













Will a Loving God Burn Sinners in Hell Forever?

Discoveries in Prophecy

by Mark A. Finley Speaker-Director, The It Is Written Telecast

Discoveries in Prophecy is a series of 26 evangelistic presentations in magazine format by Evangelist and It Is Written Speaker-Director Mark A. Finley. These presentations have been reproduced here just as delivered; therefore, the reader will encounter occasional references to slides shown during the actual delivery of the topic as originally preached, and other references characteristic of a live presentation.

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Discoveries in Prophecy

Will a Loving God Burn Sinners in Hell Forever?

an we find the love of God in the fires of hell? If God is love, why would He want to burn sinners throughout eternity, and then some? Is God pleased in some way to torment sinners in hell? In some way, does getting even bring Him happiness? Some churches and their pastors obviously think so.

Samuel Hopkins, a Calvinist preacher in the late 1700s, wailed,

"The smoke of their torment shall ascend up forever in the sight of the blessed. There before their eyes this display of divine character and glory will be in the favor of the redeemed, and most entertaining, and will give the

highest pleasure to those who love God."—*The Works* of Samuel Hopkins, D.D., pp. 457, 458.

Can you identify with that statement? Do you think that one of the great "entertainments" of heaven will be to watch agonizing sinners thrashing in hell?

Hopkins then continues, "Should the eternal torment and fires be extinguished, it would in great measure put an end to the happiness and glory of the blessed."

Samuel Hopkins pro-

claimed that hell is a hot spot in the center of the earth where millions now suffering provide entertainment for those in heaven. He pictures the fires of hell and the burning of the wicked as some kind of sport for the spectators in heaven.

Is hell a hot spot in the middle of the earth with millions of people crying in unimaginable pain, with no end ever in sight? And does God watch it all? Is heaven so close to hell that those in heaven can actually look into hell's fire and see their loved ones crying out in agony? Most of us wouldn't torment our worst enemy this way.

A FALSE PICTURE OF GOD

This picture of a God of love tormenting people for endless trillions of years has caused many thousands in every generation to become infidels. Robert Ingersoll, one of the best-known infidels of the past century, was born into the home of a minister. After hearing his father preach on the fires of hell, Ingersoll said, "If God is like that, if God would burn millions and trillions of people, men, women, children and babies, I don't believe He exists. I believe He is a figment of human imagination."

Robert Ingersoll concluded that a God who would torment people for millions of years must not be a loving God at all. Further, he decided that such a God must not really exist at all.

And Ingersoll was right. A vengeful God who delights

Many human imaginations have slipped into the Christian church in place of Scripture. The subject of "hell" is one sad example. to inflict and witness suffering doesn't exist. Unless, that is, we're talking about the one who fancies himself to be the god of this world. The charge that this world's Creator is a tormenting, vengeful God is just one more of Satan's appalling lies.

The devil himself invented the idea of eternal torment, and ever since, he's enjoyed great success in painting God as the villain of this diabolical doctrine. Once again, Satan tries to

frame God for his own crime.

What does the Bible actually teach about hell? Down through the ages, pagan practices and human tradition have often replaced Bible truth. Many human imaginations have slipped into the Christian church in place of Scripture. The subject of "hell" is one sad example.

You may be surprised at what the Bible really teaches about hell. You will discover that the truth in the Bible may be what you always imagined it should be, but never thought it really was.

For the truth about hell, the only safe place to look is in God's Word. Peter helps us to put this subject of hell into its proper setting. The Lord, Peter wrote, "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:9.

God does not delight in the death of the wicked! Does

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heaven rejoice when people are destroyed at the end of this present world? Certainly not! Jesus longs for us to be saved. What more could He have done to get that message across?

Jesus discussed this subject with His disciples in His classic parable of the sower: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted

The Bible teaches . . . that death is a sleep. Death is a silent rest until Jesus comes—for the redeemed as well as for the unsaved.

and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.'" Mat-thew 14:24-28.

What is this parable teaching us regarding the final destruction of the unsaved? In this parable, Jesus likens His kingdom to a farmer's field. The good seed was sown by the master, or owner, of the field. Then, Jesus added, "his enemy came and sowed tares." In God's world, the enemy, or Satan, sows the evil.

Jesus then makes this startling statement: "At the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn" (verse 30).

Then Jesus explains the meaning of the parable in these clear words: "The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels" (verses 38, 39).

Note carefully: The Bible says that the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest at the end of the world. Then Jesus makes His point:

"Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age" (verse 40).

Could Jesus have said it any clearer? The destruction of the wicked—the harvest of tares in the parable—will take place at the end of the world. Does this mean then that a place called hell doesn't yet exist? Jesus made it abundantly plain that it was at the end of time, at an event known as the harvest, that the wicked would be burned.

The Bible gives us a consistent account of what Jesus taught:

"For the wicked are reserved for the day of doom; They shall be brought out on the day of wrath." Job 21:30.

Further, the Bible does not teach that people are now burning in hell with the redeemed in heaven looking down on their suffering. The Bible teaches, as we have already studied, that death is a sleep. Death is a silent rest until Jesus comes—for the redeemed as well as for the unsaved. God's final judgment will occur only at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Matthew helps us understand: "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." Matthew 16:27.

All men and women will be rewarded for their works at the end of this present world, at the return of Jesus. The Bible teaches that the wicked are "reserved" until the day of judgment. The apostle Peter puts it this way: "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment." 2 Peter 2:9.

The wicked who rejected Christ are reserved in their *reserved* in their *reserved* in the second resurrection, after

An eternal fire, according to the Bible's own definition, is one that turns into ashes. The *results* of "eternal fire" are eternal, not the *duration* of its burning.

which they will be mercifully destroyed, according to Scripture.

But someone might ask, "When Christ destroys the wicked at the end of the world, does that mean that He will burn them for millions of years?"

To answer this question, let us look at the Bible illustration of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Bible describes Sodom and Gomorrah as becoming increasingly wicked with each passing year. Finally, God sent angel messengers to warn Lot to leave Sodom, along with anyone else who would believe him: "Escape for your life... lest you be destroyed." Genesis 19:17.

Unless they hastened out of Sodom, they would be

destroyed with it. God made that urgent appeal in love. After God gave them that opportunity to leave Sodom, "the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the LORD out of the heavens." Genesis 19:24.

WHAT IS "ETERNAL FIRE"?

According to God's Word, the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah was an eternal fire: "As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Jude 7.

Question: Is the fire that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah—the fire that came from God out of heaven—burning today? Obviously not! These cities were soon covered by the Dead Sea. In modern times, some of the sea has receded, and the cities are being excavated by archaeologists. But Sodom and Gomorrah aren't burning today. Yet they suffered the vengeance of what the Bible calls "eternal fire." What is the explanation?

Let the Bible explain itself as to what is meant by "eternal fire."

We read in Matthew 25:46: "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." What did Jesus mean when He said "everlasting punishment?" Notice, it doesn't say everlasting punishing-rather, it says "everlasting punishment."

The Bible makes the matter even clearer in 2 Peter 2:6: "And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, [God] condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly."

Jude 7 says that Sodom and Gomorrah were burned with eternal fire; Peter adds that they were turned into ashes. An eternal fire, according to the Bible's own definition, is one that turns into ashes. The *results* of "eternal fire" are eternal, not the *duration* of its burning. Do Sodom and Gomorrah ever need to be burned again? Certainly not, because they were completely destroyed.

An eternal fire is not one that eternally, perpetually burns. Eternal fire consumes, completely and utterly. Eternal fire turns what it burns into ashes—it completely destroys. Everlasting punishment is not everlasting punishing. Everlasting punishment is a punishment so final, so complete, so totally destructive, that it never has to be repeated. The punishment is everlasting.

We have difficulty picturing a loving God whose greatest pleasure is to burn people in unimaginable anguish for billions of years without end. But we have no difficulty accepting the biblical picture of a loving God who, after making countless invitations to sinners to forsake their evil ways, consumes sin wherever it is found. God consumes the world before the evil, rebellious world destroys itself in some horrific manner. He consumes it before the wicked, who want to "do it their way" destroy those loyal to God. The biblical picture is the only just and merciful solution God can choose.

The Bible further describes the fires of hell as being so hot that they totally destroy sin and purify this planet. Then God recreates the world. The Bible puts it this way: "Anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away." Revelation 20:15 - 21:1.

Let us look at additional texts that speak of hell fire: "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two

In Bible language, an eternal fire is one that turns what it burns to ashes. Everlasting punishment is punishment that is so full and complete that it need never be repeated.

hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched." Mark 9:43.

Jeremiah 17:27 provides insight into the meaning of the expression "unquenchable fire: "But if you will not heed Me to hallow the Sabbath day, ... then I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched."

In A.D. 70, Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled when the Romans set fire to Jerusalem. The city was burned with unquenchable fire. Again I ask, is Jerusalem burning today? Obviously not! What, then, is an unquenchable fire? Simply this: An unquenchable fire cannot be put out by human hands. In Bible language, an eternal fire is one that turns what it burns to ashes. Everlasting punishment is punishment that is so full and complete that it need never be repeated.

NOTHING LEFT OF THE WICKED

Malachi gives additional insight regarding the final end of the unsaved: "'For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,' Says the LORD of hosts, 'That will leave them neither root nor branch." Malachi 4:1.

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In highly figurative language, Malachi emphasizes even further the final end to sin and sinners: "You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet" (verse 3).

Notice how the Bible repeats this truth again and again: "May sinners be consumed from the earth, And the wicked be no more." Psalm 104:35.

"Let them be blotted out of the book of the living." Psalm 69:28.

The wicked are "reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition." 2 Peter 3:7. "Perdition" means destruction. They're not burning—they are "reserved" until the day of judgment.

The wicked are "cut down and thrown into the fire." Matthew 3:10.

"The wicked shall be no more." Psalm 37:10. God is not going to allow wickedness to go on and on—for the sake of the universe, as well as for the sake of sinners themselves. Wickedness comes to a final end. Sin and sinners will be consumed.

"Into smoke they shall vanish away." Psalm 37:20.

"The future of the wicked shall be cut off." Psalm 37:38.

"The soul who sins shall die." Ezekiel 18:4. The Bible does not say that the soul who sins will continue to live in the fires of hell forever and ever. The Bible says in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. And death is not continual life in hell. Death is the absence of life. Sin pays its own wages, sooner or later. Sin is self-destructive; it destroys all who cling to it. The Bible says in Revelation 20:14: "This is the second death."

You may wonder about the expression "forever and ever" in the book of Revelation. What does that little phrase mean? Does "forever" mean something other than forever? Let's consider the passage. The wicked, "shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night." Revelation 14:10, 11.

Here, in highly symbolic language, John is emphasizing that the "smoke" of their punishment indicates that the fire has done its work—its smoke wends its way into the universe forever—in a statement of finality. When fire does its work, without human intervention, nothing but ashes remains. Long after what is burned is fully consumed, the smoke arises, figuratively speaking, forever. The destruction is permanent—forever.

Let us look at another Bible passage where this expression "forever" is used: "But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever." Exodus 21:5, 6.

The Old Testament slave would have an ear pierced,

indicating that he would serve his master "forever." How long would the slave serve his master? The Revised Standard Version translates this text, "He shall serve him for life." So the term forever as used in the Bible doesn't mean existence without end; it means "until the end of the age"—or as long as life shall last.

Another good example of the use of this term and its meaning is found in 1 Samuel 1:22, 28. Here Hannah dedi-

Any human being who clings to sin, who knowingly and willingly rebels against God, is contaminated. And for the sake of all, redeemed and the wicked, God must destroy the contamination.

cated Samuel to the Lord "forever." Then she says she has lent him to the Lord "as long as he lives."

The wicked will be consumed and reduced to ashesburned up. The fire that burns will last as long as it takes to cleanse the earth. In the biblical sense, that means "forever." The day will come when sin and its consequences will have been destroyed, when God will usher in a new age with no more suffering or heartache. That day will be the beginning of "forever" in the sense that we use that term today.

The Bible makes plain that the fires of hell destroy both the body and the soul, or the life, of a person. The word soul simply means the whole person. Sometimes, Bible writers—as we still do today—used "soul," however, to refer to the character, to the inner spirit, of man. We seem to sense when we use "soul" in this way and when we use it in the more correct way, as referring to a whole person, in harmony with Genesis 2:7.

Jesus said, in Matthew 10:28: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

That is, the sinner who experiences the fires of hell is totally destroyed, both soul and body—the whole life.

Isaiah put it another way: "Behold, they shall be as stubble, The fire shall burn them; They shall not deliver themselves From the power of the flame; It shall not be a coal to be warmed by, Nor a fire to sit before!" Isaiah 47:14. When the wicked are destroyed, there won't even be a coal left. When God burns up sin, it's gone forever. There is no place for sin and sinners any more-not a trace remains!

THE ONLY SOLUTION TO CONTAMINATION

A tragic experience, recently recorded in the book Bitter Harvest, describes an event that took place in Michigan when an employee in a large grain company mixed in with the grain a substance known as PBB. The employee mixing the feed mistook the deadly poisonous PBB for a vitamin supplement.

The cattle, chickens, and pigs on the many farms which bought the deadly grain were contaminated. The farmers were deeply troubled as they realized that they had no choice but to isolate the contaminated animals, kill them, and burn the bodies to prevent the contamination from spreading. Grown men were moved to tears as they burned their own cattle.

God's beautiful planet has become contaminated with sin. God has done everything He could to save every human being from its poison. Any human being who clings to sin, who knowingly and willingly rebels against God, is contaminated. And for the sake of all, redeemed and the wicked, God must destroy the contamination. Sin is like a spreading cancer that must be cut out of the universe. My mind could never understand a loving God who would delight in burning people for millions of years.

God would not be a God of love if He allowed sickness and suffering to go on forever.

But my mind could understand the justice of a loving God who decided to eliminate sin from the universe before it continued to spread.

Suppose you were in heaven and decided to take a flight over a certain section of earth, and you saw some smoke. Coming closer, you hear familiar voices—but this time they are cries of anguish as people suffer the dreadful fate of never-ending fire. Cries of your friends, maybe your loved ones!

How do you think you would feel? Would that experience add to your heavenly bliss? If possible, you would be distressed even more when you realized that their intense agony would never end. Be glad today that God would never put the redeemed—or the unsaved-through such horrific experiences!

God has done everything He can to save us for eternity. Can you think of anything more He could have done? God will even erase the memory of that destruction from the minds of the redeemed: "For yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But it shall be no more." Psalm 37:10.

Again, we are reminded that the wicked will be utterly removed from the universe. Obadiah 16:16 reminds us that "they shall be as though they had never been."

GOD WILL BRING SIN AND SATAN COM-PLETELY TO AN END

God's way is the best way. His original plan for this world will be accomplished (see Isaiah 45:18). There will not be some remote corner where sin remains forever, boiling in a hell fire that will never go out! No, sin will not perpetually exist!

"But," you ask, "What about Satan? Will he be destroyed?"

Ezekiel wrote: "I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. . . . therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth, . . . and never shalt thou be any more." Ezekiel 28:16, 18, 19, KJV.

When God makes an utter end to Satan, he will never again arise to torment the universe. The redeemed will have already settled the question of God's fairness and wisdom. Never again will the question be cherished anywhere in the universe—especially among the redeemed as to whether created beings may be better able to run their lives than God is. The tragic results of sin will never be forgotten—though those results will be gone.

The God that we serve is a God of love. He's done everything He could to save us. God would not be a God of love if He allowed sickness and suffering to go on forever. He would not be a God of love if He allowed murder, adultery, and stealing to continue. The only way God can destroy sin is to destroy those sinners who cling to sin. Sin is combustible. Men and women who choose to cling to their sins will be consumed along with their sin.

Jesus appeals to men and women to be saved, for this world is soon to go up in flames as sin and sinners are destroyed. The invitation is still open: "Let the wicked forsake his way." Isaiah 55:7. Jesus cannot save us while we cling to our sins. Jesus cannot save us if we know that the Bible Sabbath is Saturday—the seventh-day of the week—yet continue to knowingly, willingly break it. Jesus cannot save us if we understand that our body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, yet continue to willingly destroy it. Jesus cannot save us if we continue to live willingly in known sin.

The door of mercy is still open. Jesus is still knocking on the door of our hearts. Perhaps in reading these pages, you hear Him speaking to you. Do you hear Him knocking? Think of what it would be like to be lost—to be as though you had never been. But that need never be. Jesusif you answer His knock—will make sure of that!

Discoveries in Prophecy Quick Quiz

Our heavenly Father has so much He longs to teach us! Think of each seminar session as one in a series of steps leading upward—a series of "lessons from heaven." May we learn our lessons well, so we in turn can teach others. God's Word, the Bible—our Textbook for this seminar—offers Learning Unlimited!

Will a Loving God Burn Sinners in Hell Forever?

Numbers in parentheses below refer to page numbers in special-edition Seminar Bibles—the first number for the King James Version, the second for the New King James Version. For example: (709 / 681).

1. At the end of the millennium, the Bible says, the wicked—those who have rejected Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord—will be destroyed in a lake of fire. Complete the following verses:

Matthew 25:41: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into _____ ____ fire." (978 / 973) Matthew 25:46: "And these shall go away into _____ punishment." (978 / 973) 2 Thessalonians 1:9: "Who shall be punished with _____ punishment." (1178 / 1170) Mark 3:29: "But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of _____ damnation." (987 / 983) Jude 7: "Suffering the vengeance of ______ fire." (1217 / 1212) So the Bible uses words like eternal and everlasting and forever to describe the destruction of the wicked. But does a word like forever, as the Bible uses it, always mean "without an end"? Consider the following Bible references: Exodus 21:6 (82 / 75) says that an Old Testament slave was to serve his master forever. Question: Are Old Testament slaves still alive today, after thousands of years, still serving their master? **Yes** O No 1 Samuel 1:22 (301 / 275) says that Samuel was to abide in the tabernacle forever. Question: Is Samuel still alive today, serving in the temple? Yes D No Jonah 2:6 (915 / 897) says that Jonah was to be in the belly of the great fish forever. Question: Is Jonah still riding around somewhere at sea today in the belly of the great fish? **Yes** No No Clearly, when the Bible uses the word forever, it can mean "as long as the person is alive." But what about eternal and everlasting? Below and on the following page, fill in the blanks for

2.

3.

the following verse:

"For behold, the day cometh, that shall ______ as an oven; and all the proud, and all

Quick Quiz

that do wickedly, shall be _____: and the day that cometh shall ______ them

_____, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither ______ nor _____." To check your answer, see Malachi 4:1 (943 / 928).

4. So the Bible says the wicked will be **burned up** like stubble, leaving behind no root, no **branch**—nothing. They are totally consumed. Check the answers below that make the most sense to you, based on what the Bible has to say.

A. When the wicked are destroyed, the results of their destruction are eternal, but not necessarily the process or duration of the destruction.
B. The wicked are never consumed—they burn forever with no end.
C. Eternal punishment is not necessarily the same thing as eternal punishing.

- 5. Romans 6:23 says that eternal life is a gift of God. Read John 3:36 (1052 / 1047) and 1 John 3:15 (1213 / 1208), and then indicate which answer below makes the most sense to you.
 - A. The wicked have eternal life in the lake of fire—even though it is a life of agony.
 - **B**. Only the righteous have eternal life. The wicked will not have it even in the lake of fire.
 - C. Eternal life is for both the righteous and the wicked.
- 6. What statement or statements below best reflect your thinking?

 \Box A. I don't mind spending eternity with a God who torments forever my friends or loved ones who miss out on heaven.

B. I do not believe that God will torture the wicked in the never-ending fires of hell.

 \Box C. God is not powerful enough to completely destroy sin. There will always be a "plague spot" somewhere in the universe where sin and sinners will go on with no end.

7. The Book of Revelation describes the destruction of the wicked. Then what does the prophet see next?

To check your answer, see Revelation 21:1 (1234 / 1229).

8. So sin and sinners are gone forever. What else does the Bible say will be no more?

"And God shall wipe away all _____ from their eyes; and there shall be no more

_____, neither _____, nor _____, neither shall

there be any more _____: for the former things are _____ away."

To check your answer, see Revelation 21:4 (1234 / 1230).

* * *

Words to the Wise:

"And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads."—Revelation 22:3, 4. Notes:

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Discoveries in Prophecy

Complete list of evangelistic magazines, cross-referenced to the book *Beyond Orion's Gates*, by Mark A. Finley

Magazine Title

Beyond Orion's Gates

1.	Living Beyond 2000	Ch. 2: Lonely No Longer
2.	Countdown to Eternity: Why Communism Failed	Ch. 5: A Man of Mud and Metal
3.	A World in Turmoil	
4.	Angel 911: Revelation's Angelic Conflict	Ch. 8: Why Insurance Companies Are Wrong
5.	2000 and Beyond: How to Find Personal Peace	Ch. 4: The Highest Ransom Ever Paid
6.	Alive at End Time: The Secret of Personal Power	Ch. 3: The Heart Specialist
7.	New Age Conspiracy	Ch. 7: Beyond Virtual Reality
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-12.	The Greatest Religious Cover-up in History	Ch. 13: Assault on Heaven's Constitution
13.	How to Identify a Cult	
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15.	The Real Truth About Near-Death Experiences	Ch. 14: Where Do We Go When We Die?
16.	How to Successfully Bury the Past	Ch. 22: How to Start Life Over Again
17.	Will a Loving God Burn Sinners in Hell Forever?	Ch. 25: Who Framed God?
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19.	Why So Many Denominations?	
	The Mystery of Revelation's Babylon Revealed	
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