

An Overview of the Doctrine Concerning Everlasting Punishment

All we know of God is ultimately based solely upon the Word of God. Some may object to that statement by bringing forth the day-by-day experience we have with God through His Holy Spirit, and in a sense that is true. But without the Word of God to interpret those experiences even those would have no basis and soon Satan would have the believer twisted and dependent only upon his emotions. So the Word of God is an anchor, a guide throughout this life, a compass and a ruler by which we measure all other things.

Knowing this to be true, it becomes incumbent upon His children to teach and preach everything within His Word. God commands that we preach the entirety of His word and Paul say to not do so is to incur the blood of men upon our hands (Acts 20:26,27). Some portions of the scriptures we enjoy preaching and others we do not. Tonight's message is one of those that may be categorized as something we must preach but not necessarily enjoy. Tonight we consider the Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment.

As we consider the future state of man, it might be good to review some of the current beliefs:

Humanism teaches man has no eternal spiritual nature, that once man dies he ceases to exist. Their battle-cry is that we came from the earth as a happen-stance of evolution and will return from whence we came.

Reincarnation teaches the spiritual nature of man leaves a body after death and takes another life-form, an animal or insect or a human (hence to be “re-incarnate”, to become flesh again). What we come back as depends upon how we live this (and previous) lives.

Not far removed or a part of the previous is the **Eastern Religions** which teach we one day will become at one with the impersonal force behind the entire universe. This is based upon the teaching that there is no personal god but rather good and evil “forces” which bind the universe together. There is within the good a little evil and within evil there is a little good, the meaning behind the popular *yin-yang* pin. “*May the force be with you.*”



Annihilists teach no future punishment but rather that unworthy souls are destroyed, hence “annihilated”. This is taught by the JW's, the argument being a God of love would not eternally punish people.

Universalists teach that while some may be punished for what would appear to mortal man to be a long time, they will eventually reach the end of that punishment and be received into heaven. A portion of this thinking may be found in the Catholic doctrine of purgatory.

We believe the scriptures teach an eternal place of bliss for those redeemed through the blood of Christ (heaven) and an eternal place of torment for those rejecting this salvation (hell).

SHEOL

To properly understand the teachings of the scriptures I believe it important to see the development of this doctrine through the centuries. The Jewish emphasis within the OT was that of a physical earthly kingdom with the Messiah ruling. **Little is written in the OT in relation to the future life**, what we think of today as teachings concerning heaven and hell. While the future life is affirmed in many OT places, details are not given concerning heavenly bliss and even less concerning the final state of the wicked (Isa 66:22-24; Dan 12:1,2).

Considering the words in the OT which surround this doctrine, we see there are four different Heb words translated at various times *grave* (KJV):

שַׁחַת (shahath) is translated *pit, corruption, grave*

בֵּיַעַר (bor) is translated as *a hill, a grave, a heap*. About two / thirds of the times this word is used it refers to a hole in the ground (e.g. *a cistern, well or dungeon*).

קֶבֶר (qeber) is translated as *a grave, a sepulcher*; a form of this word typically translated *bury, burial*.

שְׁאוֹל (sheol) is the word we would like to center on. Three passages use this word to speak of a great depth, sometimes opposite of heaven (Ps 139:8; Job 11:8; Amos 9:2; cp Deut 32:22; Isa 57:9; note since the Hebrews had no deep mines or oil wells to compare for depth, this does not rule out the possibility that these references speak of the

grave only). Sheol is used in the OT 65x, is translated by the KJV 32x *grave*; 30x *hell*; 3x *pit*. The ASV and RSV transliterate the word “*sheol*”. The NIV uses *grave* with a footnote “*sheol*”. **It is the only word used in the OT that is translated hell.**

Briefly concerning sheol: **sheol was a place for both the good** (re: Jacob, *grave*, Gen 37:34,35) **and the wicked** (re: Korah’s rebellion, *pit*, Num 16:30,33; re: the wicked, *hell*, Ps 9:17). In fact **all men are said to go to sheol indiscriminately** (*grave*, Ps 89:48). **Little is said as to the state of those in sheol, whether it is a place of bliss or torment** although we glean from the Lord’s statement that He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that the OT saints did go to heaven. The implication in that statement is that they were alive with Him (Ex 3:6) and is so argued by Jesus when confronted by the Sadducees (Mt 22:31,32). Sheol is said to be a place where the Lord is (*hell*, Ps 139:7,8). “Whatever be the derivation of this word, there can be no doubt of the scriptural application of it to **the state and abode of the dead ... the invisible world, to which the souls of men depart in death.**”

Prior to continuing it is important to point out **the error of annihilation**. In arguing against the doctrine of hell some immediately point to the fact *sheol* is often translated *grave*, therefore at death the ungodly cease to exist while the godly inherit eternal life. Baxter however considers grave an unfortunate translation: “(1) In all 65 occurrences, sheol is not once used in the plural. That is because ... sheol does not mean merely the grave. There are not two or three or more sheols, but the one only. Instead of meaning the grave, the very word *sheol* is used to distinguish it from the grave. (2) Nowhere in all those 65 references is there any suggestion that the *body* goes to sheol. The body goes to the grave (*qeber*), but the soul to sheol. (3) Nor is sheol ever spoken of as being in the ground, or on the surface of the earth, as the grave (*qeber*) is. (4) Nor in all those 65 texts do we find that *man* ever puts anyone into sheol, as he puts bodies into graves. (5) Sheol is never spoken of as digged by man, or owned by man, or even touched by man; whereas men *do* dig and own and touch graves. (6) When the Jews of the Old Testament times meant only the grave they used a different word, *qeber*, which occurs 64 times in the Old Testament. It occurs in the plural 29 times. Dead bodies are said to be laid there, 37 times. It is said to be in the earth or ground, 32 times; also to be owned by a man, 44 times; and to have been digged or touched by men, 11 times. **So let us grasp this once for all: *qeber* is the grave; *sheol* is the other side of it.**” [J. Sidlow Baxter, *The Other Side of Death*]

HADES

As we turn to the NT we find **three words translated hell**. One word is used only one time in the NT. It is found in 2 Pet 2:4, τάρταρώσας (tartarōsas):

*“For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to **hell** and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment”* (2 Pet 2:4 NKJV)

Friberg’s Lexicon (Dictionary of Greek Words) defines it as such:

“Regarded by the Greeks as a place of torment and punishment below Hades; probably so regarded in Jewish apocalyptic literature also.”

Since this word is only used once in the NT, we will just make mention and continue. **The two most common words used is hades and gehenna**. First we will consider hades.

ᾍδης (hadēs) is used 11x in the NT. Once it is translated *grave* (“O *grave* where is thy victory?” — 1 Cor 15:55); the rest of the times it is translated *hell* (many of the newer versions transliterate the word *hades*). **The word comes from two words: a (negating the word) + eidō (to see) = unseen**. The Greek Dictionaries defines the word as follows:

“Hades (literally unseen place); (1) the place of the dead underworld (Acts 2:27); (2) usually in the NT as the temporary underworld prison where the souls of the ungodly await the judgment (Luke 16:23)” (Friberg Lexicon)

“Hades: a place or abode of the dead, including both the righteous and the unrighteous; in most contexts hades is equivalent to the Hebrew term Sheol, ‘the world of the dead.’” (Louw-Nida Lexicon)

Some of it’s usages are as follows:

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16)

the “gates of hades” will not prevail against the church (Mt 16:18)

used in quoting the OT prophecy in relation to Christ: “*Thou wilt not leave His soul in hades*” (Acts 2:27,31)

Jesus had the keys of death and hades (Rev 1:18)

Death and hades followed the rider on the pale horse (Rev 6:8)

Death and hades gave up the dead at the Great White Throne Judgement (Rev 20:13,14)

This word therefore is a **close equivalent to the OT *sheol* to refer to the unseen place of the dead**; in fact this is the word used in the LXX to translate the Heb word *sheol*. While there is nothing within the word that would indicate bliss or torment, it is used more of the lost than the saved. It also carries the connotation of a temporary place and is **never used to refer to the final destination of the lost**.

HELL

Our English word comes from a Teutonic root meaning “to hide, to cover” and **originally had the significance of the unseen world of the dead generally**. Today the word is used almost exclusively to refer to the final place of punishment of the lost or those who die unrepentant. Therefore while our English word *hell* accurately brought forth the concept taught by *sheol* and *hades* originally, it is no longer used in that sense.

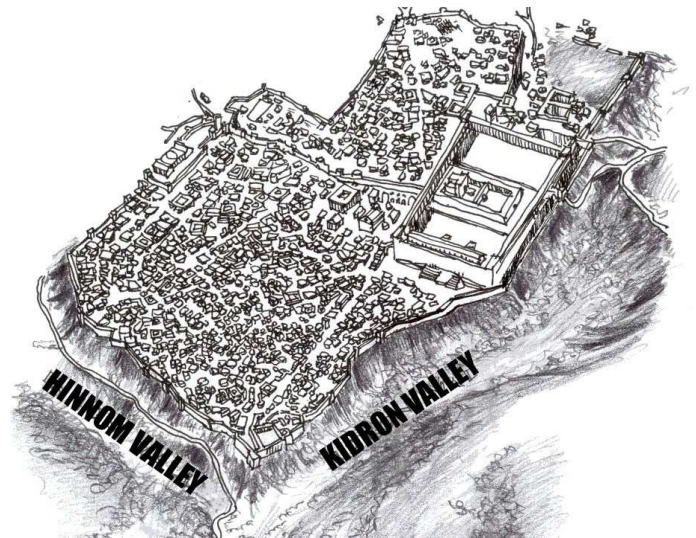
GEHENNA

The most important word to be considered in this doctrine is the Greek word γέεννα (ge-enna, usually written gehenna). **The word itself is a transliteration of Aramaic form of Heb *ge-hinnom*, meaning valley of Hinnom**. The word is used 12x in NT and is always translated “hell”. It is used once in the book of James (“the tongue is set on fire of *hell*” — James 3:6); every other time it is used is in the gospels and *always by Christ Himself*. **This is important: most of our understanding of the doctrine of everlasting punishment comes from Jesus Christ Himself**. *It was He who was eternal, He who would eventually taste the sufferings of the wrath of God for His people that spoke so much to warn us of the place to come! Who better for the warning to come from?*

Valley of Hinnom



To understand the meaning behind this word requires we return to the OT. The first occurrence is in Josh 15:8 (about 1400 BC) which describes the border of the valley of the son of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem in the territory of Judah. It is mentioned again in Josh 18:16 (*valley of the son of Hinnom*). Some take *Hinnom* to be a reference to a foreign god but the most natural explanation is to ascribe it to the family of Hinnom.



Centuries pass as Israel goes through the period of the judges, transforms into a monarchy, then divides into a northern and southern kingdom. During the reigns of Ahaz (ca. 730-715 BC) and Manasseh (ca. 687-642 BC) **the valley became associated with sacrifices being offered to pagan gods** (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6; 2 Chron 28:3; 33:6). This offering included burning children alive in the altar fires, Manasseh himself offering his children in the fires of Molech. Molech was the national god of the Ammonites whose worship was prohibited by the Lord.

This is corrected during the reforms of good king Josiah (ca. 640-609 BC) when he defiled an altar of Topheth “*in the valley of the children of Hinnom*” (2 Kings 23:10). But because of the practice of the Jews Jeremiah prophetically says the valley would no more be called *the valley of the son of Hinnom* but rather the valley of slaughter (Jer 7:29-33; 19:3-6; 32:35). **The Valley of Hinnom therefore became associated with false gods and idolatry (Satanism), death, suffering, and spiritual ignorance. Prophetically it came to be associated with judgement.**

The Lord fulfills His promise and destroys Jerusalem because of the apostasy of the Jews (ca. 586 BC). The Jews are taken to Babylon for seventy years then return into their land under the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah. In the inter-biblical period (ca. 2nd century BC) the Ethiopian book of Enoch makes it plain that the valley of Hinnom becomes equated with the last judgment.



Children being offered to Molech the pagan god of the Ammonites

“And I looked and turned to another part of the earth and saw there a deep valley with burning fire. And they brought the kings and the mighty and put them into this deep valley.” (Book of Enoch 54:1,2)

“And through the valleys of that land proceed streams of fire, where those angels are punished who had led astray those who dwell upon the earth.” (Book of Enoch 67:7)

“Then said I: ‘For what object is this blessed land, which is entirely filled with trees, and this accursed valley between?’

Then Uriel, one of the holy angels who was with me, answered me and spake: ‘This accursed valley is for those who are accursed for ever: here will all those be gathered together who utter unseemly words with their lips against God, and speak hard things of His Glory; here will they be gathered together, and here is the place of their punishment.’” (Book of Enoch 27:1,2)

NOTE: I quote these as HISTORY and not as SCRIPTURE! But in my studies I found several historians of the period between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament (approximately 400 BC ~ time of Christ) who all agree these references (and other places throughout the Book of Enoch) all speak of Gehenna.

Some believe during the days of Christ the valley was Jerusalem’s ‘city dump’. Unclaimed dead bodies and criminals were cast there to decay or be eaten by wild dogs. There were continual fires burning to consume the rubbish. Worms perpetually dwelt there as trash decomposed. While this is commonly repeated by many today, this is based upon a single Rabbi’s commentary on Psalms 27:13 (Rabbi David Kimhi, ca. 1200 AD) and there are those who state there is neither archeological nor other literary evidence (in neither literary sources from between the testaments nor later rabbinic sources) to support this claim. (Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 5 vols. [Munich: Beck, 1922-56], 4:2:1030; see also Lloyd R. Bailey, ‘Gehenna: The Topography of Hell,’ *Biblical Archeologist* 49 [1986]: 189). While I agree this ‘picture of hell’ from Jerusalem’s ‘city dump’ is interesting and provides a fitting illustration, I must also be honest and disclose there are those who deny the accuracy of that belief.

But whether there was such a trash heap or not, it is an accepted fact that **by the time of Christ the valley of Hinnom (Aramaic ‘ge-hinnom’, Greek ‘gehenna’) had come to refer to the fires hell. Therefore when Christ spoke He could turn to this cursed valley and say “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell (gehenna) than yourselves.... Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell (gehenna)?” (Matt 23:15, 33).**

SUMMATION

DESCRIPTIONS OF HELL

the second death – Rev 21:8

the wrath of God — Rom 2:15

associated with devil and demons — Matt 25:41



Children burned alive in the Valley of Hinnom in worship to Molech

a place of damnation, condemnation, a judicial separation — Matt 23:33

a place of outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth — Matt 8:12

a place of eternal punishment — Matt 25:46

a place of eternal torment — Rev 14:10,11

a place of eternal destruction from (proceeding from, not separation from) the face of the Lord — 2 Thes 1:9

a place of unquenchable fire — Mk 9:43-49 (note “the fire that never shall be quenched” is used 5x in six verses)

THE JUDGEMENT OF HELL IS FOREVER

those in hell face a sin which will *never* be forgiven, therefore there will *never* be a cessation of punishment — Mk 3:28,29

existence in hell is as eternal as existence in heaven — Matt 25:46 (note the same Greek word is used for both *everlasting* punishment and *everlasting* life — if hell is temporary, so will be our heavenly existence)

The primary purpose of hell is not for the good of the offender (reformation) nor for the welfare of society (deterrent) but for the vindication of the law (vindicatory). *As a holy God, He must judge consistently with His character.* Some teach that all will eventually be saved, that those in hell will be purged from their sins through punishment and will ultimately be with the Lord (this is called “universalism”). This is an error as to the fundamental purpose of hell: **“The reason for punishment lies not in benevolence, but in the holiness of God.** ... If the Universalist’s position were true, we should expect to find some manifestations of love and pity and sympathy in the infliction of the dreadful punishments of the future. We look in vain for this however. We read of God’s anger, of His judgements, of His fury, of His taking vengeance; but we get no hint, in any passage which describes the sufferings of the next world, that they are designed to work the redemption and recovery of the soul. If the punishments of the wicked were chastisements, we should expect to see some bright outlook in the Bible-picture of the place of doom. A gleam of light, one might suppose, might make its way from the celestial city to this dark abode. The sufferers would catch some sweet refrain of heavenly music which would be a promise and prophecy of a far-off but coming glory. But there is a finality about the Scripture statements as to the condition of the lost, which is simply terrible.” [F. L. Patton; quoted in Strong’s *Theology*]

WHO IS GOING TO HELL?

those who God promised would die if they disobeyed, therefore all the children of Adam — Gen 2:16,17; Rom 5:12

those who are now described as “sons of gehenna” — Matt 23:15

those who choose darkness rather than light — Jn 3:16-19, 36

In other words **the entirety of mankind is under the damnation of hell.** “The wicked have the seeds of hell in their own hearts,” [Calvin] the sense being the sinner’s character is hell in the making. Sin is selfish, isolating, unsocial; therefore hell is the reaping of what has been sown. As the swine is not happy in a beauty parlor but in a mudhole, so are the unsaved not happy at a prayer meeting but in a bar. Therefore **hell is the sinner’s own place — he’d rather be there than heaven! Although the unsaved does not desire eternal torments, hell is the choice of the unsaved — now they cry “God, leave me alone, stay out of my life.” — one day He will !!**

It would be improper to stop here however. **While all men are born separated from the Lord, there will be a new humanity one day consisting of those whom the Lord saves** (Eph 1:3-14). Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus saying at one time they were “the children of wrath” but have been saved through the grace and blood of Jesus Christ (Eph 2:1-10).

GOD TAKES NO PLEASURE IN THE LOST GOING TO HELL

judgement is referred to as “God’s *strange* work” — Isa 28:21

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked — Ez 33:11

Hell is not inconsistent with God’s justice but is rather a revelation of that justice. A God that would not punish rebellion is not a holy consistent God.

GOD STRONGLY WARNS THE LOST AGAINST GOING TO HELL

Jesus says if required, cast aside that which is most valuable in this life to escape of hell — Matt 5:29,30

fear God who can cast the lost into hell — Matt 10:28

what profit is there if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul? — Mk 8:36

GOD GIVES US A PICTURE OF THE FINAL JUDGEMENT —

*“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. **And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.**” (Rev 20:10-15)*

TO THE UNSAVED:

What therefore is your relationship with Christ? Do you know without doubt that if you died tonight you would be with the Lord forever in the eternal beauty of heaven? Has your sins been washed in the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who died, shed His blood and rose victoriously from the tomb? If not and you die in that state, I promise you on the authority of God’s Word that you will one day be cast into everlasting darkness. There will be no card playing, no joking with your buddies but only wailing and torments and such pain that you will forever gnash and gnaw your teeth. You will scream and cry for mercy and forgiveness but there will be none to hear. You will remember all the promptings of the Holy Spirit and the nudges of God’s people for you to repent but they will only be further torments of the opportunities provided by the goodness of God that you shunned. The worse part is there will be no end; after a million years you will have just begun. I plead with you to heed the warnings while there is yet time. Today if you will hear His voice harden not your heart, for it is appointed unto man but once to die and then the judgement. **YOU WILL ANSWER TO THE LORD!** — and without the blood of Christ, there will be no mercy. Turn from your sins today. Submit to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to Jesus for forgiveness and He promises to accept you. **Please do not delay — there is nothing more important than your eternal soul!**

TO THE SAVED:

It is understandable why the unsaved do not want to hear the truth of hell — *even the believer finds it unfathomable and repulsive*. But whether it is desirable to preach or not, God’s Word speaks plainly concerning this and the believer submits to the authority of Christ, not his emotions. Jonathan Edwards: “This doctrine is indeed awful and dreadful. It is dreadful to think of it, but yet tis what God the eternal God who made us and who has us soul and body in His hands has abundantly declared to us, so that so sure as God is true there will absolutely be no end to the misery of hell.... Some talk of it as an unreasonable thing to fright persons to heaven, but I think it is a reasonable thing to endeavor to fright persons away from hell. They stand upon its brink, and are just ready to fall into it, and are senseless of their danger. Is it not a reasonable thing to fright a person out of a house of fire?” [Gerstner, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell*] W. G. T. Shedd agrees: “Neither the Christian ministry, nor the Christian church, is responsible for the doctrine of Eternal Perdition. It is given in charge to the ministry, and to the church, by the Lord Christ Himself, in His last commission, as a truth to be preached to every creature.” [Shedd, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment*] Have our hearts hardened to this truth? Do we see our unsaved loved ones destined for hell? Have we lost the burden?