

The Gate of Hell

The History of the Valley Gate in Nehemiah 3:13

Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the Valley Gate. They rebuilt it and set its doors, its bolts and its bars and repaired a thousand cubits of the wall, as far as the Dung Gate (Nehemiah 3:13).



Today's Jaffa Gate
Is at the site of the old
Valley Gate.

Our series on the Spiritual Secrets of Nehemiah 3 regarding the rebuilding Jerusalem shows that God pre-planned the layout of Jerusalem, with a very orderly progress in the meaning of the gates, towers, and walls. Each has a very specific and important meaning for us. This study of The Valley Gate *fits* a term Al Gore once used, *an inconvenient truth*.

It fits because Valley Gate led to the Valley of Hinnom, also known as Gehenna. Jesus used the name of this place to refer to Hell. Therefore, the name of this message: "The Gate of Hell." This is serious, may be shocking, and is from the true history of the Valley Gate.

The Origin of the English Word, "Hell"

The old Anglo Saxon pagans used a word, *hel* for the netherworld, place of the dead as far back as 725 ad. The English word "Hell" refers to *four* different biblical places. *Gehenna/Lake of Fire*, mentioned 11 times by Jesus as Gehenna, 7 times in the Book of Revelation as Lake of Fire, and then there is *Sheol and Hades* in the Old Testament and *Hades* in the New Testament and the Hell for angels called *Tartarus*.

Gehenna/Lake of fire

When Jesus referred to God's punishment, He used a word that describes a very nasty place. Gehenna, which this gate leads to- a valley with a dark history. Translated "Hell" in English was originally used for a valley of child sacrifice.

Jesus wasn't being original

The ancient Rabbis were the first to use the name for the afterlife- but unlike Jesus saw it as a kind of purgatory, you would go there for a year at a time and get reviewed and you'd have the Sabbath day off from punishment.

The first English translations of scripture used "Hell" in the New Testament, for the original *ge'enna*, a Greek version of the Aramaic, *Gehenna*. The term *Gehenna* is used 11 times by Jesus to refer to the place of final judgment and punishment. In the Old Testament, *Gehenna* was a real geographical place in Israel.



The Hinnom Valley late 19th Century

Hinnom's Boys

Originally, the Old Testament calls it *Ge bene Hinnom* in Hebrew, i.e., "the valley of the sons of Hinnom" (Joshua 15:8, 18:16). *Ge* means "valley," *bene* means "sons" and *Hinnom* is the father's name. The ancient brothers whose father's name was Hinnom owned a deep, narrow glen to the south of Jerusalem.

Human Sacrifice

(2 Chronicles 28:3, 33:6) in the place of Hinnom's

sons. The valley where *Gehenna* lay was called *Topeth*. *Topeth* most likely means “drums” for the loud drums used to drown out the children’s screams. Jeremiah 31:31-34 tells of the curse of this place,

And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded not, neither came it into My mind. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be called Topheth, nor the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter; for they shall bury in Topheth, for lack of room. And the carcasses of this people shall be food for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; and none shall frighten them away. Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah, and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land shall be desolate

In a vague sounding rendition *Topeth* could also point to “burning.” But this valley with a name that represents horror and once belonged to the sons of a man named Hinnom, was nicknamed *Gehenna* as an abbreviation. Jews saw this place as representing suffering, shame, and corruption.

Josiah’s Disgust

King Josiah ...read the Bible, he became disgusted with the sin of his nation, especially the child sacrifices that took place in *Gehenna*...chose to defile the valley...sewage, animal and criminal corpses, and garbage because of the evil that Israelites had committed there (2Kings 23:10)... outside the walls (Like Revelation)...littered with corpses (Jeremiah 7:32), maggots feasting, and the bodies simmering in slow fire (Isaiah 66:24) and known to be the place where, ***“the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.”***

The Dump

Shortly after Josiah’s reign, God judged Israel by a *Babylonian invasion*, sending the nation into a 70-year exile into Babylon and Persia. After Israel resettled Jerusalem, the valley again became the dumping place for all the garbage of the city. *Once again, the dead bodies of animals and criminals, sewage, and all kinds of filth were cast out and consumed by fire kept always burning.* But with Jesus’ words, it would become better known to the Bible reading world as the image for the place of everlasting destruction.

The One Person Who Knows What He's Talking About

It was He who used the term *Gehenna*, 11 times. When Jesus mentioned *Gehenna*, **He changed its meaning into the name of the place for eternal punishment.** Only He has the authority to do so since He knows what lies on the other side. He has been there so what He calls it, that it must be.

- [Matthew 5:22](#): "...whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into Gehenna."
- [Matthew 5:29](#): "...it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna."
- [Matthew 5:30](#): "...better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into Gehenna."
- [Matthew 10:28](#): "...rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul [Greek: ψυχή] and body in Gehenna."
- [Matthew 18:9](#): "It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than with two eyes to be thrown into the Gehenna...."
- [Matthew 23:15](#): "Woe to you, scribes and **Pharisees**, hypocrites, because you... make one **proselyte**...twice as much a child of Gehenna as yourselves."
- [Matthew 23:33](#), to the Pharisees: "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you to escape the sentence of Gehenna?"
- [Mark 9:43](#): "It is better for you to enter life crippled, than having your two hands, to go into Gehenna into the unquenchable fire."
- [Mark 9:45](#): "It is better for you to enter life lame, than having your two feet, to be cast into Gehenna."
- [Mark 9:47](#): "It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into Gehenna."
- [Luke 12:5](#): "...fear the One who, after He has killed has authority to cast into Gehenna; yes, I tell you, fear Him."

Another book to use the word *Gehenna* in the New Testament is James:[\[36\]](#)

- [James 3:6](#): "And the tongue is a fire,...and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by Gehenna."

The same place is called the Lake of Fire, mentioned 7 times in the book of Revelation (14:10, 19:20, 20:9, 10, 14, 15, 21:8).

Since this document is for believers in Jesus, we all take Him seriously as the risen One. He created...experienced I... His words

Body Resurrection

The issue of body resurrection was a live debate in Jesus' time (Matthew 22:23, Luke 12:18, Mark 20:27) and after (Acts 23:6-10) that divided the 2 most powerful religious parties, the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees did believe in a coming resurrection of bodies and the Sadducees did not.

Gehenna/Hell is for the Body

(see 1 Corinthians 15). The New Testament is crystal clear that there will be a body resurrection and speaks of the punishment of Hell in terms of the body – Matthew 10:28 ***“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in Hell.”*** One can look at Hell in the New Testament through the lens of the final body resurrection. All the dead shall be raised, both just and unjust. Jesus prophesied this in John 5:28-29, ***“Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”*** The resurrected human body will be immortal, but able to suffer. It means that unlike physical suffering in pre-resurrection bodies, which ends at death, the suffering of Hell will go on and on in a physical body existence.

Hell is a place of eternal fire, degrees of punishment, grief, pain, darkness, and the undying worm.

Fire

Hell is more than anything else referred to as a place of fire in 27 biblical references. Ten of those 27 (in italics) mention the fire of Hell as unquenchable or eternal. (Matthew 3:10, *12*, 5:22, 7:19, 13:40, 13:42, 13:50, *18:8, 9, 25:41*, Mark *9:43, 44, 46, 48*, Luke 3:9, 17, 16:28, 17:29, John 15:6, James 3:6, *Jude 7*, Revelation *14:11, 19:20, 20:10, 14, 15, 21:8*).

Sadness and Pain

Hell as *Gehenna* is a place of inconsolable sadness and excruciating pain noted by ***“weeping and gnashing of teeth”*** (Matthew 8:12, 13:42, 13:50, 22:14, 24:51, 25:30, Luke 13:28). Jesus wants people to know that Hell will be very, very sad and it will hurt very, very much.

Dark

Though it is fiery it is also dark, described as ***“outer darkness”*** (Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 25:30). This most likely refers to the fact that it is away from God and His glorious power (2 Thessalonians 1:9), Who will Himself replace the light of the sun and moon after the resurrection (Revelation 21:23).

The Undying Worm

Mark 9:48 speaks of, ***“where the worm does not die and fire is not quenched”*** (quoting Isaiah 66:24). Mark 9:44 and 46 precede 9:48 with the same phrase. Though many older manuscripts don't include those previous two verses, Mark 9, verse 48 appears in every ancient New Testament manuscript.

Is This Real or a Metaphor?

It's absolutely reasonable at the outset to think that maybe all this talk of fire, gnashing teeth, darkness, and worms are simply metaphors. If so, they are tools of language that use pictures to describe the horrible reality of the coming judgment in terms that we can understand and fear.

The Book of Revelation is **full of symbols**. Why couldn't the lake of fire be just one more? Jesus used, *Gehenna*... place of torment for children who were sacrificed... burning city garbage dump metaphor... name of Gehenna... afterlife torment, **so why not take it to a second-degree metaphor?**

But right when we are ready to accept the idea of a metaphor that we don't have to take seriously as a physical and literal reality except that it will be miserable, something that wants us to do honest biblical interpretation says, **"Wait a second, let's make sure!"**

Bible metaphors JtB... Pharisees, "You brood of vipers," self-righteously ...plundered widows, divorced wives, and loved money (Matthew 3:7, 23:14). impression...OK, but made people homeless, broke, and left wives on the street. **When the viper slithers** in the grass, no one suspects anything is wrong, but when it bites, it's real bad.

Metaphors... pictures with no apologies or need to explain them. Isaiah's picture of mountains and trees (Isaiah 55:12). joy,

So now, what about fire, teeth, worms, and darkness? the world won't be ... **there is an invisible spiritual world.** The latter is one that we normally can't physically see, taste, touch, hear, or feel unless we are living in one of those **moments of divine intervention**... spiritual and physical worlds intersect.

Balaam's angel and talking donkey of them (Numbers 22:21-35).

whirlwind chariots and horses of fire that physically took Elijah to heaven? (2 Kings 2:11-12)? His protégé, **Elisha** prayed so that his servant saw the many chariots of fire that covered the hill he was on (2 Kings 6:15-17). NT **shepherds at Jesus' birth** met angels (Luke 2:8-15). angel broke **Peter out of jail** (Acts 12:6-11). **Philip** was in one place and re-appeared in another the way a *Star Trek* transporter would function (Acts 8:36-40). **the book of Revelation** the spiritual/physical world **intersections** give Bible interpreters fits. Good men disagree as to which accounts are literal and which are purely symbolic.

Bible believers agree on this: **the world we know will end and a new one will come in which God Himself is tangible in real time, unlike today.** the spiritual world will take over for the physical world... permanent physical temporary. existed before God created the physical. It will continue after he destroys the physical and creates a physical world that isn't separated from the spiritual. **It means that the spiritual world is more real than the physical world.**

viper singing mountains and clapping trees are obvious comparison intervention, Balaam, Elijah, Elisha, shepherds, Philip, Peter, and many others **don't come across** as metaphors. It's not *obvious* they are making clear comparisons between something that **cannot be with something that can.** That is a key metaphor element. Another is that metaphors compare two things **people know about.** The earlier examples used snakes and hypocrites, then trees, mountains and joy.

The afterlife is an unknown. We are not comparing two known things. The references to Gehenna/lake of fire and the after-resurrection judgment don't portray normal life, as we know it. So there could be a temptation to make them into metaphors, but neither those texts nor their contexts really push for a comparison. If metaphors, these are quick-flash images of horror that only make one feel something about the doom of the coming future. **Could it instead be these texts that refer to a future that hasn't yet arrived describe a time where "intervention," meaning the spiritual and**

physical are tangibly together will be a full time reality and they describe what will be?

both as a metaphor and physical reality can help us...3x Jesus claims to be, ***“the light of the world”*** (John 8:12, 9:5, 11:9). life through Him makes sense... clear. I can avoid negative things **other metaphors** describe as walking in the dark, not able to work, and stumbling around.

But the phrase of Jesus as the light of the world has a VERY literal application for after the end of time. Revelation 21:23 speaks of the coming world as not needing created physical light sources, ***“And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”*** It certainly is safe to say that Jesus is the lamb, but also the light. If the future world will see daytime because of His shining, then surely He is literally ***“the light of the world.”***

after the final judgment and the end of time as we know it, wouldn't we be **completely reasonable to take a literal view of this Hell?** Spiritual and physical will be one. Bodies will be physical, resurrected and immortal. Though they can suffer, they can't die. If fire and darkness exist in a physical world, why not in a spiritual/physical world- intersecting with even more reality and intensity? Metaphor or not, Jesus and the Book of Revelation describe a place where **no** one should want to end up. But with careful biblical interpretation it is in no way a jump to accept the literal view as a spiritual/physical reality.

Degrees of Punishment

deeds do matter. They certainly will determine how harsh the punishment one suffers will be. Yes, evildoers throughout history will be punished to the degree of the evil they had done. Those who did not match their evil in the area of deeds done, though evil thoughts and words may have been in abundance will receive lighter sentences, ***“And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done”*** (Revelation 20:12).

Jesus' very words also indicate that there are degrees of punishment in Hell. When speaking to the hypocrites who used religion to oppress others, rob them, and make themselves look holy he said, ***“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation”*** (Matthew 23:14).

Religious people, especially those who claim to be Bible teachers yet use and abuse weaker people, especially widows for personal gain are in a lot more trouble than the average person condemned to Hell.

He also extended the harsher judgment toward cities that rejected Him, (Matthew 11:20-24) 20 ***“Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. 21 “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the Day of Judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have***

remained until this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the Day of Judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

In this case, the degree of truth...degree of punishment. Sodom and Gomorrah, though evil, did not have the living, speaking, and loving Jesus working miracles in their midst. They didn't know as much about right and wrong, and God's willingness to forgive as the cities on the Sea of Galilee. Though they were wicked and would be judged, they will suffer a much lighter sentence than the cities that saw, heard, and were affected by Jesus' healing and compassion, yet refused to repent of their sin. Hell is punishment, but as Jesus said, "**it will be more tolerable**" punishment in varying degrees for some than others.

Yes, the degrees of harsher punishment are set for people in three areas: the deeds done in life, religious hypocrisy with taking advantage of the weak, and rejecting God's message; the more message, the more punishment.