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MATTHEW 25:41 EXPLAINED

Recently I was asked: what is meant by "the everlasting fire" that is prepared for the devil and his demons. The question referred to Matthew 25:41. Here is this verse.

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into **everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels**: (Matthew 25:41)

Many people in the world's churches have assumed that this verse means that Satan and the demons are condemned to being restrained in a never-ending fire. But that is not what this verse is saying.

Let's examine this verse more closely.

The expression "into everlasting fire" is a translation of the Greek text "eis to pur to aionion". It means something like "**into the age-lasting fire**", the adjective "aionios" being derived from the noun "aion", which in turn means "**an age**" or "**an epoch**". But this is still not the exact meaning that Jesus Christ was conveying. We'll look at this adjective for "age-lasting" more closely shortly.

Meanwhile note also that the Greek text says "**the** fire" and not just "fire". In the Greek text the word for "fire" has the definite article (i.e. it says "to pur"). By saying "into the fire", rather than just saying "into fire" Jesus Christ was identifying **a very specific fire**, implying that there is only one of this kind of fire.

The expression "prepared for the devil and his angels" qualifies which particular fire we are talking about. It answers the question: **which fire** are those on the left hand side, those who are cursed, thrown into? Which fire are we talking about? Oh, I see, it is the fire that is "prepared for the devil and his angels". That's the fire we are talking about, right?

The subject of Jesus Christ's statement in Matthew 25:41 concerns **the people** who will be burned up in the lake of fire. This is a verse about the fate of certain people; **it is not a verse about the fate of Satan**. In this verse Satan is only mentioned very incidentally, simply to identify one very specific fire. But the devil himself is not the subject of the statement that Jesus Christ made in this verse. Can you see that?

From Malachi 4:1 we know that the wicked are burned up completely, leaving them "neither root nor branch", and that they will be "ashes under the soles of your feet" (Malachi 4:3). That will be at the time of "the lake of fire" (see Revelation 20:14). From Revelation chapter 21 we also know that the lake of fire is then followed by the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem, a new creation which will usher in **a completely new age**.

So what did Jesus Christ mean when He said "**prepared for** the devil and his angels"? If it is a fire that will burn up those human beings that did not willingly submit themselves to God, how was that fire "prepared for" the devil? The devil cannot really "be burned", can he? Wasn't the fire "prepared for" burning up wicked physical human beings, rather than burning Satan?

Jesus Christ actually used the expression "prepared for" twice in this particular context. Here are these two statements:

Verse 34 = inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Verse 41 = everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

The expression "the foundation of the world" in verse 34 refers to the time of the flood, when God made certain changes to the plan of salvation. (This expression is thoroughly explained in my 2011 article entitled "What Does 'The Foundation of the World' Really Mean?")

Whatever form God's plan of salvation for human beings may have had at the time when God created Adam and Eve, it was at the time leading up to the flood that God modified that plan in such a way that the Kingdom of God will ultimately be made up of **144000** individuals who will be "the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:4), **and a huge multitude** "which no man could number" (Revelation 7:9), who will come from the millennium and from the 100-year second resurrection period. It is for these two groups of human beings, changed into spirit beings, that God has prepared "the Kingdom". **The preparations for that Kingdom** have been going on for a long time, since the time leading up to the flood, to be precise.

Now "the fire" that is going to burn up the wicked and also this entire present physical creation has also been "in preparation" for a very, very long time, in fact for much longer than the preparations for the coming Kingdom. **Preparations for this particular fire** have been ongoing ever since the day when Satan rose up in rebellion against God and attempted to take over God's throne (see Isaiah 14:13-14). That was a long time before God created Adam and Eve.

(Comment: When I say that the preparations for the universe-consuming fire go back to the day when Satan rebelled, but that the preparations for the Kingdom only go back to the time just before the flood, I mean the preparations for the present configuration for God's Kingdom, which preparations involve "two separate harvests" of human beings into the Family of God. Whatever God's plans and intentions for achieving salvation for human beings may have been at the time when God created Adam and Eve, and even before then, those plans were altered by God during the time leading up to the flood, to the point of making provision for 144000 individuals to rule with Jesus Christ for 1000 years as kings and as priests.)

That "day" of Satan's rebellion was the exact time when God already established that the entire physical creation would have to be burned up at some future time, to then be replaced by a totally new creation. With God once something has been damaged it can never be "repaired" for continued permanent use. In God's scheme of things "damaged goods" are all going to be taken out of existence by fire.

The fact that this present universe is destined to be burned up to be replaced by a new flawless universe is something that none of the translators of the Bible understood! Their belief was that Satan has been condemned to live out his miserable existence in an ever-burning hell fire. And that is what they believed when they translated Matthew 25:41 to read "into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels".

To the translators "prepared for the devil and his angels" implied **the place where** Satan will spend all future eternity. But that was not at all what Jesus Christ was saying. This is not a statement about Satan's fate. It is a statement about the fate of rebellious human beings, and Satan is only mentioned as a reference point.

The correct meaning of Matthew 25:41 is:

"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into **the "age-lasting" fire**, prepared **because of (what)** the devil and his angels **(had done)**."

(Comment: I placed "age-lasting" in quotation marks, because I will shortly modify this term further.)

That fire is **not** prepared "for" Satan and the demons! That fire is prepared because of Satan's rebellion. It is entirely Satan's fault that the Almighty Creator God has to resort to the drastic measure of actually permanently destroying by fire something that God had created ... this present physical universe.

God is not in the habit of destroying anything that God has created. That is not how God works ... create something and then destroy it. Destroying something that God has created is an extremely drastic measure, one that was necessitated by Satan's rebellion. Once this universe had been damaged by Satan's rebellion, then it became unavoidable that this universe in its entirety would also have to be removed from existence ... that's how God works.

The fire identified in Matthew 25:41 will bring **one particular age** to a permanent and irreversible end! It will bring to an end the age during which Satan was able to influence the minds of other created beings (i.e. first angels and later human beings). Satan could persuade other free independent minds to accept his selfish way of thinking. He was able to influence one third of all the angels. He was also able to influence human beings to accept his way of thinking.

Now consider Jesus Christ's statement from Christ's own point of view. Do we really think that it was Jesus Christ's intention to tell His disciples for what period of time that fire would burn? In other words: will that fire into which those "on the left hand" will be thrown burn for 1 week, or 1 month, or 1 year, or 1000 years, or 1000000 years or for ever?

What would possibly be the point in trying to tell His disciples **for what period of time** the fire that burns up the wicked will actually burn? What difference does it make whether the fire that burns up the wicked burns for 1 week or whether it burns for 1000 years? None of the wicked live any longer if the fire they are thrown into only burns for one week, as opposed to that fire burning for 1000 years, let alone "for ever".

The purpose of that fire is not to inflict some kind of torture on anyone. That's what perverse human minds, heavily influenced by Satan, come up with ... that God uses fire as a form of torture. But that thought is perverse! God uses fire, not to inflict torture, but to take both sinful human beings and also damaged physical matter out of existence. God has chosen to use fire to officially, as well as visibly, represent the annihilation of sinful people and of damaged physical matter. God uses fire to achieve the status for things "**as though they had never even existed in the first place**", the principle of Obadiah 1:16.

In that context:

The length of time for which that fire will burn is totally and completely irrelevant.

Jesus Christ had no intention of telling His disciples, and us for that matter, how long that fire will burn. So Jesus Christ did not intend for us to get the impression that the fire will be "everlasting" or even "age-lasting". This is simply not a comment about how long that fire will burn. It is a comment about what that fire will achieve ... which is total annihilation.

The lake of fire will eradicate every last vestige of Satan's influence. Satan and his demons will be banished into "the blackness of darkness" (see Jude 1:13), completely and permanently cut off from any kind of contact with God and with God's Family. And everything physical that existed before Satan is banished will be destroyed by fire. **That fire was prepared**, it was necessitated, **because of what Satan has done**.

Then a completely new age will be ushered in.

Never again will there be any selfish thoughts or deeds. Never again will there be any rebellion against God the Father. And the memory of everything that preceded that new age will be totally erased. No one in the Family of God will ever recall any of the details of what had taken place before God created the new heaven and the new earth and the New Jerusalem.

Nobody will ever recall the identity of any single person who perished in the lake of fire. All those memories will be blotted out completely. Never again will there be any tears or sorrow or death, because the former things will all have passed away and they will be forgotten (see Revelation 21:4).

While the Greek expression in this verse literally means "age-lasting fire", it will in effect be an "**age-ending fire**"! That is really what Jesus Christ was conveying in this verse. It was a constraint of the biblical Greek language, with its rather limited vocabulary, that prevented Matthew from writing this statement in such a way that it would be translated into English as "age-ending fire". This difficulty was compounded by the fact that the concept of an age-ending fire for the entire universe was difficult for Christ's audience in Matthew 25 to grasp.

Unfamiliar concepts are always difficult to convey. Most commonly we try to convey the unknown by using analogies to things that our audience is already familiar with. Think of the many "the kingdom of heaven is like unto ..." accounts in the gospels.

So an expanded paraphrase of what Jesus Christ really said in Matthew 25:41 goes as follows:

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into **the fire that will irreversibly end the age** during which Satan and also human beings were able to sin and to cause damage, which fire was prepared **because of what Satan and his demons had done** when they rose up in rebellion against God. (The correct meaning of Matthew 25:41)

How long that fire will actually burn is not mentioned, and not even hinted at. The time taken by that fire is immaterial. Who cares how long it will burn? What that fire achieves is the only thing that matters.

That fire will very emphatically **end the age** when certain forms of rebellion against God and against God's way of thinking and reasoning were possible. After that fire rebellion against God will no longer be a possibility.

That is really what Matthew 25:41 is telling us.

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