

**BIBLE THREATENINGS EXPLAINED; OR,
PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE SOMETIMES
QUOTED TO PROVE ENDLESS
PUNISHMENT, SHOWN TO TEACH
CONSEQUENCES OF LIMITED DURATION**

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Bible Threatenings Explained; Or, Passages of Scripture Sometimes Quoted to Prove Endless Punishment, Shown to Teach Consequences of Limited Duration by J. W. Hanson

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EXPLAINED;

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TEACH CONSEQUENCES OF LIMITED
DURATION.

By ^{John} J. W. HANSON, D.D.

The more profoundly learned any one was in Christian antiquity, so much more did he cherish and defend the hope that the suffering of the wicked would at some time come to an end. — DODDERLEIN.

Is the Law then against the Promise of God? God forbid! — PAUL.

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PREFACE.

When one who has been reared in the Evangelical Church is favorably impressed with the doctrine of Universal Salvation, it frequently happens that the many texts he has heard quoted against it, operate as stumbling blocks in his way. The author of this book believes that no text of Scripture, properly understood, in any manner traverses the grand central truth of the Gospel: God's triumph over all his foes, converting them to himself; and he has arranged these expositions in a brief and popular style for the purpose of showing that the Threatenings of the Bible are perfectly harmonious with the Promises of Scripture; in fact, that the threatenings are given in order that the promises of Universal Redemption may be fulfilled.

He agrees with Canon Farrar of the Episcopal Church, who says: "If the decision be made to turn *solely on the literal meaning of the scriptures*, I have no hesitation whatever in declaring my strong conviction that the Universalist and Annihilist theories have far more evidence of this sort for them than the popular view. It seems to me that if many passages of Scripture be taken *quite literally*, universal restoration is unequivocally taught,

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but that *endless torments are nowhere clearly taught*—the passages which appear to teach that doctrine being either obviously figurative or historically misunderstood."

If these pages shall assist any mind to remove obstacles that prevent it from beholding God as the Savior of the world, its purpose will be fulfilled.

BIBLE THREATENINGS EXPLAINED.

When considering the threatenings of the Bible, it must never be forgotten that they are always to be interpreted and understood in harmony with the great principles declared in the Scriptures, and more especially with the revealed character of God, and his promises to man. They must be so explained as to harmonize with the rest of the book that contains them. For instance, we read that "God is a spirit," and yet the same book speaks of the eye, hand, arm and ear of God. As an infinite spirit can have no such organs, we must not say either (1) that God is not a spirit, or (2) that one part of the book contradicts another part. Such passages must be interpreted so as to agree with the great central fact that God is a spirit.

Now we read that "God is Love" — is a "Father." And at the same time we are told that he will cast the wicked into hell—into everlasting fire—will punish them forever, etc. On the same principle we must not (1) deny that God is Love and a merciful Father, nor (2) believe that the Bible contradicts itself; but we must

believe that the threatenings harmonize with the promises, and that no penalty can be accepted as taught in the Bible, that would prove God not a Father, or destitute of love towards each and all of his children. In other words, we must shed the light of infinite, boundless, unending love on all threatened penalties, and interpret them in perfect accord with the Divine character. Believing that God is love, we must not only be prejudiced against believing that endless or any other cruel punishment is threatened in the Bible, but we must, with all the resistance of which our moral natures are capable, refuse to credit any statement that represents God as permitting any penalty to befall the sinner which will not result in his final welfare. The love of God, the Divine Paternity, is an efficient guaranty against the possibility that unending agony can be experienced by any human creature. So that, if the letter of Scripture seemed to teach endless punishment—which it does not, when properly understood—the light of the great central fact of revelation—God's Love—would dispel all darkness from the declaration, as soon as the light of that truth should fall upon it. In this frame of mind we should consider the threatenings of the Bible.

ENDLESS PUNISHMENT OF HEATHEN ORIGIN.

We should also bear another fact in mind. When the doctrine of endless punishment began to be taught in the Christian Church, it was not derived from the Scriptures, but from the heathen converts to Christianity, who accepted Christ, but who brought with them into their new church that doctrine which had for centuries been taught in heathen lands, but which neither Moses nor Christ accepted. And having received the idea from

heathen tradition, it was natural that the early Christians should transfer it to the Bible, and seek to find it there.

That the heathen invented this doctrine is undeniable.

Says Cicero: "It was on this account that the ancients invented those infernal punishments of the dead, to keep the wicked under some awe in this life, who without them would have no dread of death itself."

Says Polybius, the Greek historian: "The multitude is ever fickle and capricious, full of lawless passions and irrational and violent resentments. There is no way left to keep them in order but by the terrors of future punishment, and all the pompous circumstances that attend such fiction! On which account the ancients acted, in my opinion, with great judgment and penetration, when they contrived to bring those notions of the gods and a future state into the popular belief."

Strabo, the Greek geographer and philosopher, says: "It is impossible to govern women and the gross body of the people, and to keep them pious, holy and virtuous, by the precepts of philosophy. This can only be done by the fear of the gods, which is raised and supported by ancient fictions and modern prodigies." And again he says: "The apparatus of the ancient mythologies was an engine which the legislators employed as bug-bears to strike a terror into the childish imagination of the multitude."

This horrible heathen dogma sought entrance into the Christian church in vain, for the first three centuries after Christ, and though here and there a heathenized Christian announced it, it did not become an accredited Christian doctrine till after more than five centuries. Dr. Edward Beecher candidly confesses that as late as three hundred years after Christ it had hardly obtained a foothold.

He says: "What, then, was the state of facts as to the leading theological schools of the Christian world in the age of Origen and some centuries after? It was, in brief, this: There were at least six theological schools