

# SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER

ISA.55:10

FOR THE EATER

BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

## THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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### WHAT DOES "GEHENNA" MEAN?

In any complete study of the nature and duration of future punishment, the meaning and significance of the word **gehenna** must be carefully considered. This is in reality a Greek word that came out of the Hebrew and into the English by way of the New Testament. If a dictionary is consulted one will find that it is said to be "the name of the valley of Hinnom, near Jerusalem, where refuse was burned in Biblical times." It will also tell us that it comes from the Greek word **geenna** by way of the Hebrew **gehinnom**. Since this checks out with the New Testament usage of this term, it makes a good starting point for a full study of this word, which is found twelve times in the New Testament, eleven of which came from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The occurrences of *geenna* in the King James Version are translated "**hell**" in every passage, but this unanimity of rendering is of no help in understanding this word since there is no agreement among men anywhere as to what the word "hell" means. However, it is of special interest to the truth-seeker that the Lord Jesus used the popular name of a piece of land, which in His time had become a trash dump, a refuse heap, a place for disposal of worthless and useless matter, to designate another *gehenna* that will exist in the future, under divine government, which will be used for the disposal of useless and worthless men. This future *gehenna* is described in Revelation 19:20 as being "**the lake of fire burning with sulphur.**"

If our knowledge begins with the facts that the name "Gehenna" was the designation of a geographical location south of Jerusalem, that it had become a refuse dump in the days of our Lord, also that there will be another Gehenna when God governs the earth, we have started with a good measure of truth concerning future punishment. So with these facts before us we will look into the Biblical history of this piece of land.

From the meager, but informative, records found in Scripture we draw the conclusion that when the land of Canaan was divided by lot (Joshua 18:10), a certain portion fell to a man named Hinnom. Of this man nothing is known except that he had a son. It would appear that Hinnom died before the land was divided, so that his

portion fell to his eldest son, according to the laws of inheritance in Israel. This son's name is not known, as he is always referred to in Scripture as "the son of Hinnom," which provided the name for this plot of land, "**the valley of the son of Hinnom**" (ge **Ben Hinnom**).

Due to the fact that this area, about twenty-five generations later, became the focal point for idolatrous worship and assemblies, it must have been a very desirable piece of land with many groves and much running water. It was sites with these features that were searched out for these idol-worshipping assemblies. And we can say with certainty that this valley did become such a site. In 2 Kings 23:10 the valley of the children of Hinnom was declared to be the location of Topheth, which means "altar," and it is also identified with Molech, who was the god of the Ammonites.

Further examination of 2 Kgs. 23: 10 will show that this passage had to do with the acts of the evil King Manasseh who reigned forty-five years in Jerusalem. His reign was the exact opposite of his father, good King Hezekiah, who did that which was right in the sight of the Lord (2 Kgs. 18:3). However, in the closing years of his life, this good king allied himself with Babylon against Syria, an alliance which the prophet Isaiah forcefully condemned. As a result of this alliance Babylonian idolatry soon appeared in Israel. This was checked by Hezekiah, but he was unable to eliminate it, as Isaiah 65:2-4 clearly reveals.

This was the situation that Manasseh inherited from his father when he came to the throne of Israel. His character soon revealed itself, in that the idolatry which his father had restrained surged forth in Israel again. Under his encouragement and example, all the idolatrous abominations that were practiced in the lands surrounding this nation were brought together in Jerusalem. A reading of 2 Chronicles 33 will show this.

One of Manasseh's wicked practices was that he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom (33:6), and made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the nations, whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel (33:9).

After Manasseh's death, his son Amon ascended to the throne. His reign was an evil one, and due to his excesses, his own servants conspired against him and killed him in his own house, after a short reign of two years. After his death his son Josiah became king. He was only eight years of age. During his thirty-one-year reign a major incident took place that is most pertinent to our study of *gehenna*.

Josiah was indeed a good king. The inspired testimony concerning his reign is: "**He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and in the twelfth year of his reign he began to purge Jerusalem and Judah from the high places and the groves, and the carved images and the molten images**" (2 Chron. 34:3,4). He gave

special attention to that area which had become the focal point of idolatry in Israel, **"He defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech"** (2 Kgs. 23:10). This defilement was done by covering all places within the valley with the bones *of* dead men, or the ashes *of* their burned bones, or the meal that came *from* grinding them. (See 2 Kgs. 23:10,14,16,20; 2 Chron. 34:5,7.)

Josiah knew quite well the strong convictions *of* the people *of* Israel that if they in any manner came into contact with any *of* the remains *of* a dead person they would be ceremonially unclean *for* seven days, and could perform no act *of* worship during this time (Numbers 19:11,16). So after Josiah defiled this valley, no Israelite ever again went there to worship. His act made this piece *of* land useless *for* farming or grazing, and in the course *of* time it became the trash dump *of* Jerusalem, a place where all refuse and waste was deposited. In fact the "refuse gate" *of* Jerusalem was later located so as to give easy access to this valley.

At this point in our study there is one fact we need to know and keep clearly in mind. The people who lived in Biblical times never consigned anything to the rubbish heap until it was seen to be utterly useless and worthless. This explains why the trash dumps *of* ancient cities are *of* questionable value to the archeologist. Nothing was deposited there until it was useless. Potsherds (pieces *of* broken pottery) are the principal finds in these rubbish heaps, giving mute testimony to the worthlessness *of* things dumped there.

Thus it is that when we find that the Lord Jesus *took* the name *of* a rubbish heap south *of* Jerusalem and used this to warn evil men about a place *of* future punishment, we learn also that when He governs the earth there will be a place *for* the purpose *of* disposing and consuming *of* worthless and useless men. These are His words: **"I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him which after He hath killed hath power to cast into Gehenna, yea, I say unto you, Fear Him"** (Luke 12:5).

There can be no doubt about it. God will have a place under His government *for* the total destruction *of* worthless men. It has already been named "Gehenna." The purpose of this place can be learned from the purpose *of* the Gehenna that existed in the days when our Lord was upon the earth. That Gehenna was a depository, a consumer, a destructor *of* worthless things. The future Gehenna will be a destructor *of* worthless persons.

*Of* course there are many who will vigorously insist that no man is worthless in the sight *of* God. However, God has spoken concerning this, and it would be well if a man should search out what He has declared before shouting out his views on the value *of* a man. We will find that He said that we are *of* more value than many sparrows, which is not very much.

At this point the word *belial*, found 16 times in the Old Testament, demands our attention. This word in most versions is treated as a proper noun, but this is a mistake. It is an adjective, meaning worthless, useless, lawless; and it is usually associated with the words *man*, *son*, *children*, or *daughter*. Hence "men of belial" means worthless persons. In 2 Sam. 23 :6,7, David by inspiration declared: "**The sons of belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away. . . and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place**" (on the spot).

To be "utterly burned" can mean nothing else but total destruction, and "in the same place" means the place established or designated. We know what its name will be, and a hint as to its location can be found in Isa. 66:24.

In Revelation 19:20 we read of two personages, one called "**the beast**" and the other called "**the false prophet**," whom I believe to be Satanic messengers, and leaders in the revolt against God's government, whose doom is to be "**cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.**" One thousand years later, Satan who has been held prisoner for a thousand years is loosed from his imprisonment, and he immediately manifests his deceiving character once again, but the revolt he causes does not last long (Rev. 20:9). All who join his protest are devoured by fire that comes down from God out of heaven," and Satan is cast into the lake of fire and sulphur, the same one where the beast and false prophet were cast a thousand years before, the place prepared for the Devil and his angels.

In Revelation 20:15 we learn that those who are found guilty at the judgment of the great white throne will be cast into the lake of fire, along with "the death" (**ho thanatos**) and "the state of death" (**ho hades**). This will be "the second death" for all persons upon whom this punishment falls.

It is written of the sons of Eli that they were the sons of belial (1 Sam. 2:12). They knew not the Lord. thus they have been declared in God's word to be "belial men," that is, "worthless men." This record will witness against them in the day when they are raised from the dead to stand on trial at the great white throne. There they will be by divine decree sentenced to die the second time with the added penalty that they shall be cast into gehenna. From this death they will never come forth to be living men again, for the future gehenna will be a fire that consumes. It will be God's incinerator. Three personages will be cast into it alive. No one will ever come out of it alive.

There is much more to be said, but this must wait for further studies.

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