

Gehenna in the New Testament (all 12 references)

by Ed Stevens

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Several preterist teachers are now openly affirming *Annihilationism*, and repudiating the idea of Eternal Conscious Punishment. They claim that the word *hell* does not belong in the vocabulary of a Christian because they believe that the English word *hell* has no Hebrew or Greek equivalent referring to a place of eternal conscious punishment.

However, they are overlooking the Hebrew word *gehinnom* and the Greek word *gehenna*. Both of these words carry the meaning of a place of punishment in both the seen and unseen realms. In this article we will examine the twelve New Testament verses that use the Greek word *gehenna*. Note that every instance of the English word *hell* in these twelve verses is translated from the Greek word *gehenna*.

Annihilationists believe that *gehenna* refers only to the physical valley of Hinnom, which was the smoldering trash heap outside Jerusalem, where garbage and the dead bodies of wicked folks were thrown to be eaten by maggots, vultures, and wild animals, or consumed by the ever-burning fires. However, these twelve verses, all quoted from the NAS95, demonstrate that *gehenna* refers primarily (if not exclusively) to the place in the unseen spiritual realm where the souls of the unredeemed will be consciously punished forever. First we will quote the verse, and then comment on it:

1. Matt 5:22 *“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.”*

What does “calling someone a fool” have to do with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70? This is moral and ethical evil, which Jesus said was deserving of punishment in the *fiery gehenna*. How could burning the offenders’ bodies in the trash heap outside Jerusalem have any affect on their guilty *souls*, especially if those souls were annihilated? This implies that, during the afterlife in the unseen realm, there will be conscious punishment in a place called *gehenna*. It would not make sense otherwise.

2. Matt 5:29 *“If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you*

*to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be **thrown into hell.**”*

3. Matt 5:30 *“If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to **go into hell.**”*

4. Matt 18:9 *“If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be **cast into the fiery hell.**”*

5. Mark 9:43 *“If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, **to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire...**”*

6. Mark 9:45 *“If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, **to be cast into hell...**”*

7. Mark 9:47 *“If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, **to be cast into hell...**”*

Since the six verses listed above (Matt. 5:29-30; 18:9; and Mk. 9:43, 45, 47) are parallel statements, we will deal with all of them together as one group here in this paragraph. Notice the contrast between “entering life” and being “cast into the *fiery gehenna*.” The phrases “enter life” and “enter the kingdom of God” refer to the final destiny of the righteous after the judgment. This same concept is conveyed in the judgment scene of Matthew 25:34 and 46, where the righteous dead *inherit the Kingdom* and *enter into eternal life*. That judgment scene did not take place on earth, but in the unseen spiritual realm. So this group of six verses describes what happens to the conscious souls of both the righteous and wicked after the judgment—the righteous enter into eternal life, but the wicked are cast into the *fiery gehenna*. Jesus, in Matthew 25:41 and 46, described *gehenna* as being the same place of “*eternal punishment*” and “*eternal fire*” where the devil and his angels were also cast for eternal conscious punishment (see the similar “lake of fire” idea in Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14; 21:8). That cannot be a physical place on earth—like the trash heap outside Jerusalem—since spirit creatures such as the devil and his angels cannot be

affected by the physical fires there. Instead, *gehenna* is referring to a place of eternal conscious punishment in the unseen realm, where the conscious souls of the wicked were sent *after the judgment*. The wicked were conscious at the judgment, and were *still conscious* when they were cast into the same place where the devil and his angels were also cast.

8. Matt 10:28 “Do not fear those who **kill the body** but are **unable to kill the soul**; but rather fear Him who is able to **destroy both soul and body in hell.**”

9. Luke 12:5 “But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, **after He has killed**, has authority to **cast into hell**; yes, I tell you, fear Him!”

Notice that *gehenna* is a place which destroys (brings to ruin) **both soul and body**. The physical Valley of Hinnom did not affect the soul; therefore, *gehenna* must be a spiritual place in the unseen realm in which *souls* are brought to everlasting ruin in the afterlife. If Jesus was only threatening the burning of dead bodies in the trash heap after individuals’ souls had been annihilated, that would be no threat to the wicked. The soul has nothing to fear in annihilation. But Jesus said that bringing the soul to ruin in *gehenna* was definitely something to fear and avoid at all costs.

10. Matt 23:15 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”

The evil, hypocritical lifestyle of the Pharisees is what destined them to *gehenna*. The burning of their bodies in the Valley of Hinnom during and after the Jewish War of AD 66-70 is not all that is threatened here. As we saw in Matthew 10:28 above, there is an additional threat to their souls, which the Valley of Hinnom’s physical fires could not accomplish. *Gehenna* depicts what their souls would suffer in the afterlife, *not merely* what would happen to their bodies in the Valley of Hinnom after the destruction of Jerusalem. Also noteworthy is the fact that there were hundreds off thousands of Jews who were killed outside of Jerusalem and Palestine whose bodies were *not* thrown into the physical Valley of Hinnom. Yet their forever conscious souls were still cast into the *fiery gehenna* for eternal conscious punishment in the unseen realm.

11. Matt 23:33 “You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape **the sentence of hell?**”

The word “sentence here is the Greek *kriseos*, which derives from *krisis* and *krino* (“judgment”).

Gehenna is the place to which the wicked were assigned *after the judgment* of AD 70. The souls of the wicked were conscious at the judgment, and were cast into the same place of “eternal punishment” as the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). This is not a physical place on earth in the seen realm. *Gehenna* is a spiritual place in the unseen realm to where the souls or spirits of evil men and angels are sent for eternal conscious punishment.

12. James 3:6 *And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.*

How could the physical Valley of Hinnom on the outskirts of Jerusalem “set on fire” the lives of those living hundreds of miles away in the Diaspora, especially when this was written to living people (not dead ones) before AD 70 at a time when the unbelieving and rebellious Jews had not yet been cast into *gehenna*? James was writing to living Jews, namely, “to *the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad*” (outside Palestine). The physical fires of the trash heap outside Jerusalem at AD 70 had nothing to do with lighting the evil spiritual fires that were already in their souls before AD 70.

Therefore, their evil speech was set on fire (or influenced) by the *gehenna* which is in the unseen realm. That is what Jesus had in mind when He called the hypocritical Pharisees “sons of *gehenna*” (Matt 23:15). Their evil and unregenerate hearts were born from below (*gehenna*), not from above (heaven) (see the similar idea in John 8:23 and James 3:15-17). They were sons of their father the devil (John 8:44; Matt 3:7; 12:34; 1John 3:8-12).

Conclusion

Jesus made it very clear that no one will ever be annihilated. Regarding Judas Iscariot, Jesus said that it would have been better for him if he had never been born, than to experience what he was going to suffer in his afterlife (Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21). If Judas was going to be annihilated, that would be the same in net effect as having never been born. So his annihilation would not have been “worse” than never being born. It would be the same in net effect. Yet Jesus clearly indicates here that the afterlife of Judas would be worse than annihilation or never being born. That necessarily implies that he would not be annihilated, nor given another chance to repent and enter into heaven. Instead, it implies that his afterlife would be eternal conscious punishment (ECP).

Furthermore, Jesus said that the person who blasphemes the Holy Spirit would never obtain forgiveness, “*but is guilty of an eternal sin*” (Matt 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Lk 12:10). How could that sin-guilt be eternally held against the blasphemer if he was annihilated? And how could such a blasphemer ever go to heaven if he never received forgiveness? That proves that both Annihilationism and Universalism cannot be true.

We have seen that Jesus taught more about *gehenna* (hell) than any other teacher/writer in the New Testament. Since He was the creator of *hades* and *gehenna*, He absolutely knew what those places were like, and never misrepresented their true character in His teaching. In His interaction with the Sadducees in Luke 20:27-38, Jesus stated that “ALL are alive to God” after physical death, including the unredeemed. They were not in some kind of unconscious soul-sleep until the resurrection, nor permanently snuffed out of existence—“all are alive to God.” This very effectively refuted the Sadducees, who were Annihilationists. In light of this, how can Annihilationists today be so bold as to suggest that Jesus taught Annihilationism? And since Jesus did not teach Annihilationism, but instead refuted it, how can anyone today dare to teach it?

If you would like to know more about what the Bible teaches in regard to the afterlife of the unredeemed, I have a one-page listing of some very helpful books (“ECP Reading List”). If you would like to have it, simply request it by email and I will send it as an attachment. My email address is preterist1@preterist.org

A Response to Ed Stevens' Treatment of the Twelve *Gehenna* Passages

Samuel G. Dawson

Introduction

I read with interest my friend Ed Stevens' article explaining the twelve New Testament *Gehenna* passages in the *Fulfilled!* Summer 2016 issue. He began by saying that those of us who don't believe in the (Roman Catholic--SGD) concept of hell as eternal conscious torment of the lost, have overlooked the words *Gehinnom* in the OT and *Gehenna* in the NT that are commonly translated *hell*. Rather than overlooking these words, my study has led me inescapably to the conclusion that both these terms were proper names of a well-known valley just south of Jerusalem, and they shouldn't have been translated at all, any more than Jerusalem or Bethlehem were. Actually, *they weren't translated as hell!* The Catholic scholars in the Anglican Church (that part of the Roman Catholic church stolen by Henry VIII when the pope wouldn't let him marry Anne Boleyn) who translated the KJV merely substituted the theologically-loaded word *hell* for *Gehenna*. This word was loaded with concepts entirely foreign to the word *Gehenna*.

Those scholars had a bad habit of that sort of thing. They translated *presbuteros* (elders) as *priests*, *pascha* (Passover) as *Easter* (once), and *baptizo* (dip, plunge, immerse) as *baptism* (to slip their sprinkling and pouring for baptism into the Bible), and substituted the "divine pronouns" (thee, thou, and thine) for us rather than translating consistently. In each case, they substituted theologically-loaded words for the originals.

Ed's analysis of the twelve instances of *Gehenna* in the NT displays the influence of such substitutions of *hell* (to him meaning eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm) to those influenced by Roman Catholicism) for *Gehenna*, which never included such concepts. Had it not been for such substitutions, none of us would have concluded that Jesus taught anything about eternal conscious torment in a spiritual state.

To be fair, Catholics aren't the only ones to pull such stunts. In Ac. 8.20, where Peter said to Simon the sorcerer, "thy silver perish with thee," *Today's English Version* has him telling Simon to "go to hell." The word *hell* is not there in your Bible; the translators just substituted it, and that's just the point. *Hell's* not in any of them. It was just substituted for *Gehenna* in Bibles with Roman Catholic influence.

Contrary to this, it is said that "these twelve verses demonstrated that gehenna refers primarily (if not exclusively) to the place in the unseen spiritual realm where the souls of the unredeemed will be consciously punished forever." It's very easy to see if this claim is true. We'll just read the twelve passages and see if we see eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm in even a single one of them.

Matt. 5:22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. (NAS)

Look carefully: do you see anything in that entire verse about eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm? There's not a hint of it, is there? Folks just read that into the word *hell*, just as Roman Catholic scholars intended! Jesus didn't say what *Gehenna* was. He didn't mention the spiritual realm or that anyone would be punished consciously forever. Jesus just said such were in danger of the *Gehenna* of fire, which is what the Jews and I understood: a fiery judgment coming on Jerusalem, whose rubble would end up in *Gehenna*. But it's not Roman Catholic doctrine, which most just unconsciously plug into what Jesus said.

The next six passages noticed are the “eye, hand, and foot” passages, which we can deal with together:

Matt. 5:29, 30, 18:9, Mark 9:43, 45, 47 And if your right eye (or hand or foot) makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body (with two eyes, hands, or feet) to be thrown into hell. (NAS)

Does anyone believe people are going to have eyes, feet, and hands in a *spiritual* realm where there is eternal conscious torment? No one that I'm aware of!

Again, looking carefully at each of these passages, Jesus didn't say *hell* – he said *Gehenna*, the nearby location the Jews were thoroughly familiar with. Impenitent Jews were going to end up with their whole bodies cast into *Gehenna* at the destruction of Jerusalem (the time element will be given in another of these passages, momentarily). Note carefully that Jesus didn't mention souls punished consciously forever in a single one of them, did he? Yet Ed says “these twelve verses demonstrated that gehenna refers primarily (if not exclusively) to the place in the unseen spiritual realm where the souls of the unredeemed will be consciously punished forever.

In Mk. 9.43, “*unquenchable fire*” doesn't mean eternal fire, but fire that you can't quench or put out. It's used of national judgment in Ezek. 20.47-48, on Israel in Amos 5.5-6, on Jerusalem in Isa. 66.15-16, and of Babylon's burning of Jerusalem in Jer. 21:10-14. Of course, none of those fires were eternal; none of them are still burning!

Matt. 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (NAS)

While we use this passage many times to prove that the soul of man cannot be destroyed, Jesus plainly affirms that God can (and imminently would, as we're about to see) destroy both soul and body in *Gehenna*. Note that he didn't say, “I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed the body, will punish your soul consciously eternally,” as many read it. The concepts of conscious, soul, eternal, and torment are not in this passage, either. I'm afraid they are just thinking of those things as they read these verses, which say no such thing!

Readers of *Fulfilled!* can sympathize with such people, for as we studied I Corinthians 15 to see a first century fulfillment, just reading the chapter still flooded our minds with all the futurist sermons and illustrations we had heard on the resurrection. Our minds performed on that subject as theirs (and perhaps yours) does now on Jesus' use of *Gehenna*, so you can be a good guy and

do this! Please take a few moments and read Josh. 11.11, 10.35, 39, where the Jews conquering Canaan destroyed the souls of its inhabitants with the sword. This was national judgment, not eternal conscious torment in a spiritual realm as many imagine in Mt. 10.28. When Ed asserts, “The physical valley of Hinnom did not affect the soul,” surely he’s forgotten these occurrences of this very thing in Joshua, and therefore his conclusion that “therefore, gehenna must be a spiritual place in the unseen realm in which souls are brought to everlasting ruin in the afterlife” doesn’t follow at all. The Jews listening to Jesus in Mt. 10.28 would have understood such language. They knew from their Old Testament background that God could, and many times had, destroyed both bodies and souls in various national judgments. In Lk. 12.4-5, Luke’s account of Mt. 10.28, Jesus spoke of the fiery judgment coming on the Jews when he said in v49, “I came to cast fire upon the earth (Gr., *ge*, land); and what do I desire, if it is already kindled?”

Matt. 23:15. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. (NAS)

In this eleventh *Gehenna* passage, Jesus doesn’t mention eternal conscious torment in the spiritual realm - not in one syllable. With the help of our Roman Catholic substitution for *Gehenna*, many just read those things into these verses. It’s quite a testimony to the power of the human mind to do such a thing, isn’t it?

This passage gives us the time element of the punishment of *Gehenna*. In Mt. 23.36, Jesus said, “Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.” Not only was Jesus’ generation of Jews going to experience the judgment of *Gehenna*, but in the next chapter, Jesus said it would happen *in* their generation: “Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished.” (Mt. 24.34)

I’m sure we’re agreed that Jesus is speaking of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, but that’s precisely when the judgment of *Gehenna* took place, isn’t it?

We now come to the last *Gehenna* passage, the only one not spoken by Jesus.

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell. (NAS)

Like Jesus, James uses no words like eternal, conscious, torment, or spiritual realm. He merely used *Gehenna*, which his first century Jewish audience was familiar with. He’s addressing the misuse of the tongue just like Jesus did in the first *Gehenna* passage in inspired literature, Mt. 5.22. He says their tongue can set on fire the course of their lives, and their lives are going to be set on fire by *Gehenna*.

Conclusion

We’ve now read the twelve *Gehenna* passages closely. Again, it was asserted: “... these twelve verses demonstrated that gehenna refers primarily (if not exclusively) to the place in the unseen

spiritual realm where the souls of the unredeemed will be consciously punished forever.” Did you see any evidence of that? Its author’s a mighty good man, but there’s not one syllable of eternal conscious torment in a spiritual state in a single one of them. Those concepts are included in the Roman Catholic concept of hell, but not at all in *Gehenna*.

False theories of eternal punishment of the wicked have done unfathomable damage in the religious realm. Untold millions of people have obeyed God purely out of fear of a false concept of hell. Other untold millions have turned their backs on God because of a false sense of hell, as described by Roman Catholic sources, and their followers in most denominations.

To sum up, Jesus threatened the Jews in the environs of Jerusalem (and no one else: not people in Ephesus, Rome, or people of our time) that they were headed for the valley named *Gehenna*. There would be unquenchable fire (Mk. 9.43) *upon* his generation (Mt. 23.36) *in* his generation (Mt. 24.34), when God threatened to destroy the souls of those of Jesus’ generation after killing their bodies (Lk. 12.5, Mt. 10.28).

None of these *hell* passages say that anyone of our day can go to hell. None of them associate hell with Satan. None of them say that Satan’s domain is hell. Though they speak of men being killed and destroyed in *Gehenna*, none of them speak of men being tormented there.

Ed is correct when he affirms that we shouldn’t overlook the words *Gehinnom* and *Gehenna*, but neither should we blatantly read into them concepts entirely foreign to them. I appreciate very much his challenging our thinking on this subject.

Thanks for reading, and considering,

Samuel G. Dawson

P. S. The fate of the wicked in general and after AD 70 in particular is beyond the scope of this article. For longer essays on this subject, please see Chapters 14-16, “Jesus’ Teaching on Hell,” “Lazarus and the Rich Man,” and “Immortality and the Afterlife” in *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things* by Samuel G. Dawson, available at Amazon.com.

Editor, Fulfilled Magazine

1. I appreciated Sam Dawson's article on Gehenna in the fall edition of *Fulfilled* magazine. I agree that the Bible does not teach Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT) of the lost. Sam attributes the notion of ECT to the Catholic Church, but it actually originates with the Greeks and Romans.

2. The Greeks and Romans believed in the immortality of the soul, which lived forever in an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (reincarnation). They taught that there were four places in Hades inhabited by the dead: "Limbo," "Purgatory," Elysium," and "Tartarus." Most men would pass through Limbo Purgatory and Elysium to be born again to earthly life. However, the wicked were tormented eternally in Tartarus (Virgil, *Aeneid* VI, 540-627).

3. This basic belief structure, including Limbo, Purgatory and Hell (Tartarus), found its way into the Catholic Church, where it has existed ever since. The Reformers jettisoned most of these errors as having no colorable basis in scripture, but clung to the notion of Hell and ETC, which continue to exist in much of the Protestant Church.

4. Although I agree with Sam that God does not torture the lost eternally in Hell, I did not agree with his analysis that Gehenna refers *exclusively* or even necessarily to the literal valley of Hinnom outside of Jerusalem. Instead, I believe a candid study will show that New Testament references to Gehenna are impressed with a *symbolic* dimension pointing to the place where the lost suffer final punishment and extinction or annihilation.

5. Prior to the general Hadean resurrection, the dead went prior to the general, Hadean resurrection: Hades Paradise (also called "Abraham's bosom," or the "third heaven," cf. Luke 16:22; 23:43; Acts 2:27; II Cor. 12:2-4) and Hades Tartarus (Luke 16:23; II Pet. 2:4). At the Hadean resurrection in AD 70, the souls in Hades went to either of two places: Heaven or the lake of fire (also called the "second death," Rev. 20:14). Everyone who does not inherit eternal life suffers extinction in the lake of fire or second death (Rev. 20:15).

6. Since all who fail to obtain eternal life suffer the second death, first century Jews who rejected Jesus and the gospel would also have suffered this fate. Therefore, when Jesus asks the Pharisees "how shall you escape the damnation of hell?" (Gk. "judgment of Gehenna" – Matt. 23:33 – a passage Sam does not discuss), it seems rather obvious that he is not talking about the physical valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem. The Pharisees could very easily have escaped death or burial in the valley of Hinnom by moving to Rome or some other ancient city, or even by simply dying prior to the Jewish war with Rome (AD 66-70) when the bodies of those who perished from famine in the siege were cast into that abyss.

7. When Jesus asked "how shall you escape damnation of Gehenna," it is clear he alludes instead to the inevitable destruction in the lake of fire that awaits all who fail to attain salvation in Christ. The fact that Jesus calls this destruction *inescapable* proves that this is so, and that the literal valley of Hinnom is not in view.

8. To the above must be added Matt. 10:28. There, Jesus warns the righteous that they can suffer the fate of the wicked if they deny him amidst their persecutions: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Gehenna) (cf. Mark 8:34-38)."

9. The dichotomy here is between death of the physical body and death of the soul. Men may kill the body, but only God can kill the soul. The usage here must therefore be distinguished from Joshua 10:39, cited by Sam, where “destroying the souls” of the Canaanites signifies taking away *physical life*, but says nothing about the soul or spirit of the dead. If physical death is the “first death,” then death of the soul is the “second death.” Physical death can occur in a physical location, but the soul being a spiritual thing cannot suffer extinction in a physical place. Therefore, when Jesus warns that denying him may result in the destruction of the soul in Gehenna, he cannot have in view the physical valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem. Rather, he has in view the lake of fire, which is the second death (Rev. 20:14, 15).

10. Hence, in both these cases (Matt. 10:28 and Matt. 23:33), Gehenna is seen to be a *symbol* for the lake of fire and not a reference to the literal valley beyond Jerusalem’s walls.

11. The above conclusion is strengthened by Matt. 25:31-46, where the dead of all nations—including first century Jews—stand before the judgment seat of Christ and the lost are sent into “everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (v. 41). However, in Rev. 19:20, 20:10, we learn that the devil and his minions are cast into the *lake of fire*. Hence, the *everlasting fire* of Matt. 25:41 is the same as the *lake of fire* of Rev. 19:20, 20:10, 14, 15. But as we have already established that the *lake of fire* is another name for *Gehenna*, it follows that the *everlasting fire* of Matt. 25:41 also refers to *Gehenna* (if A = B and B = C, then A = C).

12. Since “all nations” were liable to the lake of fire and since “all nations” includes first century Jews, it was to the lake of fire Jesus referred when he warned his countrymen of the danger of Gehenna, not physical death in the valley of Hinnom.

13. This is confirmed by the Greek. The phrase “everlasting fire” in Matt. 25:41 is $\pi\upsilon\rho\ \tau\omicron\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\iota\omicron\nu$. The identical phrase occurs in Matt. 18:8 where Jesus states that it is better to enter life halt or maimed than with two hands or two feet to be cast into “everlasting fire” ($\pi\upsilon\rho\ \tau\omicron\ \alpha\iota\omega\nu\iota\omicron\nu$). However, the parallel passage in Mark alters the wording slightly and adds the word *Gehenna*:

14. And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two hands to go into hell ($\gamma\epsilon\epsilon\nu\nu\alpha\nu$), into the fire that never shall be quenched ($\pi\upsilon\rho\ \tau\omicron\ \alpha\sigma\beta\epsilon\sigma\tau\omicron\nu$). Mark. 9:43

15. If the *unquenchable fire of Gehenna* of Mark 9:43 = *the everlasting fire* of Matt. 18:8 and Matt. 25:41; and if the *everlasting fire* of Matt. 25:41 = *the lake of fire* of Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15; then the *unquenchable fire of Gehenna* in Mark 9:45 = *the lake of fire* of Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14, 15 (if A = B and C, and if C = D, then A = D).

16. Thus, in each case, we find that the physical valley of Hinnom is nowhere in view and that Gehenna *invariably* refers to the lake of fire, or second death.

17. Conclusion: Gehenna was a literal valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem, but had symbolic import and meaning which pointed to the place where the souls of the lost suffered final extinction in the lake of fire, the second death. It is artificial to read New Testament warnings about destruction in Gehenna overly literal, as referring to the Jewish war with Rome and having one’s body cast into the physical valley, just as it is artificial to read Eternal Conscious Torment into the imagery of the second death. The better view is the middle way set out above.

Response to Kurt Simmons on Gehenna

Samuel G. Dawson

I appreciate Brian Martin's publishing Kurt Simmons' review of my material on Gehenna, and Kurt's joining in the analysis of the Gehenna passages. This is a worthy subject on which to focus readers' attention.

Unfortunately, Kurt begins by inaccurately claiming that I attribute eternal conscious torment to the Roman Catholic Church. In my writing on Hell, I've attributed the concept to the Egyptians, as do numerous scholars, and shown that Grecian Jews and Gentile philosophers incorporated it during the intertestamental period. What I've attributed to the Roman Catholic Church is its unwarranted substitution of the word *hell* in the place of *Gehenna*. This isn't a serious oversight on Kurt's part, but the record here in *Fulfilled!* Magazine should be kept accurate.

In paragraph 4 of his response to me, Kurt thinks I'm taking the Gehenna passages too literally. He asserts (Assertion #1) that he will prove that New Testament references to Gehenna are symbolic, and are identical to the lake of fire in Revelation 20. In my response to Ed Stevens (*Fulfilled!* Fall 2016), I covered the 12 New Testament Gehenna passages, and showed that Gehenna was a proper noun, didn't need translating any more than the nouns Jerusalem or Bethlehem did, and that *hell* is not a translation of *Gehenna*, but a substitution of a unrelated but theologically loaded word. Kurt agrees to that point, but then asserts symbolism is also contained in Jesus' teaching on Gehenna.

In paragraph 5, Kurt asserts (Assertion #2) that Gehenna is the lake of fire. I suggest that the reader consider that Gehenna is as literal a place as Bethlehem, and the lake of fire, referred to only in Revelation 19-20, is a *sign* of the fiery judgment that was about to take place on the Jews of Jesus' generation in Gehenna, a well known valley on the outskirts of Jerusalem.

Also in paragraph 5 Kurt purely asserts (Assertion #3) that "everyone who does not inherit eternal life suffers extinction in the lake of fire." In all of the Gehenna passages taken together, the only people on the planet threatened with Gehenna were Judean Jews in Jesus' generation. No one else; not folks in Asia Minor, nor Americans in our time, were ever threatened with Gehenna. I feel that Kurt, surely unknowingly, is simply following Roman Catholicism's lead in reading everyone in all locations and ages into the Gehenna passages.

In paragraph 6, Kurt asserts (Assertion #4) that "it seems rather obvious (in Matt 23:33) that he is not talking about the physical valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem." Obvious? Is it just as obvious that Bethlehem or Jerusalem in the gospels are not those literal locations? There's just as much Bible for asserting that. Until the Roman Catholic Church came along, Gehenna meant Gehenna, yet to Kurt, it's obvious that it doesn't.

Also in paragraph 6, Kurt makes a powerful-sounding argument that turns out to be a very serious blunder. Based on his assertion that Gehenna was not just the proper name of a literal location, he writes: "The Pharisees could very easily have escaped death or burial in the valley of Hinnom by moving to Rome or some other ancient city, or even by simply dying prior to the Jewish war with Rome" Kurt's a brilliant man, but **2000 years before he came up with that argument, our Lord made it clear that this was the very thing he wanted the Jews to do—trust him and get out of Judea!** He warned them

to flee Jerusalem to the mountains! Our Lord told them to escape, and the faithful Jews did! Escape from Gehenna was possible! Thus, in Matthew 23:33-36, Jesus warned the Jews that their very generation (and no other) was headed for the judgment in Gehenna, and in 24:34, He said it would occur in His generation (not in any other). He warned them (not us) in 24:15-16 to watch for the sign of His coming, and flee to the mountains. In Luke 21:26, Luke's account of the same discourse, Jesus warned: "But watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may *prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass*" (Luke 21:26). Kurt is right when he states that if Gehenna was the literal valley outside Jerusalem, the Jews could very easily have escaped death or burial in the valley of Hinnom. You might think Jesus was making my argument, but it's not true. I'm making His, and using Gehenna just like He was.

Kurt asserts in paragraph 7 (Assertion #5) that "When Jesus asked '*how shall you escape damnation of Gehenna,*' it is clear He alludes instead to the inevitable destruction in the lake of fire." How does Kurt know this? Unfortunately, he doesn't tell us, he just asserts it. What do you, the reader, think of it? The term "lake of fire" occurs five times in the entire Bible, all in Revelation 19-20, written nearly forty years *after* Jesus spoke on Gehenna. Is it clear to you that Jesus was alluding to something no one would hear of until 40 years later? People of Jesus' time hadn't heard of the lake of fire, and no one on earth did for another forty years. It's as clear as a bell that Gehenna refers to the lake of fire to someone whose mind is permeated with Roman Catholic teaching instead of just the words of the Savior. You can be a good guy and have a mind like that. Mine was for many years, and still is on other topics. I'm just not aware of them, yet. We all have traditional "baggage" that can unknowingly color our understanding of Scripture.

In paragraphs 8-9, Kurt discusses my comments on Matthew 10:28 regarding the destruction of body and soul in Gehenna, asserting (Assertion #7) that "only God can kill the soul." The Bible nowhere says this. I used Joshua 10:39 to show that Joshua conquered Debir, "*and utterly destroyed all the souls therein.*" Kurt then asserted (Assertion #8) that Jesus' use of soul must be distinguished from Joshua 10:39, "which says nothing about the soul *or spirit.*" Well, of course, it does speak about their souls (you can see the word in the passage for yourself), and nothing about the spirit, which is what Kurt inserts to build his argument on. Again, he's a mighty fine fellow, but what makes him think he can add the word "spirit" to the passage? He adds it to refer to the spiritual part of man, to imply that Jesus is speaking of man's conscious spirit, which he then argues cannot suffer extinction in a physical place, like Gehenna. Yet again, "spirit" is not the word Jesus used, and the text clearly states that Joshua killed the *souls* of the Canaanites "with his sword." I don't think Kurt believes that only God can kill the soul *with a sword*, do you? The conquering of Debir wasn't spiritual destruction in a physical place, and neither was the destruction of body and soul in Gehenna, our Roman Catholic friends notwithstanding.

In paragraph 10, Kurt asserts (Assertion #9) that "Gehenna is seen to be a *symbol* (emphasis Kurt's—SGD) for the lake of fire." Kurt has this exactly backward; the lake of fire is symbolic of Gehenna. The lake of fire is the symbol of the real thing, Gehenna. This is established by the following: A) the term "lake of fire" only occurs in Revelation, a book of signs and symbols (which isn't the case in any of the New Testament books in which Gehenna occurs); B) no one on earth could have possibly thought of Gehenna as a sign of the lake of fire, since that term would not be used until forty years after the last time the word Gehenna was used by our Lord. Kurt couldn't have made such an assertion either unless he had help that I think he got from you-know-where. I do think the lake of fire in Revelation *signifies* the unquenchable fiery judgment coming *on* Jesus' generation *in* his generation, but it's a sign of the real thing, Gehenna, not *vice versa*.

In paragraphs 11-15, Kurt compares Revelation's lake of fire, the "everlasting fire" of Matthew 25:46, and the unquenchable fire of Gehenna of Mark 9:43. I agree that these passages all refer to the same fiery judgment, but I'm afraid that Kurt takes "all nations" in Matthew 25 to be all nations of the globe, and everlasting to be unending, neither of which are the intended meanings. The "nations" of Matthew 25 are the nations of Palestine, and you can read some of their names in Joel 3 (Tyre, Sidon, Philistia, Edom, etc.), from which Matthew 25 springs (just as Matthew 24 springs from Joel 2, with Joel linking the time element in both chapters together in 3:1). "Everlasting" fire in Matthew 25:46 is "age-lasting," throughout the Mosaic age for disobedient Jews. In the case of the faithful, they go away into "age-lasting" life in Christ, which, since His age has no end, their life in Him will have no end. Thus Matthew 24-25 was an unstoppable fiery judgment on Old Covenant Israel in Jesus' generation, the same judgment described on the same people at the same time, for the same duration as depicted in Revelation. There's not a scintilla of evidence that the lake of fire lasted past the first century AD.

In paragraph 16, Kurt concludes: "Thus, in each case (Matt 25, Mk. 9, and Rev 19-20—SGD), we find that the physical valley of Hinnom is *nowhere* in view and that Gehenna *invariably* refers to the lake of fire" Again, Kurt believes Gehenna refers *invariably* to something no one had heard of when Jesus used the word!

In paragraph 17, Kurt says, "It is artificial to read New Testament warnings about destruction in Gehenna overly literal . . ." when he thinks that Gehenna is nowhere in view and invariably refers to a lake of fire enduring long past the timeframe of Revelation. Doesn't it sound like Kurt thinks Gehenna never refers to the literal location? It's not that I'm taking it over literally, it sounds as though he *never* takes it literally!

I think Kurt serves us all well as he draws the issues between us clearly, and the reader has a clear choice to contemplate. Was Gehenna the site of an *escapable onetime unstoppable* fiery judgment coming only on *Judeans* in the *first century*, as I believe Jesus taught? Or is it *invariably* an *inescapable* lake of fire threatened *all men of all ages* which *nowhere* refers to *Gehenna* in the environs of Jerusalem?

If you'll grant Kurt's 9 assertions, overlook his blunder that Gehenna wasn't inescapable, buy into his contention that Jesus alludes to the lake of fire when the term wouldn't occur for another forty years, permit his adding "spirit" to soul in Joshua 10:39, overlook his making Gehenna symbolic and the lake of fire literal, rather than *vice versa*, etc., you'll have no problem reaching Kurt's conclusion. If you're not willing to buy into his assertions and blunders, accept his adding the word "spirit" to Joshua 10:39, deny his contention that the judgment of Gehenna was inescapable, etc., but take Jesus' words at face value, you'll conclude with Jesus that the judgment of Gehenna was an *escapable onetime unstoppable* fiery judgment coming only on *Judeans* in the first century.

I've tried my very best to not misrepresent Kurt's position, and pray that I have succeeded, as I'm confident he is at least as interested in the truth as I am.

For those wanting to delve into this subject further, please see Chapters 14-16, "Jesus' Teaching on Hell," "Lazarus and the Rich Man," and "Immortality and the Afterlife" in *Essays on Eschatology: An Introductory Overview of the Study of Last Things* by Samuel G. Dawson, available at Amazon.com.