

Malachi 4:1-3 in the Navajo Bible

Copyright (c) 2009 by Frank W. Hardy, Ph.D.

Áaji' ayílkáago báah bighan góne' honeezgai nahalin doo índa t'áá ádiláahgo deíkáahgii áadóó t'áá iiyisí doo yá'áshhóggóó áadaanúííi t'áá ałtso ehégod adidook'ááł nahalingo beidoołkááł índa behétł'óól áadóó bits'áoz'a' doo ła' doodzih da, jó'akon,ní t'áá ałtsoní bee Bóhólníihii.² Nidi nihí shízhi' dadíínóhsinii éí Jíhonaa'éí Ts'ídá T'áá Ákogi Átéii hadoogáałgo bit'a' biyaadóó hadaałt'é nídadoodhleel. Béégashii yáázh neeyáąągo bighandéé' ch'ilt'e' nahalingo ch'idoohkah.³ Áadóó beinílkáadi t'áá iiyisí doo yá'ádaajishóonii hak'i nidoohkah, índa ɬeeschch'iih nahalingo nihikétl'áah bee hak'i nidoohkah,ní t'áá ałtsoní bee Bóhólníihii. (Malachi 4:1-3)¹

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them.² But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.³ Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the LORD Almighty . (Malachi 4:1-3)²

Introduction

In this passage, "[a]ll the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire [*w'lihał*] "(vs. 1). Later, after the fire has done its work, "they will be ashes under the soles of your feet" (vs. 3). We normally think of the wicked being destroyed in a special place called "hell." We think of the righteous going to another different place called "heaven." But here God tells us, through His prophet, that the righteous will walk on the ashes of the wicked. How can this be if they are in different places? And if they are not in different places, how can the righteous avoid burning too? Just what does this all mean?

The First Thousand Years

Some background

It is tempting to think loosely about things that will take place after the present order of things has run its course. It does deeply concern us whether we have a relationship with Jesus now that will take us safely through the end time and ensure that we will spend eternity with Him later. But the actual being there is for the future. The Bible gives us some information on how

¹ Navajo Bible quotations are from *Diyin God Bizaad. The Holy Bible in Navajo*. Revised edition. New York: American Bible Society, 2000.

² English Bible quotations are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version®*. NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

the future will unfold for those love and serve God. We may or may not have studied these things closely, but the information is there if we wish to examine it.

In four passages the Bible speaks of a "new heaven" and a "new earth." Two of these are in the Old Testament and two in the New.

"Behold, I will create **new heavens and a new earth**. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. (Isaiah 65:17)

"As **the new heavens and the new earth** that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. (Isaiah 66:22)

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to **a new heaven and a new earth**, the home of righteousness. (2 Peter 3:13)

Then I saw **a new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. (Revelation 21:1)

In each case the two are spoken of together and no distinction is made between them. The word "heaven" here could mean the uppermost part of our biosphere – the sky and clouds that surround our planet. Sometimes we use the word "heaven" in another way to refer to the place where God lives, which is not the same as the thin mantel of air that surrounds Planet Earth. "Heaven" in this broader sense is a real place, but in a different part of the universe.

Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later." (John 13:36)

When Jesus says He is going to a place where Peter cannot come, but where he – and all who love Him – will follow later, it is this other part of the universe that He's talking about. With enough effort there is no place on our planet that people can't go. But heaven, if it is another different place separate from Planet Earth, is a place where we can't go – at least not now. When Jesus comes the second time, He will take us to this other place.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (John 14:1-3)

Revelation 20:1-6

But this is not the end of the story. In Revelation John mentions a period of a thousand years. We call this the "millennium," although the word "millennium" itself does not appear. In the second half of Revelation 19 (vss. 11-21) Jesus leads all the angel armies of heaven to earth in order to rescue His people from the tribulation. (The idea that His people never experience the tribulation is simply not biblical.) The second coming is a rescue mission which takes place when it is most needed. So that's the last part of chap. 19, from vs. 11 onward. At the second coming Jesus comes back and takes us to be with Him so that we also may be where He is, i.e., not here. He takes us to another place.

What happens on earth while we are with Jesus in this other place? The first half of the next chapter tells us. In Revelation 20 (vss. 1-6, especially 4-5) we read about what happens during the next thousand years. During this time the earth is littered with dead bodies. The wicked are dead (see below), the righteous are elsewhere, and the only ones left are Satan and his evil angels.

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. (2 Thessalonians 2:8)

When the enemy of God is destroyed by the splendor of Christ's coming, this is not the second death we're talking about. It is simply the way this person and all his followers pass this life. Instead of dying from old age or having a fatal accident, they are destroyed by the splendor of Christ's second coming.

We have said that "the lawless one" is destroyed by the splendor of Christ's coming and that Satan remains – bound for a thousand years. So who is this "lawless one"? Not Satan. We would have to study other passages in order to understand who the "lawless" one is, but the point is that it is a human being. This term does not refer to Satan. The same words could certainly be used to describe Satan, but in this passage he is not the one they refer to. The "lawless" one is destroyed, but Satan remains during the thousand years of Revelation 20.

What happens to Satan during this period? Nothing. Nothing at all. There is no one left to tempt or deceive and he is left with nothing to do but consider where his rebellion has led him. This earth is the "Abyss" (NIV) or "bottomless pit" (KJV) in which Satan is bound for a thousand years. He has nowhere to go and nothing to do. For so active a personality this must surely be the next thing to torture.

What about those who are saved? What do they do during the first thousand years after Jesus comes again? For them this will be a busy time. Paul says, "Do you not know that we will judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:3). When? Before the second coming? After the thousand years are over? How about during the thousand years? Afterward there won't be any evil angels to judge. Before the second coming we're not judging anyone. But the time in between makes perfect sense. While we are in heaven – after Jesus has come, but before the wicked are destroyed – we are with Jesus where He is and our task is to judge those angels who followed Satan in rebelling against God.

After the Thousand Years

Revelation 20:7-15

When the thousand years are over, a number of things happen. These events are described in the second half of Revelation 20 (vss. 7-15). First, the wicked from all ages come back to life. Then they are thrown into the lake of fire. Hell is not a place for the dead. If it were, it would be no more remarkable than the process of cremation. When people are cremated their bodies are burned, but they are not alive to know it. Hell is not like that. Hell is a place for the living, i.e., for those who have rebelled against God and refused to accept His gift of salvation. At this time they experience what Scripture calls the "second death." No one can die if they're already dead. To experience the second death the wicked must come back to life. They do this

at the end of the thousand years. Now Satan has someone to deceive again. This fact is liberating to him and so he leads those he has brought down in one last final and desperate attempt to wage war against God.

They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. (Revelation 20:9)

The fire in this verse is the fire of hell. Notice carefully where it comes from. Does it burn in the depths of the earth, as many suppose. No. We're talking about things that take place on the surface of the earth. So does the fire come up to reach the surface, or does it come down? What the Bible says is, "But fire came down from heaven and devoured them" (vs. 9).

When it comes down from heaven, does it keep on doing this for all eternity? Verse 10 could give this impression. "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (vs. 10). But notice vs. 14. "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death" (Revelation 20:14). When death is thrown into the lake of fire, what that tells me is that death is done away. It is no more. And when it says, "The lake of fire is the second death," that tells me the wicked die in the flames. This is no natural death. It is the second death, by which the universe is cleansed of sin and sinners. If the wicked die in the fire, they must be alive when they go there. When they die, that's the end of death. No one else will ever die, because those who remain are the saved and we will be with the Lord forever (see 1 Thessalonians 4:17). Being dead is not the same as being alive. Those who suffer the second death do not live on forever and ever to suffer in hell. They die in hell – and it is a painful death – but when they are finally dead, that's the end. They are no more.

How can the punishment be forever if the fire is not forever? To answer this question we must have a very clear concept of what the punishment is. Paul says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The wages of sin is the punishment for sin. So what is the punishment for sin? It is eternal death. The gift of God is eternal life. These are not the same. The way sinners enter their punishment is by dying in the flames of hell, but the punishment itself is not their burning. It is their death. The punishment for sin is not eternity in hell. Hell is the means by which they enter their punishment, but the punishment for sin is not eternal burning. That is not what Paul says. It is eternal death.

Revelation 21

How can we be sure of this? How can we know that hell does not burn forever and that the wicked do remain in the flames through all future ages? We can know this from studying what happens next.

Please remember and bear carefully in mind as we proceed that the fires of hell come down (not up), and that they come down to the surface of the earth. They do not burn in the depths of the earth. This fire has a purpose. It is sent to cleanse the earth of sin and sinners. Why does God need to cleanse the earth? Why not just start over somewhere else? Because He had a plan for this earth and He is determined to implement it. And what is His plan? Well, what was His plan in the beginning? In the beginning He created the earth to be our home – a place of blessing and happiness.

Now let's return to the earlier question. After the thousand years what is God's plan? What it always was. He wants this earth to be a place of blessing and happiness. But Satan has turned it into a desert. So what to do? What God will do is cleanse the earth, get rid of Satan – and all his followers and all they have done – and recreate the earth again just like it was before. When God does this it will be called the new earth, or the earth made new. This is described in the early verses of Revelation 21.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Revelation 21:1)

The city – the capital of God's government – had been in another place. Now it comes "down out of heaven from God" and comes to rest, well where does it come to rest? On the surface of the earth. This is the same surface of the same earth where the fires of hell had been burning just previously (chap. 20). Why aren't they still burning in chap. 21? Because they have done their work. They have done it completely. Sin and sinners are no more. It is at this point that God recreates our earth, just as He had planned it to be in Genesis 1-2. I include the beginning of Genesis 2 in this reference because the Sabbath will be part of God's new creation.

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure.²³ From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the LORD.

²⁴ "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." (Isaiah 66:22-24)

I have just argued that the flames will not burn forever and here it seems that they do. But a fire that is not quenched is not the same as a fire that burns forever. The fire at the twin towers of the Trade Center on September 11, 2001, could not be quenched. Is it still burning? No the towers are being rebuilt. So what does it mean that the fire could not be quenched. It means no one could put it out. Just so, in the present case no wicked person can put out the fire that engulfs him or her. It will burn until it has done its work completely. Then it will stop burning and God will recreate the new earth on the same spot, just as workers in New York are now rebuilding the twin towers on the same spot.

Conclusion

Notice again what our passage says. Not a root or a branch would be left (see vs. 1). We will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of our feet (see vs. 3).

"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or

a branch will be left to them.² But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.³ Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the LORD Almighty . (Malachi 4:1-3)

The popular belief is that people go to heaven or hell when they die. What I'm saying is that people go to heaven or hell while they are very much alive. The popular belief is that heaven or hell is where people spend eternity. Neither part of this is true. Those who are saved spend their first thousand years in heaven, but then the city comes down from heaven and the capital of God's government is transferred to the earth. Where the saved spend the rest of eternity – after the first thousand years – is not in heaven, but on the earth made new.

As for the wicked, they don't spend eternity in hell. They are raised to life in order to enter the flames alive. These flames are where they die the second death (see Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8). Then they are no more. Their punishment is what happens next and this part is truly endless. It continues through all the ceaseless ages of eternity. Forever and ever they remain dead and separate from God and any of the good things they might otherwise have received. Their death is an eternal death (see Romans 6:26); their dying in hell is not an eternal dying. Eternal dying would mean eternal living, but eternal living – in hell or anywhere else – is not the wages of sin. At least Paul does not say it is. Living forever is the gift of God – His reward to those who love Him.

Again, how can we be sure? One part of the answer is in the text itself. Think about it. How can the wicked be ashes under our feet if we go up and they go down, i.e., if we are in different places? To walk on something it has to be where you own feet are. You can only walk on the floor of the room you are in. The wicked are ashes under our feet, first because they burn up – completely. And second because they burn on the surface of this earth. We who are saved are also on the surface of the earth, but inside the city. The infinite glory of God that gives life to those who are saved brings death to those who are lost. This all happens here on the surface of our planet. Once the wicked are gone, God recreates the earth and the meek then inherit – not heaven – but the earth (see Matthew 5:5).

Are there passages that don't seem to fit this concept? There are those passages. But when we search the entire body of Scripture and bring all of the relevant passages together, one cohesive picture emerges. God destroys the wicked where the wicked are. That's here on this earth. He then gives the entire earth to His saints to enjoy as He had always intended. In this His plan in the beginning is finally put in place. What He intended, He brings about. If He cannot fulfill His promises to some, He will fulfill it to others. His promises will be fulfilled. And we will be with Him forever.