same time make it hell for God. He cannot endure that, for *that would* be the final mockery of his nature. And he will not' (*In the end God* (1968), pp.132, 133, Collins, Fontana Books).

'If we really believe in One God, and believe that Jesus Christ, in what he was and what he did, truly shows us what God's character and his attitude

to men are like, then it is very difficult to think ourselves out of the belief that somehow his love will find a way of bringing all men into unity with him' (*Wrestling with Romans* (1979), p.132, SCM Press, Ltd).

THOMAS TALBOTT - 'As Paul saw it, God does indeed elect or choose individuals for himself. But the election of an individual inevitably reaches beyond the elected person to incorporate, in a variety of ways, the community in which the person lives and, in the end, the entire human race' (*The Inescapable Love of God* (1999), p.120, Thomas Talbott, Willamette University, Salem, Oregon 97301).

GERRY BEAUCHEMIN - 'It is inconceivable God would have created the world without first anticipating the atonement. Even if all were to incur the second death described in Revelation, all men are still redeemed by the blood of the lamb slain before the foundation of the world! (1Pet.1:20; 2Tim.1:9; Rev.13:8). He purchased all men on the cross (Jn.19:30). He died for the whole world! (1John 2:2). Christ's blood was not shed in vain for anyone! It will achieve all the glorious purpose for

which God has ordained it. It cannot miss its mark! (*Hope Beyond Hell* (2007), p.174, Malista Press, Olmito, Texas).

My purpose in providing what seems to me to be an interesting and impressive list of supporters of the Larger Hope, in the early centuries and in more recent times, is to inform the reader of its occurrence and influence in Church history, an influence which is increasing as more people become aware of it as a welcome alternative (and, I suggest, more truly scriptural understanding of God's purpose in salvation) to that of the narrower, less-merciful view.

Church history is dotted with numerous godly, learned and deeply compassionate people, who through their deep study of Scripture and genuine sympathy with the human condition – made wretched and hopeless through the Fall, Satan, sin, the world and the flesh – have concluded that God, in His eternal love and goodness, has purposed to redeem, reconcile, and restore all things to Himself in Christ. The saints in the lists above are representative of such loving spirits; whose words savour of the divine mercy.

TORMENT

Those who believe in the everlasting punishment of the wicked often cite the 'torment passages' of Scripture as justification for their belief. However, on closer inspection, the word 'torment' in the New Testament suggests something other than the purely retributive infliction of pain. Apart from Heb.11:35, all the instances of 'torment' and its derivatives are translations of the Greek *basanos*, i.e., a *touchstone* used for testing the genuineness of precious metals. Such a stone was used to scratch metals and coins to ascertain their true nature, but clearly there was no sense in which it *tormented* these things. It simply tested them.

If this meaning of *basanos* was carried through into the New Testament, it is highly significant and helps to dispel any idea of the infliction of everlasting retributive torment.

In Matt.4:24 *basanois* means torments, 'pains' (RSV Greek/English Interlinear, Nestle-Marshall, p.12); but pains suffered by people who were sick and diseased. Such were not being *tested* in any way by their pain, but we may say that their pain *revealed/proved* they were ill.

In Luke 16:23 *basanois* is synonymous with *odunasai*,

'suffering' (v.25). The suffering of the rich man in this parable is often cited as evidence of the torments of hell, but on close inspection, such a conclusion is seen to be unfounded. As well as considering the general meaning of this parable (see *The Larger Hope*, pp.73-76), focusing on the rich man's 'torment' we note that i) he was suffering in *hades* (the intermediate state between death and the last judgment), not *gehenna* ('hell,' AV); ii) there is no mention of his suffering being everlasting or endless; iii) fire, in Scripture ('flame,' in this instance, v.24), especially in the realm of eschatology (the last things), can be highly symbolic. In what is clearly a *parable*, the rich man's torment may be due to remorse, or, if he remained self-centred, by the loss of his privileges. If remorse, this may have been brought about by the *touchstone* of truth and righteousness penetrating his insensitivity to the needs of others. If so, perhaps Jesus meant us to see in these things an eventual end to his torment, when he had learned to think of, and love, others; his newfound concern for his brothers indicating, perhaps the positive effect of this remedial chastening.

This suggested interpretation of the Parable of the Rich

Man and Lazarus may help us to look more hopefully at other 'torment' passages in the New Testament that involve divine judgment (Matt.8:29; Mark 5:7; Luke 8:28; Rev.9:5; 14:11; 18:7,10,15).

A highly important thing to realize when attempting to interpret the 'torment' passages in the Book of Revelation is that it is full of symbol, metaphor, and mystical imagery, so much so, that reaching hasty, superficial and dogmatic conclusions, especially on the delicate subject of the fate of the wicked, is fraught with danger (see *The larger Hope*, pp.81-86). Having said this, whatever doctrinal conclusions we arrive at, with regard to the nature of the torment of the wicked, they must harmonize with the eternal love, goodness and mercy of God, whose 'tender mercies are over all His works' (Ps.45:9), and who wills the salvation of all (1Tim.2:4).

In view of God's love for His enemies, and His power to subdue all things, and draw all things to Himself, even through the fires of purification, we can, I feel, hope for the eventual restoration of all people in Christ.

UNIVERSALISM

The word 'universalism,' in its

theological sense can mean several things, i) the belief that salvation is possible for *some people* from every nation; ii) the belief that *all people* will be saved, but only through Christ; and iii) the belief that all will be saved, but that Christianity is *just one path* to God among many. Many claim that i) is the authentic biblical universalism, but those known as Christian Universalists maintain that the Bible clearly teaches the total restoration of all things in Christ.

Christian Universalism

In the A-Z of the Larger Hope, I have attempted to provide comprehensive scriptural evidence for Christian Universalism. In this section I have included a further selection of biblical material, gleaned from more than fifteen years study on this subject. I have endeavoured not to duplicate references and comments, but some repetition has been unavoidable. The following notes, rather than being thematic, are sequential, in that they are in book order as they occur throughout the Bible. Comments will be brief, due to constraints with regard to the size of this book, but they should, nevertheless, be helpful to the thoughtful student of God's word.

Some of the following verses/passages clearly teach the restoration of all things, and from the others the Larger Hope may be deduced.

Old Testament

Gen.3:21 – this little appreciated verse teaches, or at least implies, that the whole race in Adam and Eve is redeemed, the tunics of skin having been made from a slain animal typifying the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).

Gen.ch.19 – is about Sodom's depravity and destruction; but the city's restoration is assured (Ezek.16:44-63).

Gen.20:6 – God prevented Abimelech from sinning against Him: hence He is able to subdue all things (including people) to Himself (1Cor.15:28).

Gen.20:7 – forgiveness and life are granted through the intercession of Abraham, God's elect servant: hence all may receive life through Christ, who intercedes continually for us (cf. 1Tim.2:1-3).

Gen.21:8-21 – God's care for Hagar, and His promise to multiply her seed into a great nation, suggests His merciful purpose to include her and her descendants (the Arab people) in the restoration of all things (Isa.19:18-25). They will be among the nations, tribes, and

tongues blessed through Christ, Abraham's seed (Matt.1:1; Gal.3:16).

Gen.22:18; 26:4 - all nations will be blessed through Abraham's seed - Christ (and the Church) (Gal.3:16, 29).

Gen.45:1-15; 50:15-21 - a wonderful revelation of God's kindness in Joseph's love and forgiveness of his heartless brethren - a prophetic picture of the Greater Joseph's forgiveness of and provision for the Jewish people and all nations - for Christ, the 'bread of God,' came to give life to the world (John 6:33, 51).

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Exod.19:5-6 - Israel were meant to be a 'special treasure' to God 'above all people,' a 'kingdom of priests,' indicating her intended role as a channel of blessing to the nations, a role fulfilled in this age by the Church as she reaches out to all with the Good News (1Pet.2:9).

Exod. 33:18-19 - God's glory is His goodness, and vice versa; a revelation of God's character pregnant with hope for humanity.

Exod.34:6, 7 - the glorious attributes of God in relation to His sinful people. Mercy is emphasized. Punishment is only to the third and fourth

generation, *not* unlimited punishment (Mic.7:18-20).

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2 Sam.14:14 - God 'devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him' - words which shine with hope for all people - through God's reconciliation of 'the world'/'all things' to Himself in Christ (2Cor.5:19; Col.1:20).

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1Kings 8:43 - Solomon's prayer that 'all the peoples of the earth' may know and fear God, as Israel did, is a prayer for the salvation of all people. Will the Greater Solomon, Christ, desire and pray for less? (1Tim.2:1-6).

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Job 7:17-18 - God is concerned with the welfare of all people; His visiting us and testing us is motivated by love, hence for our eternal good.

Job 7:20-21 - God watches us and disciplines us. Why? Because He loves us and intends to do what Job pleaded with Him to do: pardon transgression and take away iniquity (Neh.9:17; Ps.130:3, 4; Isa.53:6; Hos.13:14). God is the 'preserver of men'(v.20, AV, cf.

Ps.12:7; 61:7; 140:1, 4; Ps.49:8). If God is the 'preserver of men,' this suggests He will fulfil this attribute in the salvation of all?

Job.13:25 - will God 'break a leaf driven to and fro?' and will He 'pursue dry stubble?' (AV). That is how Job felt in his infirmity, but his restoration lay ahead. Christ will not break a bruised reed or quench smoking flax, but will 'send forth justice to victory, and in His name the Gentiles will trust' (cf. Matt. 12:20, 21); all of which suggests God's goodness to *all*, and His 'tender mercies over *all* His works' (Ps.145:8, 9), in contrast to the merciless attitude of many preachers through the centuries.

Job.14:1-17 - God will not smash irrecoverably the frail works of His hands, made in His image, the objects of His love and pity. His desire is towards the works of His hands (v.15); He has covered our iniquity and taken away our sin (v.17; Gen.3:21; John 1:29).

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Ps.2:8-9 - the 'nations' and the 'ends of the earth' are given to Christ as His '*inheritance*.' Those who rebel will be broken and dashed to pieces, but only to subdue, re-make and restore

them to God, through Christ (see pp.154-165, under Punishment and Purification).

Ps.22:27-29 - the 'ends of the world,' 'all the families of the nations,' and 'all that go down to the dust' shall 'bow' and 'worship before God' (cf. Isa.45:22-25).

Ps.64:9 - 'all people will fear {the Lord},' 'declare the work of God' and 'wisely consider His doing,' - all of which speaks of universal submission to God, a world-wide acknowledgement of and subjugation to Him, and a granting of wisdom and humility to all.

Ps.65:1-3 - to God 'all flesh will come' and He will 'provide atonement for them' (cf. 1 John 2:2).

Ps.66:3, 4 - through God's power His enemies will submit to Him, all the earth will worship Him and sing His praises. In this we have a clear declaration of the restoration of all things/people to God.

Ps.67 - the whole of this Psalm is an exhortation that through God's mercy the whole world may respond in Joy and praise to Him - an exhortation that will be fulfilled (Rev.5:13).

Ps.68:18 - a declaration of Christ's victory, His leading captivity captive, even being given the rebellious, as all are subdued to Him.

Ps.68:30-32 – God is invoked to rebuke all beast-like people, until they submit to Him with ‘pieces of silver,’ i.e., tokens of redemption. The nations are exhorted to sing His praises.

Ps.72:8,9,11,17 – God’s dominion will be universal, ‘from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the earth.’ Those remote from Him will ‘bow before Him, and His enemies will lick the dust,’ i.e., be submissive to Him. ‘All kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him.’ ‘Men shall be blessed in Him, and all nations shall call Him blessed.’ These words show that subjugation to God is a restorative, not eternally destructive process (Zeph.3:8,9).

Ps.86:9 – all the nations God has made will come and worship before Him.

Ps.100 – this Psalm is redolent with the psalmist’s desire for people of every land (Lit. ‘all the earth,’ margin) to praise God and serve Him with gladness, for ‘the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations.’ His inspired longing will certainly be fulfilled (Rev.5:13).

Ps.102:15 – all the nations and kings of the earth will fear (acknowledge) God and His glory (cf. Rev.21:24; 22:2).

Ps.103:8-10 – God does not deal with us according to our

sins, or punish us according to our iniquities. He does not keep His anger forever, because He is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. In other words, divine grace abounds more than sin, and mercy more than judgment (Rom.5:20,21; Jam.2:13).

Ps.138:4, 5 – when the kings of the earth hear the words of God’s mouth, they will sing of His ways (Isa.52:15).

Ps.145:8-13,15,16 – God is good and merciful to all. His saints (the elect) will make known to the sons of men His mighty acts and the glorious majesty of His kingdom. God satisfies the desire of ‘every living thing.’ If this is true of His care of every animal and human being at the *natural* level, will He withhold the true, life-giving bread from anyone? Will He provide all creatures with the lesser, but deny to some the greater?

Ps.148:11 – the psalmist exhorts all things, including the earth’s kings, princes, and judges; young men, maidens, old men, and children, to praise the name of the Lord – revealing God’s receptive and all-embracing heart toward His creatures. This inspired invitation to praise God is universal and will, I believe, be ultimately heeded by all.

Prov.10:12 - this is perhaps the most concise declaration of the Good News in the whole of Scripture - 'love covers all sins.' In our Lord Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega, we have the beginning, development and glorious fulfilment of this truth. It perfectly sums up the Larger Hope - the ultimate salvation of all God's children.

Prov.22:15 - the rod of *correction* drives foolishness from the heart of a child, and God's correction and discipline will ultimately drive it from all His offspring.

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Ecc.3:3, 4 - there is 'a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.' All this indicates that chastening, death and destruction are not God's last word to us, but healing, building, and joy, when all are restored to God in Christ, for God has 'committed them all to disobedience that He might have mercy on all' (Rom.11:32).

Ecc.3:18 - God tests us that we may realize how beastly we have become (His image in us debased), but with a view to raising and restoring us (cf. Dan.4:27-37).

Isa.2:1-4 - a glorious picture of all nations blessed through the House/Church of God. All will be subdued and will learn peace.

Isa.19:18-25 - Israel's traditional enemies will be chastened, blessed, and united with her as God's people.

Isa.25:6-8 - death, the veil covering all people and all nations, will be swallowed up, and all will be comforted.

Isa.45:22-25 - all people will bow the knee to God and say, 'Surely in the Lord I have righteousness and strength' (cf. Phil.2:9-11).

Isa.52:15 - the cleansing ('sprinkling,' AV) and enlightenment of all nations through Christ is foretold.

Isa.53:6 - all Israel's iniquity laid on Christ, just as Christ has given Himself 'a ransom for all' (1Tim.2:6).

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Jer.3:17 - all nations shall be 'gathered to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem . . . and walk no more after the stubbornness of their evil heart.'

Jer.32:17, 27 - the Lord is the 'God of all flesh.' Nothing is too hard for Him to accomplish, not even the salvation of all people. These words find an echo in Matt.19:23-26.

Ezek 16:44-63 - the restoration of Sodom, Samaria and apostate Israel points to the 'restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began' (Acts 3:21).

Ezek 47:1-12 - in this vision God twice reveals to Ezekiel that 'every living thing will live' wherever the river of life from under the threshold of the temple flows (vv.9, 1; cf. Rev.22:1-5)

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Dan.7:14 - all peoples, nations and languages will serve Christ.

Dan.7:18, 27 - all kingdoms shall serve and obey God. The saints will reign with Christ in the ages to come (Rev.5:10).

Dan.9:8, 9 - God's mercy and forgiveness triumph in the end, even though his people have rebelled against Him.

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Hos.2:19, 23 - those who were not God's people (through rebellion), and had not received mercy, obtain mercy, and become His people again.

Hos.3:4-5 - the restoration of Israel foretold. Repentance is required, but repentance is God's gift (Hos.12:6; Jer.24:7; Acts 11:18; 2Tim.2:25).

Jonah 4:2 - God's forgiveness of the people of Nineveh was, as Jonah feared, in keeping with His grace, mercy, love and forbearance, raising the hope that *all* people will be brought to repentance and salvation.

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Micah 7:18-19 - God 'does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He is able to 'subdue our iniquities . . . and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.' If God does this for 'the remnant of His heritage' (v.18), He will do it for all for whom Christ has died (John 1:29; Heb.2:9; 1Tim.2:6; 1John 2:2).

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Hab.1:12 - 'judgment' in the form of 'correction,' not eternal death, is appointed for God's creatures.

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Zeph.3:8, 9 - God's fiery/angry judgment of the nations is not entirely retributive punishment, to destroy them utterly, but is essentially *remedial*, that He might 'restore to the peoples a pure language, that they may call on the Lord with one accord.'

Zech.8:20-22 – ‘Peoples shall yet come, inhabitants of many cities’ . . . ‘many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem.’ Whilst this does not, arguably, prove the Larger Hope, it presents a far broader hope than the popular view that relatively few people will be saved.

Zech.9:9, 10 – these words present the prospect of ‘the ends of the earth’ coming under the sway of Christ – not to be forcibly subjugated, then eternally tormented – but to know His peace.

New Testament

Matt.5:43-48 – here is the heart of Christianity. Loving our enemies identifies us as children of God our heavenly Father, for it mirrors His own love for the unlovely. The teaching of this passage alone leads, I feel, to the Larger Hope – the belief that God will love, bless, and do eternal good to all His offspring, even His enemies.

Matt.9:36, 37 – Jesus looked with compassion on the multitudes and likened them to ‘sheep without a shepherd’ and a ‘truly plentiful harvest,’ which speaks of the broadness of the harvest – and His love.

Matt.13:33 – not just some, but *all* the meal was leavened.

Matt.18:2, 14 – ‘it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.’ We are all ‘little ones’ during our infancy, those who, according to these words, Christ loves, draws to Himself, and blesses. If He loves the world’s children, then He loves the world and is its Saviour (John 4:42; 1John 4:14).

Matt.21:31, 32 – the word ‘before’(v.31) means *before in time*, suggesting that whilst the tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before Israel’s self-righteous religious leaders, the word *before* implies they *will enter* eventually, perhaps when, by the mercy of God, ‘all Israel is saved’ (Rom.11:26, 32).

Matt.23:37-39 – as on many previous occasions, the people of Israel, represented by Jerusalem, were not willing to turn to God, now present in Christ. As a consequence, Jesus said their house was left to them desolate (v.38). However, He did not mean they were eternally lost, for in the very next breath He said that they would have a change of heart at His second coming. Sadly, most commentators/preachers stop at v.38, and for some reason completely ignore Jesus’ more merciful teaching of future restoration in v.39.

Luke 1:37 – over and over again in Scripture we are assured that *nothing* is impossible with God: *but* when it comes to the extent of salvation many deem the Larger Hope impossible. We sense and appreciate God's heartbeat in this matter by His grace and favour. When we do, it is surely that we might glorify Him, rejoice with unspeakable joy, and gladly declare the good news to others.

Luke 2:10, 14, 29-32 – the good tidings of great joy, the good news of the Saviour coming into the world, is good news for '*all* people' (v.10). His coming was proof of God's good will toward '*men*' – clearly *all* men is implied. God's salvation in Christ was for '*all* peoples' (v31). God's love for the world has been displayed in the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of His Son. The sense in these verses is broad, even universal.

Luke 3:4-6 – we are distinctly told that '*all flesh* shall see the salvation of the God.' Not simply as *observers*, but as *partakers*. This seems to be the natural sense of these words (Isa.45:22-25).

Luke 4:5, 7 – in God's sovereignty and for His wise purposes Satan was given authority over fallen humanity, but only until Christ came to

destroy his works (1John 3:8). Then the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever (Rev.11:15). All Adam's offspring, the subjects of the ruler of the kingdoms of this world, are by nature dead in trespasses and sins (Eph.2:1). So it follows that *all* will be made alive when the kingdoms (peoples) of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ (Rom.5:18, 19; 1Cor.15:22).

Luke 15:11-32 – there are many valuable lessons to be learned from the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but, with regard to the Larger Hope, suffering, trial and hardship led to realisation, repentance and restoration. Isn't there a clear principle here, namely, that chastening allowed or administered by God is for our *benefit*, that we may all partake of His holiness and manifest the peaceable fruit of righteousness? In keeping with the spirit of this parable, will not 'Our wise, gracious and loving heavenly Father, the 'Father of spirits,' and the 'Father of mercies,' restore us all to Himself in the end? The parables of the Lost Sheep, and Lost Coin, indicate this – the lost being found in each case.

Luke 19:10 - Christ came initially for the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt.15:24); however, His coming 'to seek and to save that which was lost' has a deeper and wider significance than His being the Saviour of Israel. The whole world needs a Saviour, for all the descendants of Adam have strayed from the Creator, the great Shepherd of souls, hence need finding and bringing back to Him. What God purposes to do He sooner or later *does*, for He 'does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth' (Dan.4:35; see also under God's Sovereignty, p.176). From this we can be certain that every lost sheep *will be found* and restored to God in and through Christ (Eph.1:9-10).

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John 1:29 - Jesus, the Lamb of God, 'takes away the sin of the world.' He does this in that the sin of the whole world was 'laid' on Him, just as Israel's iniquity was laid upon Him (1John 2:2; Isa.53:6), so that Israel and the whole world are redeemed and reconciled to God in Him (2Cor.5:19; Col.1:20; see also under Redemption, pp.167-169, and Reconciliation, pp.166, 167). In order to limit

the scope of redemption and reconciliation, many in the Reformed school interpret the word '*world*' in certain passages, including John 1:29 and 3:16, to mean the world of believing Jews and Gentiles. This restricted idea of '*world*' presents a radically different understanding of God and His love from that of the majority of Christians.

John 3:17 - 'God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that through Him the world might be saved.' From this verse, and Luke 9:56; 19:10 and John 12:47, God's purpose in sending His Son into the world was clearly to *save the world*. Christ did *all things well* (Mark 7:37); He *finished the work* His Father gave Him to do (John 17:4); and He has promised to draw *all people* to Himself (John 12:32). So He *will accomplish* what He came to do, i.e., not condemn, judge and destroy the world/men's lives, but *save them*.

John 4:42 - the people of Sychar, after spending a few hours with Christ, came to believe that He was 'the Saviour of the world.' Their understanding of this wonderful truth was more limited than the Apostle John's, who after a lifetime of faith, contemplation, and spiritual enlightenment,

proclaimed it himself in a context of love. Sandwiched between declarations that 'God is love' (1John 4:8, 16) is his, 'we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Saviour of the world' (v.14). This follows the heartening news that Christ is 'the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world' (2:2); and that rather than God's love being conditional on our love for Him, He *first* 'loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins,' i.e., the sins of the *whole world*.

John 6:33, 51 - Christ's declared intention in coming as the 'bread of life' was to 'give life to the world,' and to give His flesh 'for the life of the world.' No narrower purpose can be read into these words. The *whole world* is sick and dying in sin, and He is the unfailing Remedy.

John 12:32 - Christ's death on the Cross, His being 'lifted up,' atoned for the sins of the whole world. In Adam the whole world fell and died, but in the crucified and resurrected Christ *all* find life, not just potentially, for He *will*, sooner or later, draw *all people* to Himself. This is the plain meaning of Jesus' words, however-much people try to twist and limit them.

John 17:2, 6, 11, 20 - John ch.17 is Christ's great high-priestly prayer to His Father. It is clear that He prayed on this occasion, not for the world in general, but for His disciples and those who would believe in Him (in this age) through their word. Consequently, it appears to be a prayer for the elect - those destined to suffer with Him in this age, and live and reign with Him in the ages to come (see 'Elect,' pp.115-117). However, it is clear from the teaching of Scripture as a whole, that the number of those who will ultimately be saved is not restricted to the elect; for it is *through the ministry of the elect, the 'sons of God,'* that the whole creation will be delivered from bondage to corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom.8:18-23).

John 17:21, 23 - it is clear from Jesus' words in these verses that He intends *the world* to believe that God sent Him into the world. Why, if He did not intend to save the world? (Luke 9:56; 19:10; John 3:17; 12:47).

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Acts 3:21 - the 'restoration' or 'restitution of all things,' Peter says, is a major theme and hope running through the Old Testament Prophets (see pp.25-

26), and evidently means the restoration, not simply of Israel and the blessings she enjoyed in the days of David and Solomon, but the blessed sin-free, loving relationship and fellowship human beings enjoyed with God before the Fall.

Acts 10:15, 28 - Peter's remarkable vision on the rooftop at Joppa, revealed to him that people of all nations had been cleansed through God's work in Christ. This seems to be the sense of these verses: not that a *few* Gentiles (Cornelius and his household), had been cleansed, but that the whole world had been redeemed and reconciled to God in Christ (2Cor.5: 19), and was able to come into the good of this through faith in Him.

Acts 13:11 - if anyone deserved to be condemned to endless separation from God, it was Elymas the sorcerer, but his chastening was *temporal*, 'for a time,' presumably to teach him a lesson and hopefully prepare him for a more favourable response to the Gospel - which, for all we know, may have happened. Doesn't this suggest that God, the 'Father of mercies,' chastens sinners for their good, with a view to their restoration, for He is able to subdue all things/people to Himself (Phil.3:21; see 'Subdue,'

pp.177-179.

Acts 17:28, 29 - Paul reasons with the Athenians by appealing to aspects of their own culture/poetry. One of their poets had called human beings God's 'offspring,' and Paul, rather than denying this, affirms it by saying 'since we are the offspring of God . . . ' This shows that despite the Fall all human beings are God's children, fallen children, nevertheless *His* children. In the Bible God is called the 'God of the spirits of *all flesh*,' the 'Father of spirits,' and is prayed to as 'Our Father . . . '(Num. 27:16; Heb.12:9; Matt.6:9).

This is not to detract from the truth that through the new birth we can become God's children in a particular sense, when we come to *know Him* as our Father, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; but it does remind us that God loves and cares for *all* His offspring and intends, in due season, to bless them in Christ (see 'Father,' pp.120).

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Rom.4:13 - Abraham is the 'heir of the world' in that through his 'seed,' Christ, all nations, tribes, kindreds and tongues will be blessed. Little did he envisage the glorious fulfilment of this in the salvation of all people,

by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Again, the most natural meaning of Paul's words is that the whole world is destined for blessing in Christ, and not simply *some people* of all nations.

Rom.5:10 - Paul teaches that those who have been reconciled to God through the death of His Son will be saved by His life. In 2 Cor.5:19 and Col.1:20 Paul reveals that in and by Christ 'the world' and 'all things' are reconciled to God, and can enter by faith into the good of His glorious work of reconciliation. Since grace and faith are gifts of God we can hope for the salvation of all.

Rom.5:12-21 - here Paul spells out in the plainest way possible how God has completely nullified the results of the Fall, by bringing all who have sinned and are under judgment and condemnation, and who are spiritually dead by nature, to justification, abundant grace and the gift of righteousness through our Lord Jesus Christ. The parallels in this passage are clear. Through one man's offence 'judgment came to all men,' but through Christ 'the free gift came to *all men*, resulting in justification of life' (v.18). We are assured that although sin abounded, in Jesus Christ 'grace abounded *much more*' (v.20).

Rom.8:20 - God Himself has subjected the creation to futility, but '*in hope.*' 'Futility,' 'corruption' (v.21), and 'groaning' (v.22), referring as they do to the creation, apply not so much to inanimate things, or even to animals, but to human beings. God has done this to show that our only hope of salvation is in Him, through His mercy, which He offers to *all* (11:32; 1Tim.2:4). So if our salvation depends on God's *mercy*, there is hope for all, for that is the essence of mercy and grace - as opposed to merit and good works. The only conclusion we reach from these things is that all people will receive mercy in the end, in order that God *alone* may be praised and glorified.

Rom.11:32 - 'all,' both Jews and Gentiles, have been 'committed to disobedience.' Futility and disobedience are everyone's lot by nature, and this, as we have seen, is to make us completely dependent on the grace and mercy of God. For it is *only* when we fully realize *this* that we can know true humility and dependence on God our heavenly Father, and find fulfilment, not in our works, but in His unconditional mercy and love in Christ (Eph.2:4-10).

Rom.12:21 - we are encouraged as Christians 'not to

be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.' This sums up Jesus' teaching in Matt.5:43-48, and reflects the loving heart of our heavenly Father. The point here, as far as the Larger Hope is concerned, is that if *we* are to overcome evil with good, in imitation of God and Christ, will not God the great Exemplar, overcome with good *all* evil in *all* people, and become '*all in all*' one day? We are *assured* that He will do so (1Cor.15:28).

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1Cor.2:8 – this verse, along with Acts 3:17 and 1Tim.1:13, teach a vital, mitigating truth, in relation to the attitude of unbelievers in and persecutors of Christ. Peter and Paul point out the mitigating nature of *ignorance* (see '*Ignorance*,' pp.130,131). Persecutors of Christ/Christians are not altogether blameless, for cruelty to fellow-humans is culpable. However, Paul distinctly says that had Israel and the world's rulers *known* it was the Lord of glory they were putting to death, they would *not have done so*. Doesn't this suggest, along with what Jesus said about the people of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom (Matt.11:20-24), that when the veil of ignorance is

lifted, people will believe, or at least be more inclined to believe? We are assured that when all veils are removed, and all of us know 'even as we are known,' there will be a universal turning to God (Isa.45:22-25; Phil.2:9-11).

1Cor.5:5 – here we see God's unchanging attitude towards sinful believers, and the remedy He employs to rid us of our sin and restore us to Himself. For His own name's sake, the church's sake, and the offending brother's sake, Paul commands that the man be 'delivered . . . to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.' Happily the man did not have to wait until the day of the Lord before he repented and was restored (2 Cor.2:3-11).

Notice the role of Satan in the process of chastening. He is to some extent involved in the 'destruction' of the 'flesh' (sinful nature) of offenders. This is meant to be an *educative process* leading to full restoration (1Tim.1:20).

If spiritually enlightened offenders receive remedial and restorative treatment, will not God treat the unconverted – who are blind, ignorant, and dead in trespasses and sins – in the same way and with the same compassion?

1Cor.6:2 - after counselling his Corinthian brethren on how to deal with their inter-personal squabbles, Paul reminds them of the sobering truth that 'the saints will judge the world,' even 'angels.' Clearly, they had a lot to learn before they were ready for that.

Interesting as the situation at Corinth was, what Paul says sheds light on the reality and role of the 'elect' in relation to the rest of humanity. The saints' judging the world, as we have seen (under Judgment, pp.133-135), is their sharing with Christ in His judgment of the world 'in righteousness' (Acts 17:31), which does not lead to humanity's utter destruction, but its correction, purification and emancipation, fitting it for life in the new heavens and new earth, under the glorious, holy and loving reign of Christ and the Church (Dan.7:13, 14, 18, 27; Matt.19:28; 1Pet.2:9; Rev.1:5; 5:10). The saints *will* execute judgment against the wicked (Ps.149:5-9), but only until their evil nature has been destroyed and they have the image of God restored in them.

1Cor.15:28 - the purpose of God, Paul declares, is to bring the whole creation into fullness of blessing, in Christ, even that God might be 'all in all' (see 'Subdue,' pp.177-179).

2Cor.5:19 - when Paul says, 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself . . .' he is using the past tense, referring to Christ's work of redemption and reconciliation at Calvary. From God's point of view, Christ's death *actually* redeemed and reconciled humanity, and now all are exhorted to 'be reconciled to God' (v.20), through faith in Christ. In the end, everyone will declare 'In the Lord I have righteousness and strength' (Isa.45:24), showing that God's work of reconciliation in Christ was not in vain, for all will be reconciled in the end.

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Eph.1:9-11 - by the symbolic/typical gesture of clothing Adam and Eve (and all in them) in the skin of a sacrificed animal, God laid the ground for the truth declared in these verses. In the heart, mind and will of our Creator and heavenly Father, has always been the purpose that, 'in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth - in Him.' There is a divinely appointed order in this - initially the 'first-fruits,' then, through them, the

'harvest;' also, the 'firstborn' sons, followed by the 'later-born.' In Rom.8:23 Paul says that Christians (in this age), 'have the first-fruits of the Spirit' (cf. Jam.1:18). So this 'gathering together in one all things in Christ,' is realized by God in this age and in the ages to come through Christ and the Church - the 'first-fruits' (see 'First-fruits,' pp.122-123).

Eph.4:10 - Jesus first 'descended into the lower parts of the earth,' i.e., the grave, then, in the Spirit, to hades (1Pet.3:18-20). From there He ascended 'far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things,' by His Spirit, giving gifts and ministries to the Church (v.12). God's filling of all things began with the Church, the first-fruits and firstborn, and, as we have seen, continues until God becomes 'all in all.' Much has to transpire before God is 'all in all,' but in the end it will be perfectly and universally realized.

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Phil.2:10, 11 - see pp. 28-30.

Phil.3:21 - see pp.178.

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Col.1:16 - not only did Christ

create *all things*, they were created '*for Him*' (cf. Heb.2:10). Doesn't this prove that He will gather/subdue all things to Himself in the best and most beneficial way? (1Cor.15:27, 28; Eph.1:10); for if all things were created *for Him*, i.e., for His pleasure and possession, will He not, being the embodiment of divine love, goodness and mercy, ultimately bring all that is *His* into His kingdom of love?

Col.1:19 20 - see pp.30, 31.

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1 Tim.2:1-6 - this is one of the most powerful testimonies to the Larger Hope in Scripture. It begins with Paul exhorting Timothy, his 'son in the Faith,' and the Christians in his care, to pray for *all people*, including rulers and those in authority - one hoped-for blessing being that the churches may be left in peace, be allowed to fellowship, and be Christ's witnesses in the world.

God our Saviour 'will have *all* men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (vv.3, 4, AV). Notice that 'all men' in this verse is synonymous with 'men' in v.5, i.e., mankind as a whole. In other words, Christ stands as the only divinely appointed

mediator between God and humanity. Following on from this, Christ 'gave Himself a ransom for *all*,' the same 'all' that we find in v.2 and v.4. So there are no textual reasons for restricting these 'alls' to something less than *everyone*.

If God wants to save *all* people, He will do it (see pp.31-33, and 'Sovereignty,' p.176).

1Tim.4:10 - Paul and his fellow-Christians 'suffered reproach' because they 'trusted in God, the Saviour of *all* men, especially of those who believe.' They were persecuted by Jews and pagans, whose view of God was often exclusive, whilst the Apostles taught that God loved and was willing to save *all* people. To some extent it is the same today, except that it is not just non-Christians who sometimes oppose believers in the Larger Hope, but Christians of the traditional type, who believe that all who are unconverted in this life will be lost forever.

With regard to this verse, it is often pointed out that the final clause limits salvation to 'those who believe.' Whilst it is true that no one will be saved without coming to repentance and faith in Christ, there is little if anything in Scripture that restricts one's opportunity of finding salvation to this life.

Paul tells us that God is the Saviour of *all* men, not *just* those who believe. He is not simply the Saviour *for* all men, either, as some would have us believe, but from this description of Him we gather that He actually saves *all* people. A simple illustration may help to make this clear. Someone is in great danger of drowning in the sea. On the beach stands a qualified life-saver, sent to rescue him, but he loses his nerve at the sight of the breakers. Another man runs up, dives into the water and brings the endangered person to safety. Clearly, the first man was a saviour *for* the drowning swimmer, whilst the second was the saviour *of* the man. Paul says that God is the Saviour *of* all men, implying that all men will be saved. It may seem like playing with words, but I believe it helps to show that God is more than just the *potential* Saviour of the world. (for the significance of 'especially,' see 'Especially,' p.118).

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2Tim.2:24-26 - here are words of hope for *all* people. Paul acknowledges the spiritual principle that repentance, knowledge of the truth, and

deliverance from Satan, are the gift of God, the unmerited outflow of His mercy and love. Paul is saying that because we know this to be true, we can gently, patiently, and with all humility, teach and correct those who oppose the truth. If salvation depends on the God who is Love, we can hope for the salvation of all.

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Titus 2:11 – see pp.33, 34.

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Heb.1:2 – Christ has been appointed 'heir of *all things*.' As we have seen, He has redeemed all things and reconciled all things. He will draw all people to Himself, and it is into Him that God is gathering all things. Limiting these 'alls,' as some try to do, is artificial, even a wresting of Scripture in order to force it into a particular theological system. This is a danger we must try to avoid. Better to leave a passage shrouded in mystery than cut, snip and squeeze, until it squares with our views.

This description of Christ, the 'heir of all things,' has a comforting ring about it. It means that all things are His by inheritance and by right.

Picture the all-merciful, all-gracious Son of God, who, with God the Father and the Holy Spirit is God; a God who is eternal and infinite love in the essence of His Being. Picture such a One clasping to His bosom the redeemed creation, His inheritance, which, says Paul, He will deliver from bondage to corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Is it possible that He, the One who has 'purged our sins' (v.3), will banish some or many of the redeemed into a Christ-less eternity? How could He when He came for the very purpose (and He never fails) of saving and restoring the world? By inheriting *all things*, He has ensured that nothing that belongs to Him, nothing bought at infinite cost, will be lost.

Heb.2:9 – Jesus 'tasted' death, 'suffered' death, for *everyone*. By doing so He redeemed all from the power of death and its consequences, laying an immovable and unrepeatable foundation for all His dealings with His creatures. Because of this He is able to deal with all people as His *own*. All belong to Him and will be led by Him, the Good Shepherd, to eternal pastures. The way, the experience, may be hard, involving chastening, discipline, punishment, but it all takes

place in the eternally secure confines of the redeemed community.

Heb.2:17, 18 – the high priests of Israel made atonement and propitiation for the sin of the whole nation once a year. Christ, our great High Priest, has offered Himself *once only*, for Israel and the whole world (1John 2:2).

Heb.9:26-28 – in a similar vein to that above, the writer of Hebrews speaks of the result of Christ's atonement being the *putting away of sin* by His sacrifice. This reminds us of, and teaches the same truth as, John 1:29, 'The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.' We learn from these verses that God has dealt with sin once and for all in the death of His Son. Sins/trespasses are no longer imputed to those who have been redeemed and reconciled to God (2Cor.5:19), paving the way for all people to be restored to God in Christ.

In v.27 we are told that 'it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,' words often cited to prove that death brings to an end all opportunity of salvation. However, when this verse is kept in context, we see it is because death is followed by judgment (no mention of endless punishment) that Jesus offered

Himself for our sins. Here is an instance where 'many' (v.28) really means 'all.' I say this because Jesus put away 'sin' by His sacrifice, i.e., *sin in its entirety*, rather than the sin of some, but not others. Further, in v.27 a *universal* experience is being described, for *all* people are appointed to die. So for it to make sense, 'many' in this context must mean '*all*,' for Christ 'tasted death for *everyone*' (2:9).

Verse 28 does not teach that only *some*, who eagerly await Christ's second coming, will be saved; rather, it is an exhortation not to get enmeshed in the world if one wants to be counted among the first-fruits, the faithful in this age who will experience the resurrection of the faithful, the 'first resurrection' (Rev.20:5, 6; 2Tim. 2:18). It is the vigilant and faithful who will partake of the 'marriage supper of the Lamb' (Rev.19:7, 9). The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins indicates this. For the 'wise' Christ's coming will be a time of salvation, deliverance, and rapture, in that they will be received into Christ's presence with great joy. For the 'unwise' there will be a sorrowful and regretful wait, till He comes again, this time with His faithful saints (Zech.14:5; Jude 14).

1Pet.4:6 - there is some uncertainty about the event to which Peter refers, and the meaning of his words. However, they seem to contain a truly biblical principle/truth, namely, that all God's chastening and purifying judgments are designed to destroy the 'flesh,' our sinful nature, which is at the root of, and behind, all our sinful behaviour, in order that we may be renewed and transformed by His Spirit in our inner man, either in this life, - as with the sinful believer at Corinth (1Cor.5:5), - or, as Peter indicates, in the next. God is able to do this with all people. Some of the early Church Fathers teach that Christ preached not only to the antediluvians, and forgave them, but that He will reach all who die in their sins and restore them to God.

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2Pet.3:9 - this verse is akin in sentiment to 1Tim.2:4. There we read that God is 'not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.' In contrast to *thelo*, translated 'will' in 'who will have all men to be saved . . .' (1Tim.2:4), the stronger, more determinative *boulomai* is used by Peter in this verse. This may mean that he is

saying that God has not *determined* that any should perish. If so the way is open for all to be saved, and the double-decree of Calvin - that God has decreed that some will inherit eternal life, whilst others will suffer endless punishment - falls down. However, Peter's intention in using *boulomai* is difficult to determine, because the distinction between *thelo* and *boulomai* is sometimes unclear. What is clear, is that God is merciful and long-suffering. He wills/desires all to be saved, and is unquestionably able to save all.

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1John 4:10 - from this verse, and 2:2, it is clear that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of *all* people, not just some. God is love (4:8, 16). 'He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' Having atoned for the sins of the whole world, all barriers have been removed from our being saved through Christ. It is unreasonable to think that having loved us, and given His Son for us, God will not go the whole way and save all for whom His Son died, especially when repentance and faith are the gifts of His sovereign mercy and grace.

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Rev.1:7 – Christ's coming with the clouds seems at first glance to be fatal for all the tribes of the earth, including those who 'pierced Him.' But when seen in the light of Zech.12:10-14, the Old Testament prophecy of this great event, it can be seen to have a more hopeful outcome, for at the sight of the crucified Lord, when He returns at the end of the age, the people of Israel, every family, will mourn with remorse and repentance, as for an only son, a firstborn. We read in (Zech.13:1), that 'in that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and uncleanness (cf. Rom. 11:26).

If this is to be true of Israel, will it not be true of all the other tribes of the earth who witness Christ's coming? Just how and when is shrouded in mystery, but the sense is positive, hopeful and glorious!

Rev.5:10 – this verse reveals the special role of the saints in God's purpose. They are chosen to reign with Christ, now, in a spiritual sense, but in the age to come actually on and over the earth. Far from being the only ones to be saved, they will rule

over and minister healing to the nations (Rev.21:24; 22:2). They will constitute the New Jerusalem whose gates are open by day and by night, a source of blessing, in Christ, to all who enter – see 2:26; 3:21; 17:14.

Rev.5:13 – it will stand repeating that this verse provides irrefutable evidence for the Larger Hope. Every creature in existence is seen praising God and the Lamb. How can the endless existence of a hell crowded with wicked, suffering, hopeless people be squared with this verse?

Rev.14:4, 5 – these verses say various things about the one hundred and forty-four thousand who stand with Christ, the Lamb of God, on Mt Zion, having His Father's name on their foreheads (v.1). They are 'virgins,' probably meaning that they are single-minded for God and Christ (v.4). They 'follow the Lamb wherever He goes.' They are 'first-fruits to God and to the Lamb.' They are probably the 'church of the firstborn,' which is also linked with Mount Zion (Heb.12:22, 23). Once again we see the first-fruits/firstborn and their special closeness to Christ, as they prepare for their role/rule as kings and priests with Him in the ages to come. There is much to consider here.

Rev.21:1-5 - here, partly in symbolic imagery, we see the culmination of God's purpose for humanity. The old creation has passed away, either altogether, or more probably, renewed. The 'holy city, the New Jerusalem,' is seen 'coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.' A loud voice announces that 'the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them . . . and be their God.' All suffering, mourning and death has passed away, for God says, 'Behold, I make all things new.'

Amongst these remarkable things, there is great significance in the 'bride,' the 'New Jerusalem,' and the 'tabernacle of God.' All three are, I believe, symbols of the *glorified Church*. Her historic role of serving God and humanity reaches its perfect, fulfilment in the new heaven and new earth. Through Christ and the Church, God will govern and bless humanity in the ages to come, reversing all the damaging effects of the Fall (v.4). Clearly, the Church is just a part of the company of the blessed, a key and facilitating part indeed, but not the *only* part, as Christians have often been led to believe. She is God's channel of blessing to others.

This extensive list of texts, under 'Universalism,' is by no means exhaustive; indeed, evidence for the salvation of all is woven into the very fabric of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation.

UNQUENCHABLE FIRE

See pp.50, 51 and pp.121, 122.

WILL (God's)

See pp.31-33.

WORM (Undying)

Our Lord takes the Old Testament imagery of the 'undying worm' and weaves it into His teaching about the fate of the wicked (Isa.14:11; 66:24; Mark 9:44-48). It is accompanied by 'unquenchable fire,' also an Old Testament image connected with death and judgment.

That this terrifying prospect is in the first instance symbolic, when it comes to the punishment of the wicked, is easily shown. Take Isa.66:24: the 'worms' (if the scene is meant to be taken literally), are depicted devouring *corpses*, hence, causing no pain to the deceased; in fact they are doing them a service in that they are consuming their corruption.

The 'undying' aspect of the

'undying worm' (if seen as part of God's dealings with the wicked after death), has the same meaning as 'unquenchable,' in 'unquenchable fire,' namely, that which continues *until* the complete elimination of the old sinful nature, and involves the purification of the immortal and perfectible in human beings, hence precious to God. So these things continue to work in the wicked until they have accomplished their (God's), purpose.

It is significant, with respect to the above, that 'never,' in Mark 9:43, 45, is not in the best manuscripts (Nestle - Marshall, *RSV Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (1958).

WRATH (God's)

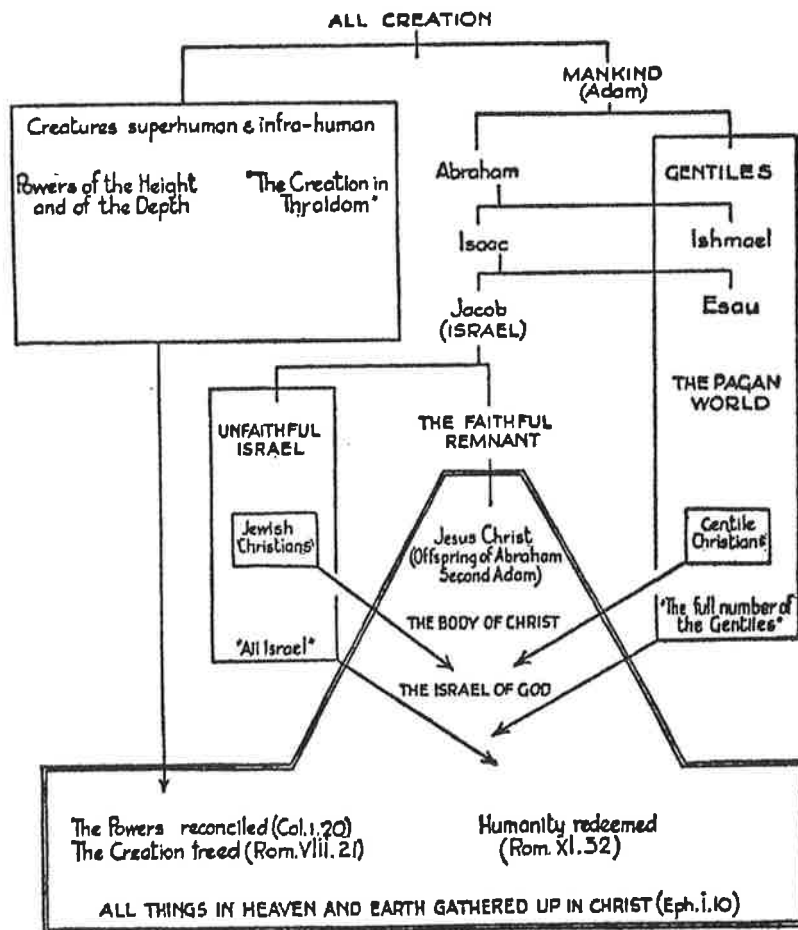
See pp.46, 47.

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End

The Plan of God to Restore All Things in Christ

From C. H. Dodd's *Commentary on Romans* (1932)



Note - this book may be downloaded,

Tony Johnson - P.O. Box 1211 - Cleveleys - Lancs - England.

tonyj58@sky.com

If you wish to contact the author please
e-mail tonyj58@sky.com