

Our expectation would be the opposite: it would be consumed forever, not tormented forever. Hence it is the smoke (evidence that fire has done its work) which "rises forever and ever" Rev 14:11; cf. 19:3).

Four objections are raised to this understanding of the "lake of fire."

1. There is the vivid picture of hell as the place where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48) .... Jesus' use of Isaiah 66:24 does not mention everlasting pain. What he says is the worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched. Nor will they until presumably their work of destruction is done.

2. At the end of the so-called parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus contrasted "eternal life" with "eternal punishment" (Matt 25:46). Does that not indicate that in hell people endure conscious punishment?... Jesus said that both the life and the punishment would be eternal, but he did not define in that passage the nature of either.

3. But did not Dives cry out because he was "in agony in this fire" (Luke 16:23-24, 28)? Yes, he did. But we must be cautious in interpreting a parable (if it was that) which speaks of "Abraham's bosom" as well as hell fire .... The natural interpretation would be that Jesus was referring to the so-called "intermediate (or intern) state" between death and resurrection. I myself believe that this will be the time ... when the lost will come to the unimaginably painful realization of their fate. This is not incompatible, however, with their final annihilation.

4. But does the Book of Revelation not say that in the lake of fire "they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever"? Yes, that sentence occurs, but only once .... The beast, the false prophet and the harlot, however, are not individual people but symbols of the world in its varied hostility to God .... They cannot experience pain. Nor can "Death and Hades" which follow them into the