

Unquenchable Fire

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Mark 9:42-48 “If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a huge millstone tied around his neck and to be thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter into life crippled than to have two hands and go into hell, to the [unquenchable fire](#). 45 If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better to enter life lame than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 47 If your eye causes you to sin, tear it out! It is better to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where their worm never dies and [the fire is never quenched.](#)” (Jesus) NET

Luke 3:17 “His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with [unquenchable fire.](#)” (John the Baptist) NASB

Both Jesus and John the Baptist talk about the lost being thrown onto unquenchable fire as the penalty for sin. John compares the saved with wheat and the lost with chaff. He says that God will destroy the wicked/chaff with unquenchable fire, a fire that cannot be put out. Nothing is more swiftly consumed than chaff. It creates a blaze that nothing can extinguish until its work is done. Once the chaff is burned up the fire ceases for lack of material to feed on. In defining the meaning of “unquenchable fire” we should let the bible interpret itself. The prophet Jeremiah and the book of 2nd Chronicles explains what is meant by the term “unquenchable fire”.

Jeremiah 17:27 “But if you do not listen to Me to keep the sabbath day holy by not carrying a load and coming in through the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day, then I will kindle a fire in its gates and it will devour the palaces of Jerusalem and [not be quenched.](#)” NASB

The ancient city of Jerusalem was threatened with destruction by unquenchable fire if the people did not stop desecrating God’s Sabbath day. This prophecy of Jeremiah was later fulfilled by the Babylonian army as described below.

2 Chronicles 36:19, 21. “Then they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its fortified buildings with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles... 21 [to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah](#), until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete.” NASB

Jeremiah’s prophecy was fulfilled. Jerusalem is destroyed by the Babylonian army and they burned it with unquenchable fire. Fire that no man could put out. But the fire went out of its own accord when there was nothing left to burn. So when Jesus talks about the lost being destroyed by unquenchable fire He is not teaching that the fire never goes out He is teaching that no power on earth can put out the flames until its work is accomplished.

It's rather unfortunate that many people believe that the words of Jesus give the impression that Jesus taught the false doctrine of an eternally burning hell rather than the truth of the annihilation of the wicked in a hellfire. An unquenchable fire that will not last forever but will burn itself out as happened to the palaces of Jerusalem. This highlights the importance of letting the bible interpret its own expressions for us rather than reading our own understanding into the bible.

Ezekiel 20:47- 48 “and say to the forest of the Negev, ‘Hear the word of the Lord: thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I am about to kindle a fire in you, and [it will consume every green tree](#) in you, as well as every dry tree; [the blazing flame will not be quenched](#) and the whole surface from south to north will be burned by it. 48 All flesh will see that I, the Lord, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched.”” NASB

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Here we have God speaking to the Prophet Ezekiel declaring that he will start an unquenchable fire in the Negev forest that will consume every tree. Unquenchable fire consumes it does not preserve as taught in the false doctrine of eternal torment.

Amos 5:4-6 “The Lord says this to the family of Israel: “Seek me so you can live! 5 Do not seek Bethel. Do not visit Gilgal. Do not journey down to Beer Sheba. For the people of Gilgal will certainly be carried into exile, and Bethel will become a place where disaster abounds.” 6 Seek the Lord so you can live! Otherwise he will break out like fire against Joseph’s family; the fire will consume and no one will be able to quench it and save Bethel.” NET

Again we have the bible describing unquenchable fire as a consuming fire. A fire that will consume Bethel and bring it to nothing. By letting the bible interpret its own words and expressions we can conclude that “Unquenchable fire” is a fire that consumes and cannot be put out until it completes its mission of destruction. Once that mission is accomplished the fire will go out.

Mark 9:43 “If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off! It is better for you to enter into life crippled than to have two hands and go into hell, to the unquenchable fire. NET

Mark 9:48 “where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. NET

In this verse Jesus is quoting from the prophet Isaiah 66:24. The picture of undying worms does not teach eternal torment but describes a disgusting sight of decomposition. The worms (Gk: 4663 Skolex) are of the type that feeds on dead bodies. Like the unquenchable fire, once the food supply is gone the worms will die just like the fire dies out. In Isaiah 66 God's enemies are killed and their corpses are totally destroyed. In quoting Isaiah 66:24 Jesus is teaching the same thing.



Isaiah 66:24 “Then they will go forth and look On the corpses of the men Who have transgressed against Me. For their worm will not die And their fire will not be quenched; And they will be an abhorrence to all mankind.” NET

This imagery does not portray one of eternal torment. It speaks of the corpses of the dead rotting on the ground in smoldering ruins while being consumed by flesh eating worms.

Below is a sampling of 9 other english versions of the bible comparing them with the New International Version translation of the bible of Mark 9:43 regarding the bible doctrine of hell fire and the fate of the lost. It shows that the NIV is the only version of the ten to interpret the verse as - “never goes out” compared with the other versions translating it as “unquenchable”. “Unquenchable” is the accurate translation while “never goes out” is an inaccurate interpretation.

Mark 9:43:

New International Version (NIV) : fire never goes out.

New American Standard Bible (NASB) : unquenchable fire.

Christian Standard Bible (CSB) : unquenchable fire.

English Standard Version (ESV) : unquenchable fire.

Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) : unquenchable fire.

King James Version (KJV) : never shall be quenched

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) : unquenchable fire.

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New King James Version (NKJV) : shall never be quenched

New Living Translation (NLT) : unquenchable fires of hell

World English Bible (WEB) : unquenchable fire.

What is the difference between “unquenchable” and “never goes out” ? “Never goes out” means that the fire will burn permanently. But unquenchable fire does go out like the unquenchable fire that destroyed the palaces of Jerusalem. It cannot be put out by anything done by man, its flames are irresistible, but will go out on its own when the fuel it feeds on is consumed.

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The NASB

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