

The WORLD TOMORROW

A WORLD-WIDE BROADCAST

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Dear Friend:

A startling statement is found in Mark 9:48. In this passage of Scripture, Christ spoke of a worm that "dieth not." Whoever heard of the immortality of worms? What did Christ mean?

Some PEOPLE think that Jesus was referring to people as worms and was trying to say that these "people" never died -- but lived on in agonizing torment. Those who say this fail to notice that Jesus does not call the wicked people "worms" but instead speaks of THEIR worm. The lexicons define the Hebrew (Isa. 66:24) and Greek (Mark 9:48) words translated "worm" as a grub or maggot and in no way refer to a man. Christ was not teaching the immortality of people or worms!

Actually, Jesus was here warning his listeners that those who would "offend" -- who would live a life of rebellion against God and His children -- would be cast into "hell fire." Most Bibles show in the marginal rendering that this was "Gehenna fire." Jesus was referring to Gehenna as a type of the second death in the "lake of fire" which will befall the ungodly.

Gehenna, or the Valley of Hinnom, was located outside of Jerusalem and was a place where trash, filth, and the dead bodies of animals and despised criminals were thrown. There were ledges along the edge of this valley on which these dead bodies might land instead of falling down into the fires beneath where everything was burned. Smith's Bible Dictionary gives a description of this valley -- which was something like one of our city dumps today where trash and rubbish are burned up.

If anything, especially a dead body, landed on a ledge above the fires, it would be devoured by many worms or maggots which were kept alive by the animal and vegetable substances deposited there.

It was to these worms that Christ was referring when He said "their worm dieth not." But Christ didn't mean that each individual worm continued to live forever!

Actually, these worms, or maggots are the larvae which develop from eggs deposited by flies. They continue for only a few days in this larval stage, then pupate and finally emerge as flies, later dying. These are scientific facts, known by any real student of science. And yet some people think that Christ ignorantly stated that these larvae continued to live forever in that stage of development! This just goes to show that we should always be careful to use wisdom and common sense in studying God's Word. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7). Let's rightly use the minds God gave us!

The Greek word which was inspired and translated into the word "worm" in this passage simply means a grub or maggot, and is a collective expression for all the worms that devour dead matter. Yes, the flies that these worms become, like all other animals will return to the dust from which they came. "All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." (Eccl. 3:19,20).

This same reference to worms is found in Isaiah 66:24. Here we again find that the inspired word simply means a common grub or a maggot. These worms or larvae also feed on the dead bodies for a few days, and then emerge as flies. Thus, these worms "die not" but continue to develop into flies just as any normal, healthy worm! The flies continue to deposit their eggs only as long as there are dead bodies or other matter for the larvae to feed on.

Neither do these worms have immortal souls! Ecclesiastes 3:19 shows that no creature, man or beast, is born with an immortal soul.

The Bible is one book that makes good sense! So let us always study these perplexing scriptures through, before we jump to conclusions. Then let us live by God's Word, so that we may be worthy of the gift of eternal life. Then we need not receive the wages of sin -- death (Rom. 6:23). This will come by a fire which will not be quenched -- but will burn itself out by consuming this earth and the bodies of all the wicked. Neither will we need to worry about these "worms" which will live on the bodies of transgressors -- not at first consumed by fire -- until there are no more bodies left. Then all will return to the dust and ashes (Mal. 4:1).

But if we will honestly search the Scriptures and live by them, we will be accounted worthy to inherit eternal life in the new earth which is to come.

LETTER ANSWERING DEPARTMENT