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## Are Most People Really "Hellbound?" (Part I)

**Genesis 18:25:** (NASB) ...*Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?*

**Special Guest:** Kevin Miller, filmmaker, [www.hellboundthemovie.com](http://www.hellboundthemovie.com)

Christianity is a faith that claims to see the mind of God through His written Word. It claims to represent a God of Love and compassion, yet a God of Justice and consequence as well. All Christians are unified in the belief that the true followers of Christ will be rewarded with immortal life in heaven, yet Christianity is amazingly fractured in its belief about what happens to everyone else - which constitutes the vast majority of all humankind. Do unbelievers suffer in merciless agony for all of eternity in the fires of Hell? Do unbelievers experience the fire of hell as a purifying fire that brings them to Christ? Do unbelievers simply experience utter destruction and cease to exist upon final proof of incorrigibility? Stay with us as we seek biblical truth on the matter!

**Our premise for this subject is two-fold:** 2 Timothy 3:14-17: 1. The Scriptures do hold that all we need to know regarding life and death, and the fact that all Scripture is inspired indicates that it is all in harmony. Luke 24:44: 2. The risen Lord tells us that all three divisions of the Old Testament lead to him, meaning that the Old Testament is truly the foundation on which the New Testament is built. Psalms 89:13-14: This tells us that the character of God includes a mighty arm of power, with righteousness and justice a foundation of his throne. Built on that is love and faithfulness.

Kevin Miller is an award-winning screenwriter, director and producer who has applied his craft to numerous documentaries, feature films and shorts. Recent projects include *Hellbound?*, *Drop Gun*, *No Saints for Sinners*, *spOiled*, *Sex+Money*, *With God On Our Side*, *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed* and *After...* In addition to his work in film, Miller has written, co-written and edited over 40 books. He lives in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada with his wife and four children.

**Rick:** What provoked you to do this particular documentary?

Kevin discussed the idea of examining different theological views on a topic in order to provoke informed discussion. He edited a book (*Her Gates Will Never Be Shut*) of a friend of his, Bradley Jersak, who appears in the movie. This introduced him to the concept of a post-mortem judgment and how it is treated in the Old and New Testament. He also looked at the different interpretive streams of view in the early church where some views became dominant, others recessive and vice-versa.

Kevin states: Particularly for people who are raised in an evangelical context, they are not often introduced to alternative ways of looking at things. In fact, oftentimes alternative ways of looking at things are viewed as a threat against their faith. I really wanted to make a film that made it safe to have this discussion and also to make people aware of the type of discussion throughout the history of the church.

**Rick:** When making the movie, did you get any negative response to what you were doing and how you were doing it?

Kevin discussed how there were some suspicions when asking people to appear in the film, as well as when finding investors. Some investors would only agree to provide funding if the conclusion was pre-determined and in agreement with their point of view. This is contrary to the core of a documentary, which is an exploration of a subject that happens on film. One does not start with a pre-determined ending and it should change the filmmaker by the end.

**Rick:** What was the reaction on you? Did it change your perspective or enhance your thinking?

Kevin: It really led to a wholesale re-evaluation of Christianity. Kevin went on to explain that the first time this happened to him was during the making of, *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, about Intelligent Design beliefs of teachers in higher education.

He started the film as someone who was hoping that some form of Universalism could be true, and ended the film being quite convinced that all people must be ultimately reconciled to God and to each other.



**Protestor from Westboro Baptist Church interviewed, 99 percent plus go to hell, *Hellbound?* (Documentary)**



- *Kevin: You guys are famous for your signs that say, "God Hates Fags," and on your website, "God Hates the World," tell me this: What happens to people God hates?*
- *Protestor: They go to hell! What, do you think that's a hard one?*
- *Kevin: Of all the people alive today, what percentage of people are ending up in hell?*
- *Protestor: 99.99999999 percent!*
- *Kevin: What would be the purpose of God punishing people for all eternity?*
- *Protestor: Because He wants to. Because He can. Because He set it up that way, and since you don't like how He did it, here's what you do now. You go create your own universe and your own beings/creatures, and you make it the way you want it. This is the way God made it.*

Rick: Obviously this is a pretty radical perspective. Tell us about that experience.

Kevin: This took place at the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in New York City. We wanted to interview them because one of the sub-themes of the film is really not so much the beliefs that we have about hell, but how do we hold those beliefs? ...These guys are absolutely certain that they know who is right and who is wrong and it turns out most of the world is wrong and they are the only ones who are right. It was kind of a surreal experience...they are very combative on the film...I was really having to stay on my toes just to keep up with them. They also have a real agenda against people who are gay, lesbian, or trans-sexual. I happen to have a member of my family and his partner just off camera (in that scene) who fall into that category; my wife is there as well. That was most on my mind as I was debating these folks is how they (my wife and friends) were responding to some of the hurtful things that were being said.

We already discussed how the Old Testament is the foundation for the New Testament. Now we will begin to gather the images of the Old Testament regarding what happens to the wicked at their end - does the Old Testament show us torture?

Genesis 7:21-23: We have a very specific description of what happened: They were blotted out, they perished, they died.

**So how is that supposed to be applied from a New Testament perspective?**

2 Peter 3:5-7: (NASB) Here it tells us that *the world...was destroyed*. But was the earth destroyed? No. But the world order at that time was destroyed. That was the intention of the flood. Peter is saying that the "heavens and earth" met their end by water and in the same way will meet their end by fire in the final judgment.

Rick: It's all about judgment, isn't it?

Kevin: The thing that is being debated is whether you believe in eternal torment, Annihilationism or Universalism, I think everybody is concerned that justice be done. What does justice look like? If you really boil this debate down, it comes down to what is the nature of punishment for the sins we commit that go unpunished on this earth. Does it last forever? Does it ultimately destroy the person or is its final purpose reconciliation? This is what is being debated ultimately.

***Our perspective: When you look at justice and judgment in relation to the love of God, there is no sin that anyone commits in this life for which they will not have to answer.***

Oftentimes when you say you don't believe in hell fire, the knee-jerk reaction that is that people can just do whatever they want.

Kevin: I encounter that all the time. People make that leap right away that if you question their interpretation of final things, well then you believe in nothing. There was no other possible way to look at this issue. I don't believe I interviewed a single Universalist that didn't believe in hell in some form; in other words, a post-mortem judgment where people will have to account for everything they have done. Nobody is getting away with anything. We are all going to have to 'fess up to that and face the consequences, whatever that happens to be.

Is there a way to decipher through Scripture and history how that happens in reality? Are there literal burning flames or is there another method by which this judgment and accountability are put in place? **More imagery:** Deuteronomy 32:21-24: This symbolizes the fire of God's anger. (This text is later quoted in Romans 10:19-21, explaining that it relates to the Gentiles coming to favor.)

**Are fear and threats God's tools?**

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Rick: In terms of the folks that you interviewed, those that were on the pro-hellfire side, what was their sense toward those of us on the other side of the issue in terms of where we might be heading?

Kevin interviewed Bob Larson in the film, a self-styled exorcist. Mr. Larson thought the idea of questioning eternal torment and hell is "the beginning of a slippery slope." A slippery slope argument can also be a fallacy, because it is based on saying: "A" will always lead to "Z." It is also a very fear-based tactic to prevent people from questioning the status quo. On one side this argument is used to corral people in. On the other side, my own questioning into the issue, once you begin to question the notion of eternal torment, you are going to go eventually and do a wholesale re-evaluation of the atonement and so many different other things. In fact, it was me really looking at alternate views of the atonement that led me to begin to reconsider the idea of eternal torment and hell. You can't examine theological ideas in isolation. That is true. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't examine theological ideas for fear of where those examinations might lead.

**More Old Testament imagery of what judgment happens at or after death:** Psalms 37:1-2: (NASB) When grass withers, it dies. **Wither and fade...** Psalms 37:9-10: **Be cut off, be no more...** Psalms 37:20: **Perish, vanish like smoke...** Psalms 37:34: **Cut off...** Psalms 69:24-28: *Be blotted out of the book of life...* to be blotted out you had to be there to begin with!

Rick: Based on the opinions expressed in the film, where does the average person stand who may not be a believer?

Kevin explains that some believe in a form of predestination where some are destined to heaven and other people are not. That is one of the big debates in Christianity. Do all people even have the potential to be reconciled to God or is it only a select few?

Psalms 1:4-6: *Driven away like chaff on in the wind ceases to be.* It perishes and is not tortured. Psalms 68:1-2: This is another poetic rendering as to how it works in relation to what God's justice brings. We know that the Old Testament works exactly in line with what Jesus did and taught. We know that images of death and judgment were varied, but all pointed to destruction. We know there is no allusion to torture and torment in the Old Testament. If that is the case, where did the torture idea come from, or did God just not bother to tell millions of people about it? Why would He have withheld such an important piece of "truth?"

If not the Old Testament, then where did hellfire come from? Long before Jesus, ancient Egypt had imagery of burning, tormenting fires.

**A caller asks why the concept of an immortal soul was not addressed in the movie.**

Kevin: This is a common discussion around the subject of hell. Are we born with an immortal soul or is immortality a gift that is only given to the righteous, so the wicked are deprived of immortality? This leads one to a view of some sort of annihilation.

If one holds the view of eternal torment of Universalism, if there are beings that live forever, you have to do something with them. Most Christians will agree that inherent immortality is not so much a biblical idea as it is a Greek idea introduced later on. **A verse that is often invoked by people who are defending the view of eternal torment is:** Isaiah 55:8-9: If somebody comes up against the idea of eternal torment and has a difficult time reconciling that with the idea of a loving God, people will say, well, God's ways are not our ways. The interesting thing is the context of that verse. **...Looking at the Scriptures before these:** Isaiah 55:6-7: So the context in which we are being told to submit ourselves to the wisdom of God is in the faith of His mercy to His enemies, not in the faith of His terrible wrath against His enemies. In our own justice system, there are various purposes of justice such as retribution, public protection and others. But I think the highest purpose of our justice system is ultimately rehabilitation and reconciliation. We don't want to have justice at the expense of society and we don't want to have justice at the expense of the offender either. Hopefully we can seek a form of justice that simply reconciles. That doesn't mean that whatever you do wrong we will just forgive it, but ultimately the end game is to bring people together. I look to God and have to believe that His justice is even higher than that.

Rick: The original source for hell is not scriptural; it is from Egyptian and Greek mythology. When historically did the Jewish thinking get exposed to such things and what was the result?



Kevin discussed that like all people, the Jewish people lived amongst all sorts of different cultures. They got into trouble for this throughout the Old Testament, such as when they were taken into captivity in Babylon. The same thing happens today. It is natural to take theological ideas and graft them onto the culture you are in. By the time of Christ, if one were to have taken a poll about what happens to the wicked after they die, there would have been a lot of different answers depending on which religious group you were talking to.

Rick: There are about 400 years between the Old and New Testaments. During that time, where there were no prophets on the scene, there were a lot of opportunities for wrong thinking to enter in.

Kevin: This is called the Inter-Testament Period - the time between the writings of Malachi and Matthew. This is when you start to see a lot of these ideas develop. In the Old Testament, we don't see a well-developed view of the afterlife at all.

Rick: Right - it is mostly imagery. We know from the Old Testament that we have a God of justice and judgment, but how is that carried out? That is what the New Testament clarifies for us. We will revisit the subject during Part II of this program.

**These next two Old Testament texts are perhaps the most often referred to by those who promote hellfire:** Daniel 12:1-2: We will spend more time on this in Part II, but we believe this next Isaiah Scripture gives us a clue...Isaiah 66:23-24: Kevin discussed that the corpses are the slain enemies of God and the death of them is going to act as a deterrent. We see here a temporal judgment - something that happens at a specific point in time on this earth. There is not speculation about the afterlife; rather, it seems to be something that is stated within a poetic language talking about a judgment at that time.

This took place at a literal place on the earth, Gehenna. Jesus used that imagery in his teachings. How is that literal place being described and what does it teach us about the justice and judgment of God for mankind? Matthew 24:1-3: After being asked these questions, Jesus answers by first describing the events of the impending destruction of the Temple in 70AD, and then says that this is merely the beginning. There was an immediate fulfillment and then a prophetic one.

A note of caution that Christian Questions reviewed in great detail during the three-part series, *Should You NOT Be a Christian*: When we begin to put more of the basis of our belief on our own personal experience and emotions rather than the written word of God, we can get into trouble. Our experiences are tailored to the type of person we are, the context in which we live, etc. The Bible, on the other hand, provides a consistent plan from beginning to end. Our beliefs must be consistent with the written word of God.

Kevin: The word that Jesus uses exclusively in the Gospels to describe the fate of the wicked is "Gehenna." It is one of many names for a valley outside of Jerusalem which has a rich but dark history. Back in the time of Jeremiah, the prophet warned that if the practices did not come to an end, it would lead to the destruction of the people. Jesus is warning the Jews that if they continue down the path of violence, they would meet a similar fate. Just because Jesus is referencing a literal place does not mean that he isn't referring to something in the afterlife. But it is important to know that he is speaking to something rooted in their context.

Rick: Those who were listening could understand him. This valley became a garbage pit in which to throw refuse. Fires were kept burning so that everything thrown in would be completely destroyed. Nothing living was thrown in there.

**Regarding Gehenna, this gives us a sense of what happened here:** Jeremiah 19:3-6

Jeremiah 7:30-33: (Keep in mind, the very children whose torture and death God laments here would be those who, by definition of not knowing Christ, would be tortured eternally according to proponents of hellfire.)

Kevin: If Jesus were around today, I think maybe the analogy he would use is Ground Zero. What that would mean for us is a place of ultimate destruction.

***So are most people really "hellbound?"  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions,  
Think about it...!***