

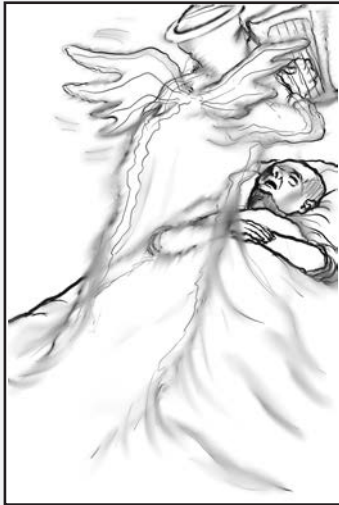
# The Fires of Hell



## SABBATH—NOVEMBER 26

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Mark 9:42–48; Malachi 4:1; Ezekiel 18:20–22; Acts 2:29, 34, 35; 1 John 5:3–12.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Test everything. Keep what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21, ERV).



**Many Protestants also believe that the spirit never dies. These Protestants believe the spirit goes right away to heaven or hell after a person's death.**

**ITALIAN POET** Dante Alighieri (A.D. 1265–1321) wrote a very famous poem named *The Divine Comedy*. His poem is about the spirit of a dead person. In the poem, the spirit went to hell, which was in the earth. Or the spirit went to a place named Purgatory. The spirit goes to Purgatory to bathe in flames to take away their sin. After the spirit's sins are burned away, the spirit can go to heaven, which is also named Paradise. Then the spirit will live with God Himself.

The poem is a make-believe story, of course. Sad to say, this poem caused people to believe false ideas about what happens to the spirit after death. These false ideas are part of the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church today. Catholics believe that a person's spirit stays alive after his or her body dies. Then the spirit goes to hell, purgatory, or heaven right away. Many Protestants also believe that the spirit never dies. These Protestants believe the spirit goes right away to heaven or hell after a person's death. False ideas about what happens when we die have caused Christians to believe many terrible lies.

This week, we will look at some of these false ideas. We also will learn what the Bible really says about what happens to us when we die.

## WORMS THAT NEVER DIE? (Mark 9:42–48)

**Compare Mark 9:42–48 with Isaiah 66:24. These verses talk about worms that eat dead bodies. The Bible says the worms do not die. What do these verses mean?**

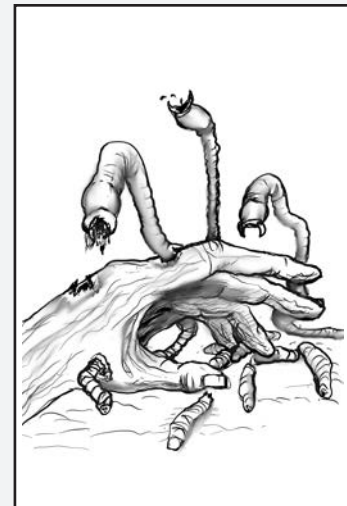
Some Bible thinkers believe that the noun “worm” (Mark 9:48, ICB, NLV, WE) is a word picture for the spirit of an evil person. These Bible thinkers believe that after a person dies, his or her spirit floats to hell where it never dies. There, the spirit suffers everlasting punishment.

But this idea is foolish. As we learned, the Bible teaches us that a person’s spirit sleeps after his or her body dies. We need to understand Isaiah 66:24 to know what Jesus is talking about in Mark 9:42–48. “Bible writers use the word ‘worm’ the same way as many worms. So, one ‘worm’ in Mark and Isaiah do not mean only one worm. The word ‘worm’ really means many worms that eat dead bodies.” —Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (London: United Bible Societies, 1961), page 304, adapted.

Mark 9:48 is a quotation from Isaiah 66:24, which says: “ ‘They [the saved] will go out and see the dead bodies of the people who sinned against me. The worms that eat them will never die. The fires that burn them will never stop’ ” (Isaiah 66:24, ICB).

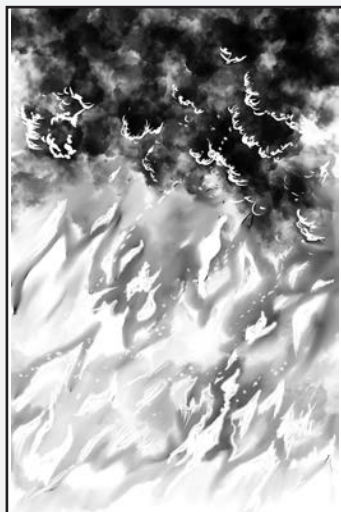
This verse shows us a scary picture about the future. We see God’s enemies dead on the ground. Fire burns up their bodies. Worms eat the bodies that the fire doesn’t burn. Or maybe the worms eat the bodies first. Then the fire burns up the bodies. We are not sure. What we do know is that Isaiah never talks about any spirits that escape both the fires and the worms and that then fly into hell.

But what about the “worms” that never die? The language about the worms in Isaiah 66:24 is a word picture. Jesus uses this same word picture in Mark 9:48. This word picture doesn’t mean that the worms live forever. (Everlasting worms? What?!) What Jesus wants us to understand is that the worms do not leave their job unfinished. The worms continue to eat the bodies of the evil dead until these bodies are destroyed. No wonder Jesus says that it is better for someone to enter God’s kingdom with a hand, foot, or eye missing. What good is a perfect body that fire and worms will destroy (Mark 9:42–48)?



**The language about the worms in Isaiah 66:24 is a word picture.**

## THE FIRES IN HELL (Malachi 4:1)



**So, when the Bible talks about “everlasting” fire, we must understand that this fire will not go out until it fully destroys what it burns.**

**Read what the Bible says in Malachi 4:1 and Jude 1:7 about hell. How can these verses help us better understand the teaching about “fire that burns forever” (Jude 1:7, WE) and the “ ‘fire of [from] hell that cannot be put out’ ” (Mark 9:43, NLV; read also Matthew 18:8)?**

The English words “forever” and “everlasting” come from the Hebrew word “**olam**,” which in the Greek language is “**aionios**.” “Forever” or “everlasting” can have different meanings. When the Bible talks about “forever” and God, then the word “forever” shows us that God never dies and has always been alive. (Read Deuteronomy 33:27.) When the Bible talks about “forever” and humans (Exodus 21:6, NKJV), then the word “forever” must happen in a human lifetime (about 70–90 years). So, when the Bible talks about “everlasting” fire, we must understand that this fire will not go out until it fully destroys what it burns. (Read Matthew 18:8 and Matthew 25:41 for examples of everlasting fire.) Nothing will be left of evil people when this fire ends (Malachi 4:1).

The teaching that evil people will be punished in hell and burn forever and ever is an ugly lie. If God punishes evil people forever, then sin and evil will continue forever, too. Also, we must remember that all human life comes from God (Deuteronomy 32:39; Psalm 36:9). God says, “ ‘I don’t enjoy seeing people die . . . not even evil people!’ ” (Ezekiel 33:11, ERV). So why would God let evil people suffer in hell forever? Also, the Bible says that evil people will be punished and “judged by what they had done” (Revelation 20:12, ERV). So, why would God give humans punishment that never ends?

All everlasting fire or fire that burns forever in the Bible happens after the saints spend 1,000 years in heaven with Jesus. Jesus will bring His people back to this earth after the 1,000 years are over. Then God will wake up the evil dead. Revelation 20 says that they will burn in the lake of fire until they are gone. So, we shouldn’t say that hell is a place that people go to now and that the fires in hell will burn forever and never stop.

**What do hell and the grave teach us about God’s love?**

**A SECOND CHANCE IN PURGATORY? (Ezekiel 18:20–22)**

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that some people do not go to hell when they die. But these people aren't ready for heaven. So, they go to purgatory. As we already learned, the Catholic Church teaches that a person's spirit can go to purgatory after he or she dies. There, in purgatory, a person bathes in flames to take away his or her sins. Purgatory is not the same as hell. Catholics teach that purgatory and hell are two different things. When the spirit is clean from sin, then the spirit can fly to paradise or heaven. People who are alive can pray for the spirit of the dead person who is in purgatory. The prayers, good works, and offerings of the living can help the spirit get out of purgatory faster.

**Read Ecclesiastes 9:10; Ezekiel 18:20–22; and Hebrews 9:27. How do these verses show that the teaching about purgatory is false?**

The teaching about purgatory mixes two false ideas: a burning hell and prayers for the dead. People who believe in the Bible can't accept any of these false ideas. We have four reasons why. We know that (1) the dead sleep in their graves. They don't know anything that happens anymore (Ecclesiastes 9:10). (2) The holy life of one person can't be given to another sinner (Ezekiel 18:20–22). (3) Only Jesus can save us. Jesus asks God to forgive us for our sins (1 Timothy 2:5). And (4) after we die, God will judge us. We get no second chance to reject sin and accept God (Hebrews 9:27).

Worse, purgatory is a false teaching that lies about God and His love. "Satan's work since his fall is to make God look bad. Satan invented the idea that the spirit lives forever and never dies. . . . Satan also lied about hell. Satan says that sinners in hell never stop burning in fire. Purgatory is Satan's idea, too. These false teachings lie about God. They cause people to believe that God is mean, nasty, and doesn't forgive anyone."—Ellen G. White, Manuscript 51 (December 10), 1890. This false view teaches that the dead aren't asleep. They're in purgatory where they suffer until someone gets them out. Satan lied to Eve. Satan continues to lie to humans today.

**Jesus already saved us. Why is understanding Bible teachings so important, too?**



**Purgatory is a false teaching that lies about God and His love.**

## THE SPIRITS OF THE DEAD IN HEAVEN? (Acts 2:29, 34, 35)



The grave is a place where dead people sleep.

Protestants don't believe in purgatory. But many Protestants believe that the spirits from saved people go to live with God in heaven after they die. Some people say that these "spirits" leave their bodies when they die. Other people say that these "spirits" are given a new spiritual body. They believe this body is not made of flesh but is made from God's bright light.

These ideas are false. They don't support the Bible truth about the Second Coming and the final judgment. The final judgment is the time when God will judge His people before Jesus comes back. God will wake up His sleeping followers at the Second Coming. Why will God wake up His followers for a judgment, if the spirits of holy people already are enjoying heaven?

**Read Acts 2:29, 34, 35 and 1 Corinthians 15:16–18. How do these verses help us understand what happens when we die? How will God wake up His followers?**

The Bible teaches us that a few people already are in heaven. Some of these people were alive when God took them. That's what happened with Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:9–11). Or God woke them up from the dead. That's what happened to Moses (Jude 9) and the people that woke up from the dead when Jesus did (Matthew 27:51–53).

The grave is a place where dead people sleep. As we learned in Revelation 6:9–11, the spirits "under the altar" who cry to God are a word picture. This word picture shows that God must punish evil people. God will punish the evil people who killed Jesus' followers. So, this word picture about the altar isn't proof that the spirit lives forever after death. If the spirits under the altar are real, then they aren't enjoying their everlasting life in heaven. So, the dead, both the saved and the lost, are not spirits separated by death from their bodies. These spirits are not floating around heaven, where they wait to be joined again to their bodies at the Second Coming.

Dead people don't need to wake up at the Second Coming if the saved dead can go to heaven right away when they die. Sad to say, we often listen to this false teaching at Christian funerals, don't we?

**THE BIBLE'S VIEW ABOUT HELL (1 John 5:3–12)**

**Read 1 John 5:3–12. Why does John in these verses limit everlasting life only to people who are in Jesus?**

1 John 5:11, 12 teaches us that our spirits don't live after our bodies die. To understand these verses, we must remember that "God is the only one who never dies" (1 Timothy 6:16, ERV; read also 1 Timothy 6:15). Life starts with God, too (Psalm 36:9; Colossians 1:15–17; Hebrews 1:2).

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, sin entered humans (Genesis 3). All humans came under the curse of death. Our bodies no longer lived forever. We lost the gift of everlasting life. But our loving God made a plan to save us and give us the everlasting life that we lost in Eden. As Paul says, "God chose us to belong to Christ [Jesus] before the world was created [made]. He chose us to be holy and without blame in his eyes. He loved us" (Ephesians 1:4, NIV).

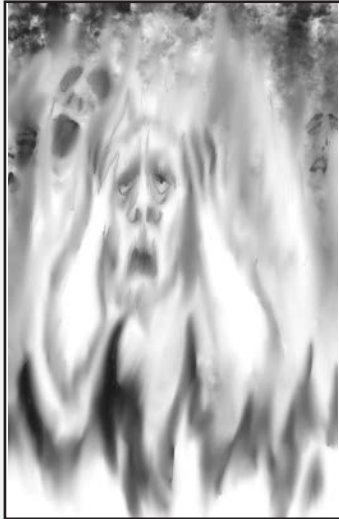
In Romans 5:12–21, Paul explains that "sin came into the world [this earth] because of what one man did. And with sin came death" (ERV). "So one sin of Adam brought the punishment of death to all people. But in the same way, one good act that Christ did makes all people right with God" (Romans 5:18, ICB). "And this [act] brings life forever through [by] Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 5:21, ICB). Paul says that the real Adam brought sin and death. We must accept this Bible truth if we want to understand the Bible. John adds, "God has given us eternal [everlasting] life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life. But the person who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:11, 12, ICB).

We understand these verses from John and Paul better when we read what Jesus says: " 'Everyone who sees the Son and believes in him has eternal [everlasting] life. I will raise [wake] them up on the last day' " (John 6:40, ERV). Jesus also says, " 'I am the One Who raises [wakes] the dead and gives them life. Anyone who puts his trust in Me will live again, even if he dies' " (John 11:25, NIV).

Everlasting life is a gift from God. Only saved people in Jesus have everlasting life. The Bible doesn't teach that a person goes to heaven or hell when he or she dies. The Bible also doesn't teach that the spirit lives forever or that all humans will be saved. These teachings are very popular. But they aren't in the Bible.



**When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, sin entered humans.**



**“The Bible doesn’t teach . . . the false idea that sinners suffer forever in hell after they die.”**

**ADDITIONAL THOUGHT:** Read Ellen G. White, “The First Great Deception,” pages 531–550; “Can Our Dead Speak to Us?” pages 551–562, in *The Great Controversy*.

“The teaching that the spirit lives forever is false. This false teaching comes from the idea that a person’s spirit continues to live after he or she dies. The Bible doesn’t teach this false idea or the false idea that sinners suffer forever in hell after they die. These false ideas go against the Bible, our thinking, and our natural feelings. But many people accept this popular belief. They believe that saved people who died are in heaven. These saved ones can see everything that happens here on the earth. They know what is happening in the lives of their friends. But how can the dead be happy knowing about the troubles of the living? How can the dead be happy seeing the evil behavior of their loved ones? How can the dead enjoy watching their loved ones suffer and feel pain in this life? How can the dead enjoy heaven if they are worried about their friends on earth? Do you understand why this is an ugly lie?”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 545, adapted.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

- ① Have you ever talked with someone who believes that the saved go to heaven right away and the lost go to hell when they die? People who believe this idea are very stubborn. Why do people refuse to stop believing that the lost are suffering forever in the fires of hell? Maybe they hate the idea of their family and friends in the grave? Do you see that false ideas are very powerful?
- ② Most Christians teach that the spirit lives and never dies. What should we do together to announce the Bible truth about what happens to our spirit and body when we die?
- ③ What are some non-Christian ideas that have replaced Bible truth and become popular teachings in the Christian churches today? How can we protect ourselves from these false ideas?

## “MODESTY! MODESTY! MODESTY!”

People came to the hospital in Katima Mulilo, Namibia, to see the sick little boy. Akurious was only 2 years old. He had been sick for months. People cried when they saw his pain.

“The hospital isn’t helping Akurious,” said a visitor to Akurious’s parents, Modesty and Rebecca. “You should talk to the witch doctor. God will understand.”

“Just do it,” said another visitor.

After the last visitor left, Modesty turned to his wife, Rebecca. “What should we do?” he said. “Maybe the people are right. Jesus will understand.”

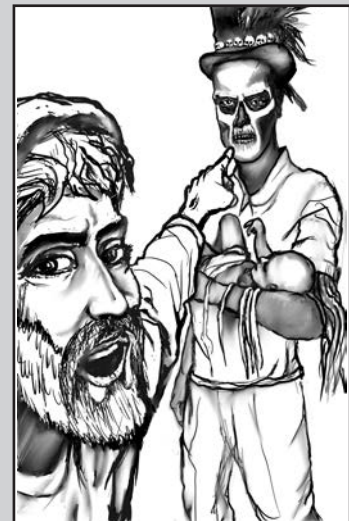
Rebecca couldn’t stand to see her only child in so much pain. So, she agreed to see the witch doctor. The witch doctor said that witches put an evil spell on the boy, and he must take some special medicine. Modesty and Rebecca bought the witch doctor’s medicine. They gave some of the medicine to their son daily. But the medicine only made him worse. Modesty started to pray hard. “Lord Jesus, I know I’ve made a mistake,” he said. “I turned away from Your mercy. Talk to me, Lord. Help my child. You healed people with awful skin diseases. You made the blind see and the lame walk. Heal my child, too.”

Soon after that, Modesty had a dream. He heard Jesus call him by his name three times. “Modesty! Modesty! Modesty!” Jesus said. “Akurious is My child. Why have you given control of his life to evil spirits? You must not go to any witch doctors if you want your son to live.”

Modesty was surprised and afraid. He threw away the witch doctor’s medicine. Modesty remembered hearing a Seventh-day Adventist doctor give a health talk at a camp meeting. So, Modesty took his son to the doctor. The doctor said Akurious had two lung diseases and sent Akurious to a hospital. Modesty continued to pray. Rebecca joined him. They put their full trust in Jesus. Akurious (see picture) now is 22.

Akurious’s parents, Modesty and Rebecca Kakula, had four more children. When each child was born, they refused to ask the witch doctor’s blessing. They took their babies to the Seventh-day Adventist church, where they gave them to Jesus. Please pray for people who accept Jesus but have a hard time letting go of their old ways of life and beliefs. They believe Bible teachings, but when trouble comes, they go back to the old ways. Seventh-day Adventist church workers try to help these people understand that their old ways of life don’t work. Thank you for your offerings that help these workers share the Good News about Jesus in ways that help people let go of their old ways of life.

INSIDE  
*Story*  
by OCRHAIN MATENGU



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