

## 2. The Wheat and the Darnel

### Foundations & Keys

In Matthew 13, we have 7 parables of the kingdom that Jesus taught on the same day. These parables were the first 'secret' ones that he revealed. It is very significant that Matthew lists these seven parables, which, taken together as a whole, reveal some of the basic truths of the secrets of the kingdom. As is commonly known, the number seven, in scriptural numerology, stands for spiritual completion or fullness. So, here in Matthew, we have a complete package in itself of the kingdom secrets revealed through these seven parables.

We have already considered the first one, *The Sower*, and now we are going to consider the second one, which is commonly called *The Wheat and the Weeds* (or Tares). These two parables lay the foundation for the others that follow; so, like the first, we shall be considering this second one in quite some detail. This parable is only recorded in Matthew's account, in Matthew 13:24-30, with Jesus' interpretation given in verses 36-43.

'He then tells them another parable, saying, "**The kingdom of the heavens is likened to a man sowing good seed in his field. Yet while the men are sleeping, his enemy came and sowed darnel among the wheat, and went away.**" Now when the wheat sprouted and produced its fruit, then the darnel also appeared. Now the servants of the master came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Then where did the darnel come from?' He said to them, 'A man, an enemy, did this.'

The servants said, 'Do you want us to go and pull out the darnel?' 'No,' he answered, 'otherwise, as you are pulling up the darnel, you may also be uprooting the wheat with it at the same time. **Let both grow together until the harvest**, and in the time of the harvest I shall say to the harvesters, 'First gather the darnel and bind them into bundles to burn them, yet gather the wheat together into my granary.'"

(Matthew 13:24-30 FT)

One of the keys to understanding the real meaning of this parable is the mention of **darnel**. Now most versions render the Greek word *zizanion* here as *weeds* or *tares*. *Zizanion* is a species of darnel called 'bearded darnel' (see Vines Expository Dictionary & Strong's Concordance). This is a poisonous kind of rye grass that looks just like wheat until the ear appears. This is the key to the parable – darnel looks like wheat for a time until the harvest, when the fruit should appear in the ear; but only the wheat will produce fruit, as the darnel is a poisonous weed that is only fit for burning up.

In fact, some botanists would say that this darnel is basically degenerated wheat, that is, wheat that doesn't produce the grain. Darnel is widely known to have poisonous properties that are believed by some to be caused by a fungus. When ingested by humans and herbivores, darnel causes severe symptoms similar to drunkenness, and can even cause death. Darnel is seen as a farmer's enemy, along with thorns and thistles, as they can hinder the growth of the crop, and the crafty practice of deliberately sowing darnel seed in a wheat field has been known from ancient times.

All of this is a figurative description of those who are false believers, as those who are also in gross error. They appear as though they will bear fruit, but in reality, they only produce poison, a fungus; that which causes others to become drunk in sin and error, and they are only fit for the fiery judgment of God.

Now before we go any further with this, let us see how Jesus interpreted this parable to His disciples.

'Then leaving the crowds, He entered into the house. His disciples come to Him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the darnel of the field." He answered them, saying, "He who is sowing the good seed is the Son of Man. Now the field is the world. **Now the good seed are the sons of the kingdom. Now the darnel are the sons of the wicked one.** Now the enemy who sows them is the devil. Now the harvest is the completion of the age. Now the harvesters are angels.

So even as the darnel is being gathered and consumed in the fire, thus shall it be at the completion of this age. The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall be pulling out of His kingdom all sins and those doing lawlessness, and they shall be throwing them **into the furnace of fire.** There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous be shining like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

(Matthew 13:36-43 FT)

Now Jesus gave a number of keys here not only as to how to interpret *this* parable, but he also gave clues as to how to interpret a number of other parables as well, as we shall see later. The first two kingdom parables, the parable of the Sower and the Wheat and the Darnel, are the only ones where we are given a clear interpretation of each by Jesus himself. Yet these spiritual words can help us understand the rest of the parables as well. So we must remember what we have learned from each parable and then apply it to others where appropriate.

Now the basic facts of this parable are pretty simple really – and notice that the disciples rightly called it '*the darnel of the field.*' The primary focus is on the darnel. This parable reveals the following truths. During Christ's absence from this earth, which was to occur after his death, resurrection & ascension, the message of the spiritual kingdom of heaven would continue to be sown into the hearts of believer's as sons of the kingdom (the wheat). As we learned from the Sower parable, those who receive the Word and continue in the Faith, bearing fruit to God, these are the true sons of the kingdom who are producing good fruit - that is, the wheat (literally the good grain, which could actually refer to barley or wheat).

Yet at the same time, Satan the Adversary (the 'devil') is also doing some sowing of his own. The darnel are those who are the sons of the wicked one, those who are lawless, those who lay traps or snares for others who are searching for truth. These are impostors and deceivers, those who claim to belong to Christ, but by their fruits, they deny him. They appear as though they are wheat (that is, as genuine followers of Christ), but in reality, in their hearts, they do not know Him – they are darnel. Nevertheless, their end will be what their actions deserve.

There would come a time when Christ would send out his angels during an era of divine judgment (commonly associated with the great Day of the Lord) when the separation of wheat and darnel would take place. The rest of the NT calls this the Coming or Presence of Christ, when all will be made manifest. There will be nothing hidden from the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. All will be revealed in the Day of the Lord. This heavenly, spiritual event would occur at the conclusion or completion of the age, metaphorically called the harvest, at the time of the great Judgment. And Jesus also emphasised in the parable that, before this 'harvest' time, the darnel must not be pulled out because it could be damaging to the wheat.

### A 1<sup>st</sup> Century Fulfilment?

Throughout Church history, it has been a common interpretation to understand this parable (and others like it) as referring to the whole of the present age of the Church, from the 1<sup>st</sup> century till the yet-future Second Advent of Christ. I accepted this view for many years, but as shown on my website, in recent years I have seriously had to question this popular understanding, and I have been led to the conclusion that Jesus was initially talking about events that were to occur in his own generation (I will attempt to show this shortly). It's all about the context. Be that as it may, this doesn't mean that these things have no relevance for today. Let me explain.

Throughout the writings of the Apostles, there are plenty of warnings about those who are false (the darnel), and these impostors existed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. There were false apostles masquerading as ministers of righteousness (2 Corinthians 11:13-15; Revelation 2:2); false prophets, particularly those performing false miracles (1 John 4:1; Matthew 24:24; Revelation 16:13-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:9); false teachers (2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:1-2; 6:3-10); and false brethren, wolves in sheep's clothing (2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4-5; Acts 20:29-31; Matthew 7:15-23).

This 'apostasy' existed in the days of the apostles leading up to the crisis of 70 AD; yet these same conditions and characteristics have continued to exist throughout the centuries since then within the Christian Church (or Christendom). Hebrews 9:27 states that '*it is destined for man to die once and after that to face judgment,*' so ultimately the good wheat and the wicked darnel will be separated out before God and receive their dues.

All falsehood, which also includes all the false doctrine that has crept into the teachings and creeds of Christendom through the centuries, will receive the fiery judgment of God as manifested through Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-15). Everything that is truly false, everything that is poisonous, everything that is not in accord with righteousness and truth – all the darnel – shall be exposed and destroyed in fiery judgment, for everything and everyone will be manifested by the Light. And this ultimately occurs in the spiritual world (or dimension), and not this world.

Nevertheless, this parable, like most of Jesus' teaching, was primarily concerned with events that were near, events that were already unfolding within that generation.

One of the most important questions we should ask here is, what did Jesus mean by *'the conclusion of the age?'* Which age? And has this 'completion' occurred yet?

### The Completion of the Age

Matthew's gospel by itself contains enough information for us to know quite confidently what Jesus meant by 'the end of the age'. Yet we shall also find that the rest of the NT clarifies these things even further.

Taking Matthew's gospel first, this is the first mention in Jesus' ministry of the phrase *'the end of the age'*. The word commonly translated as 'end' here is the Greek word *sunteleia*. This word is more accurately rendered 'conclusion' or 'completion' and it signifies a completion or consummation of something. The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament by George Ricker Berry translates it as 'completion'. As Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words explains, "*The word does not denote a termination, but the heading up of events to the appointed climax*".

The Greek word *aion* denotes 'an age', that is, a period of time, an epoch or era, when certain events take place. Therefore, Jesus was referring to the conclusion or completion of the age in which they were in, thereby consummating or finishing a specific era of time whereby God had been working out his purposes with his covenant people, Israel. The whole of the NT refers to this end-of-the-age event as 'the day of the Lord', and this 'day' was said to be near, being fully expected to occur within that generation.

As we shall see later in this book, in the final parable that closes out Matthew chapter 13, the Parable of the Net, Jesus again refers to 'the conclusion of the age' (verse 49). In both of these parables in Matthew 13, the completion of the age is related to a spiritual event involving Christ as the Son of Man sending out his angels to execute judgment. As we shall now see, it is evident that this event at the completion of the age is none other than the coming of the Son of Man to establish his kingdom in power; that is, the Day of the Lord itself, also known as the Coming or Presence of Christ.

Jesus went on to tell his disciples that the coming of the Son of Man to establish his kingdom in power and to execute judgment, with his angels, would occur within their lifetime, while some of them would still be living.

"For the Son of Man is going to (*Gk. about to*) come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. **Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.**"

(Matthew 16:27-28 NIV; see also Matthew 10:23)

Then during the last week of his ministry, Jesus prophesied the utter destruction of the Temple at Jerusalem. This prompted the disciples with him to ask when this would happen. Jesus responded with a prophetic discourse commonly called the Olivet discourse. It is recorded by Matthew that the disciples quite rightly understood that the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple would occur in

relation to the Day of the Lord, the time of the Presence of Christ at his Second Appearing, at the completion of the age.

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

(Matthew 24:1-3 NIV)

After his resurrection, and just before his ascension, Jesus gave 'the great commission' to his chosen apostles. After commanding them to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom to all the nations, baptising them and teaching them, Jesus promised his apostles that he would be with them by his spirit until the completion of the age.

<sup>16</sup> Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. <sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. **And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**"

(Matthew 28:16-20 NIV)

Therefore, it is already evident from the context of these passages in the gospel of Matthew that 'the completion of the age' was to occur within the lifetime of the apostles at the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. This earthly sign within human history would conclude the old covenant age of the law while fully establishing the new order of the spiritual kingdom of the Messiah and the new covenant.

This is confirmed and clarified by the writings of Paul and the writer to the Hebrews (if the writer wasn't Paul himself).

<sup>26</sup> Otherwise Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. **But he has appeared once for all at the culmination (Gk. *sunteleia*) of the ages** to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. <sup>27</sup> Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, <sup>28</sup> so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

(Hebrews 9:26-28 NIV)

<sup>11</sup> These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom **the culmination (Gk. *telos*; lit. 'ends')** of the **ages** has come.

(1 Corinthians 10:11 NIV)

These texts reveal very clearly that the fulfilment (or culmination or completion or conclusion or consummation) of the age(s) had already arrived on that 1<sup>st</sup> century generation due to the arrival of Jesus as the promised Messiah. The prophesied events concerning Israel, Jerusalem and the Temple would be complete by 70 AD, *at the very completion of the age*, when the times of the Gentiles would be fulfilled (cf. Luke 21:20-24).

### The Harvest

Therefore, to be consistent with the clear teaching of the NT, 'the completion of the age' in the parables and teaching of Christ refers to the events accompanying the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. This is further confirmed by the typology of the 7 Feasts of the Lord, where the period of 'the harvest' is understood to mean the feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering at the end of the age. And just as the generation under Moses and Joshua took 40 years from the establishing of the covenant to the entrance into the Promised Land, so the generation of Jesus' day also took 40 years from the establishing of the new covenant to the entrance into the full inheritance of the kingdom of heaven – thereafter to shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father (cf. Daniel 12:2-4).

Returning to the details of the parable, Jesus revealed that at the end of the age, at the season of the harvest, Christ would send out His angelic messengers (that is, heavenly spirit beings) to gather the unrighteous darnel for judgment, while harvesting the righteous wheat for salvation (cf. Revelation 14:14-16). That is, there would be a judgment of separation between the righteous believers and the unrighteous unbelievers or hypocrites (that is, the apostate pretenders). One shall be taken, while the other is left (cf. Luke 17:26-37; Revelation 19:15, 21).

The parable of the Darnel, as well as the Net of Fish, are describing these judgments of separation, where the wicked are separated first to be destroyed (by being metaphorically cast into a 'furnace of fire'), while the righteous are left to enter the kingdom. Yet take note that there are actually two Harvests at this time, a Good Harvest (i.e. the Good Grain) and a Bad Harvest (i.e. the Bad Darnel). Both are reaped or harvested at the same time. One is positive while the other is negative, depending on the viewpoint. As we shall see later, the bad harvest is often referred to under the motif of the Grape Harvest and the crushing of the grapes in the winepress of God's wrath.

Yet the parable reveals that this great Harvest would not occur until both groups were fully ripened at the end of the age. Only then would Christ return to save his chosen ones (i.e. the elect Body/Bride of Israel) and to condemn the rest through a judgment of separation. And His heavenly angels were to play a large part in this process (cf. Revelation 14:14-20).

### The Fire of God's Wrath

From the ministry of John the Baptist onwards, warnings about the coming wrath and judgment of God in relation to the Messiah's coming kingdom were clearly proclaimed to the people of Israel. And this judgment was often spoken of in terms of *the unquenchable fire of God*. John had said something to the religious leaders about this fiery judgment while he was baptising the people in the Jordan River, preparing the people for the coming of the King Messiah.

"...who forewarned you to be fleeing from the coming wrath? Produce fruit worthy of repentance, then. And don't presume to be saying among yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I am saying to you that God is able out of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Yet already the axe is lying at the root of the trees. **Every tree which is not producing good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire...**"

"...He (*Christ*) will be baptizing you in the Holy Spirit **and with fire**, Whose winnowing shovel is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and will be gathering His grain into His granary, **yet the chaff He will be burning up with unquenchable fire.**"

(Matthew 3:7-12 FT; also Luke 3:7-9, 16-17)

John was warning the Jewish religious leaders, and the people in general, of the impending Day of the Lord, the day of wrath, in which Christ would judge Israel with a baptism of fire that would destroy the wicked. Only those who would produce the fruits of repentance would be saved for the kingdom, while all others would be thrown into the fire. Those of Israel were warned not to rely on their racial lineage, with Abraham being their ancestor, for this would not save them.

In fact, God has the power to fulfil his promises by raising up children to Abraham from among the stones! John probably meant by this that, through the power of God, the lifeless, arid landscape around him could metaphorically produce fruit-bearing vegetation; that life can come from death. It may also have been a veiled reference to the conversion of Gentiles. So in effect, the Jews were told *'don't rely on your flesh and religious rituals to save you!'*

John also likens Jesus to a farmer who uses a large winnowing shovel to separate the grains of wheat from the useless chaff at harvest time. This would take place on a threshing floor, a raised piece of ground made for this purpose, and the shovel would be used to throw the reaped grains into the air after they'd been threshed, after which, the heavy grains would fall back down, while the lighter elements of grass, the chaff (and any missed darnel), would blow away in the breeze. The chaff would then be gathered and burned, while the grain is stored in a barn.

Both John and Jesus taught that people are metaphorically like a fruit tree that either produces good fruit or bad fruit. When Jesus warned the people of Israel about false prophets and teachers who would arise in his name, he said that they could be recognised by their fruit as to whether they were a good tree or a bad tree. Those who do not produce the good fruit, revealing themselves to be bad trees, are cut down and destroyed in the fire.

<sup>16</sup> By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> **Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** <sup>20</sup> Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

(Matthew 7:16-20 NIV)

He also warned his own disciples that even those who bore the good fruit would be pruned by the Father to produce more fruit, while every branch that doesn't produce the right fruit, due to its separation from the vine, would be cut off and destroyed in the fire.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. **He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful...** I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. **If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.**"

(John 15:1-2, 5-6 NIV)

### The Good Fruit

Let us digress slightly to consider the theme of fruit. All of this confirmed John's words that the axe was already at the root of the trees. Those who would not produce good fruit would be cut down and thrown into the fire; that is, judgment was very near. But what is the good fruit of the good tree? It is the fruit of repentance in obedience to God's Messiah, and the fruit of the Spirit, particularly that of love, grace, peace and righteousness.

"Now **the fruit of the Spirit** is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control..."

(Galatians 5:22-23)

"...(for **the fruit of the light** is in all goodness and righteousness and truth)..."

(Ephesians 5:9)

"He who is loving his brother is remaining in the light, and there is no snare in him."

(1 John 1:10)

"...**the peaceable fruit of righteousness...**"

(Hebrews 12:11)

"...filled with **the fruit of righteousness** that is through Jesus Christ..."

(Philippians 1:11)

"But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, **full of mercy and good fruit**, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness."

(James 3:17-18)

These texts reveal that those who truly follow God and his Son will ultimately remain in these things and will continue to produce the good fruit in some measure

or another – whether a 30, 60 or 100 fold harvest. All those who do not produce this fruit of the Spirit, no matter what they may lay claim to in the flesh, will ultimately be cut down and thrown into the eternal (or age-abiding) fire of judgment.

### The Bad Fruit

The rotten fruit is the fruit of the flesh, which leads to corruption and eternal death.

“...Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing lawlessness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. **What fruit did you have at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!** But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, **the fruit you have leads to holiness, and the end result is eternal life.** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

(Romans 6:19-23 FT)

“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

“**But the fruit of the Spirit is** love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

(Galatians 5:19-25 NIV)

And consider these solemn words from Jesus himself!

“He replied, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots...””

“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. **It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.** And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. **It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell** (*Gk. Gehenna*).”

(Matthew 15:13; 18:7-9 NIV)

Jesus is saying metaphorically here that if there is a weakness of the flesh that causes you to be bearing bad fruit, causing others to stumble and leading them into sin and wickedness in disobedience to God, you should cut it off! This applies to

things you do (the hands), how you live (feet for walking) or how you view life (the eyes).

It is better to go without certain things in this life and then enter the life of the eternal kingdom, rather than to try and hold on to the things of the flesh, and then lose everything at the Judgment and be thrown into the eternal fire of destruction, the fire of Gehenna!

He who tries to save his own soul will lose it, but he who loses his soul (gives up fleshly indulgence and the self-life) in this life for the sake of righteousness and truth will ultimately save it and will enjoy the life of the kingdom. Even if we were to briefly gain the whole world through sin in this life, it is nothing compared to losing or forfeiting our souls in the kingdom (cf. Matthew 16:24-27).

Jesus said something very similar to this when he warned his disciples about the persecution that they would soon be facing.

**“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Gk. Gehenna)... “Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.””**

(Matthew 10:28, 32-33 NIV)

**“I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. **But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell (Gk. Gehenna)**. Yes, I tell you, fear him.”**

(Luke 12:4-5 NIV)

A good question to ask right now is, ‘what about the ‘eternal fire’ or ‘Gehenna?’ Is this the traditional Hell or something else? Let’s take a look at this important, yet grossly misunderstood, subject, as it relates to the ‘furnace of fire’ in the parable we’re considering (along with the parable of the Net).

## Gehenna

Firstly, it needs to be said that ‘hell’ is not a scriptural word. This may come as a surprise to many, but it’s true and anyone can check this out for him or herself.<sup>1</sup> As well as being used for the Greek ‘*hades*’ in most translations, hell has also been used for two other Greek words - *Gehenna* and *Tartarus*. (We shall consider the subject of Hades later in this book when dealing with the parable of The Rich Man and Lazarus). The one used the most is *Gehenna*, and it is used about seven times in Matthew’s gospel (5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33) about three times in Mark’s account (9:43, 45, 47), once in Luke’s gospel (12:5), and once in the letter of James (3:6).

When people say that Jesus was the one who spoke the most about hell, he was in fact referring to *Gehenna*. This word stems from the Hebrew meaning ‘*valley of Ben Hinnom (or the sons of Hinnom)*.’ The valley of Hinnom was an actual place on the south-western side of Jerusalem, and the earliest mention of it in the Bible is in

Joshua 15:8 & 18:16. It was eventually used as a place of child sacrifice in ancient Judah, where they sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire to the idols Moloch (or Molech) and Baal (cf. 2 Chronicles 28:2-3; 33:6; Jeremiah 32:35). This was an abomination to God. The valley itself, or at least a place within this valley, became known as *Topheth* meaning 'abomination' or something abhorrent (cf. 2 Kings 23:10; Isaiah 30:33, and Jeremiah 19).

The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that this valley would become a Valley of Slaughter during Jerusalem's destruction when the wrath of God would be poured out on the rebellious city. This was to have its ultimate fulfilment in the Jewish war of 67-70 AD.<sup>2</sup>

“The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes, declares the LORD. They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it. They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the LORD, **when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room.** Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds and the wild animals, and there will be no one to frighten them away. I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate.

(Jeremiah 7:30-34 NIV; see also Jeremiah 19)

These same prophecies were reiterated in the NT through Jesus and the apostles, at a time when the era for the fulfilment of these things was very near (cf. Matthew 24:28; Luke 21:20-24; Revelation 1:1, 3; 6:3-4; 14:19-20 & 19:17-21). Therefore, in one sense, these prophecies about Gehenna & fiery destruction for Israel had a 'literal' physical fulfilment in relation to earth history with the horrific & cataclysmic events that culminated in 70 AD. Yet Jesus taught something far greater about the fire of Gehenna that goes far beyond worldly events; and he did this by attaching a metaphorical, spiritual meaning to these things.

### The Fire of God

Some scholars believe that, during the Second Temple period, leading up to Jesus' day, Gehenna became Jerusalem's incinerator for dead carcasses of animals and even criminals, as well as other rubbish, which was continuously kept burning; and the parts which were not burning were consumed by maggots or worms.<sup>3</sup> (These images are being emphasised in passages such as Isaiah 66:16, 24 and Mark 9:42-49). Subsequently, the Hinnom Valley, or Gehenna, became synonymous with that which was unclean and abhorrent; that which is fit for destruction.

During this time (i.e. the second temple period), it became common within Jewish literature to view Gehenna as a metaphor for the fiery judgment and punishment of God against unfaithful Jews *and* wicked Gentiles at the final Judgment (e.g. 2 Esdras 7:36); while amongst the beliefs of the nations, fire was very much viewed as a means of purification, as well as destruction.

"Later rabbinic lore embellished Gehenna even more. Originally a place of punishment for Jews alone, it was broadened to include all sinners. From about the time of the apostle Paul, Gehenna became the rabbis' general term for the intermediate state and, after that, a purgatory.

Some of these developments show traces of foreign influence, perhaps by the Zoroastrian eschatology of Iran. There, fire is the means of testing at the last judgment... In the end, everything, including hell itself, will be purified by fire.

The Greek philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus, also taught that each world era ends with a great conflagration, returning everything to the primal fire, and from it then producing a new world. The Stoics later included some of these ideas in their concept of the end of the world by fire (called the *ekpyrosis*)."

(Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, Third Edition 2011, Cascade Books, p. 119)

Jesus himself took this idea and imagery of Gehenna to another level, teaching with spiritual authority beyond that of the previous rabbis. In many respects, Christ sanctioned the metaphorical use of Gehenna as describing the Jewish concept of final punishment. Yet this imagery of Divine fire had been revealed in the visions of Daniel, particularly in the vision of the Four Beasts, where God's throne on the Judgment Day, at the establishing of Messiah's kingdom, was portrayed as a chariot/throne of fire with a River of Fire issuing from before it, and the spiritual 'beast' is destroyed in this fire (cf. Daniel 7:9-11).

In the NT, in the book of Revelation in particular, this fire becomes the Lake of Fire, the ultimate 'Gehenna of fire' in the spiritual world. This judgment, and fire, is not of this world, but it belongs to the world of angels and God himself. According to the teaching of the NT, all those who are not the true children of God will be resurrected to face this fire – which is called 'the Second Death' (cf. Revelation 20:14-15). But what is the nature of this fire? Is it a fire that torments forever? Or is it one that destroys forever -- the ultimate capital punishment? Let us briefly consider some OT teaching on this.

It needs to be noted that even under the Law of Moses, which had very severe penalties for those who transgressed God's commands, burning in fire was not one of the penalties. There were instances where those who had been stoned to death for certain sins, primarily sexual sins, were to have their bodies burned or cremated instead of a decent burial, as a sign of shame and contempt (cf. Leviticus 20 14; 21:9), but this was not being burned alive in fire. In fact, God reveals how much he detests this practice of being burned alive when he showed his contempt for the rituals of the Ammonites, whereby they would sacrifice their sons and daughters in the fire to their idol Moloch (also known as Molech or Milcom). Yahweh specifically commanded that the Israelites must not do the same thing (cf. Leviticus 18:21, 24-28; 20:1-5; Jeremiah 32:35; 1 Kings 11:5, 33).

Yet even in the instances where God destroyed people with spiritual fire, such as Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, this fire was not natural fire that burns up the flesh. These men still had their priestly tunics on them when their bodies were taken away for burial (Leviticus 10:2-5). God is a consuming fire, and his supernatural, spiritual fire can destroy without touching the physical flesh at all; though, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, it can also destroy like natural fire, leaving things smoking like a furnace (Genesis 19:24-28). Hence, even rising smoke becomes an indication and sign of God's complete destruction by fire.

Yet it is interesting to note from this account in Genesis 19, that Lot's wife, who hesitated and took time to look back at Sodom while they were escaping (after they were specifically told not to hang about, i.e. she wanted to go back), was not burned up by the fire that fell from above, but instead, she became a pillar of salt! What actually happened chemically, we don't know, but somehow after her sudden death, her body immediately changed into some kind of salt, which may have had something to do with the sulphur. (This linking of fire, sulphur and salt is very significant, as we shall see.)

Moses also saw this same fire of God burning in a desert bush, yet the bush did not burn up (Exodus 3:2-3). Natural fire needs certain physical elements to consume so that it can keep burning, but spiritual fire is altogether different. It is the supernatural fire of God that can give life or destroy it – without having to literally burn anything.

Going back to our subject, here is a reminder of what Jesus had to say about Gehenna.

"It is good for you to be entering into the kingdom of God one-eyed, rather than, having two eyes, to be cast into **the Gehenna of fire**, where their worm is not dying and the fire is not going out. For everyone will be salted with fire, and every sacrifice will be salted with salt... Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another." (FT)

In this passage in Mark 9:42-49, Jesus was using the symbol of Gehenna to describe the impending judgment of the powerful Day of the Lord's indignation, when he would be unveiled from heaven in flaming fire, dealing out vengeance on the wicked (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). This accords with the prophecy in Isaiah 66:22-24, from which Jesus was quoting, and with elements of the Olivet Discourse.

"...all mankind will come and bow down before Me," says the LORD (Yahweh). "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against Me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." (NIV)

"Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will be gathered."

(Matthew 24:28 NIV; also Revelation 19:17-21)

As we saw earlier, even though Gehenna had a more literal fulfilment in the events of 70 AD, it becomes very evident that, in the light of Jesus' teaching, these prophecies, especially the Isaiah text, were to be understood figuratively or spiritually, as applied to the judgment in the coming age of Christ's kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

The Gehenna of fire is always used of unbelievers and wicked hypocrites, but can the fire of God become a positive thing for believers?

### The Fire of God's Law

For about 18 years, I believed and taught that the Lake of Fire in the book of Revelation was symbolic of a purifying process for all those 'in it', ultimately believing that all would be saved from it at some distant point following a time of chastening. I eventually came to see the problems with this view, known as

Evangelical Universalism, and I subsequently rejected it as biblically unsound in late 2012/early 2013. Nevertheless, I have still wondered how the few texts in scripture that refer to fire as a purifying force are to be understood if they do not relate to the Lake of Fire. Here is my conclusion.

Although it is evident that on one level, the 'Gehenna of fire' was a natural, earthly fire, an incinerator, indicative of shame and contempt, in most of the instances where the word Gehenna is used in the NT, though, it is ultimately describing the judgment of the Day of the Lord; that is, on a higher level, it is describing the fire of God's divine justice working out its righteousness and punishment in the other world/age.

The Greek word for fire is *pur* from which we get such words as purify and purge. In this world, natural fire can have a purifying effect on materials that can stand the test of fire, such as gold and silver. These metals can be purified by fire to get rid of all the dross, the unwanted, impure alloys (cf. Malachi 3:2-3; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

In scripture, this becomes a metaphor for the fire of God's righteousness and holiness destroying sin within the believer *in this life*. The fire may be figurative, but it is very real. It is a spiritual fire, on the highest level, because God's law itself is spiritual (cf. Romans 7:14).

**"Is not My word like fire,"** declares the LORD (*Yahweh*), "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"

(Jeremiah 23:29 NIV)

"For **He will be like a refiner's fire** or a launderer's soap."

(Malachi 3:2 NIV)

"...and His eyes **as a flame of fire**"

(Revelation 1:14 GRB Interlinear)

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

(1 Peter 1:6-7 NIV)

Take note of the last text, where Peter appears to borrow heavily from Malachi 3:3 concerning the 'refining' of God's holy people. The apostle Peter points out here that gold eventually perishes, even though it can be refined by fire. And in the same way, the faith of a follower of Christ can be tried and tested in God's fire to bring purification and maturity – but this does not automatically mean that the 'Lake of Fire' will not destroy those subject to it. This 'eternal fire' is not one of purification, but of destruction, annihilation or perishing – the Second Death. For the follower of Christ, the fire of God brings life; for the unbelieving and wicked, the fire brings punishment & death.

The apostle Paul also revealed that the works of each disciple and servant of Christ will be tested with God's fire on the day of judgment; yet take note that this 'divine fire' will destroy all that is worthless before God, so that only the 'gold and silver' will remain. This fire is not like the 'Lake of Fire' (or Gehenna), which destroys both body and soul<sup>5</sup> (cf. Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:4-5). This fire only tests the works or acts of the believer, rather than destroy the whole person -- though some kind of loss can still be experienced. This is an extremely important distinction when discussing the nature of the fire of God. Here is what Paul wrote.

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. **It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work.** If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. **If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved**—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

(1 Corinthians 3:11-15 NIV)

These few scriptures will suffice to show that the fire of God is his righteousness, holiness and justice. As we saw earlier in Mark 9:42-49 in relation to the 'Gehenna of fire', everyone would be salted with fire. Nevertheless, Jesus also said that every sacrifice would be salted with salt. Why the metaphor of salt with fire and sacrifice?

Now it is common knowledge that salt is a preservative and an antiseptic, and it is also a seasoning for food. In the Law of Moses, every grain offering, also termed a sacrifice, had to be seasoned with salt (cf. Leviticus 2:13). The salt represents the goodness of God's righteousness and character. Jesus said that his followers are to be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13). We are to be living sacrifices, burnt offerings with a pleasing aroma, salted with the salt of goodness, grace and peace, consumed by the righteous fire of God's Spirit.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, **to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice**, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship..."

(Romans 12:1 NIV; see also Ephesians 5:2 and Philippians 4:18)

"...offer up spiritual sacrifices, most acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

(1 Peter 2:5 FT)

"Let your conversation be always full of grace, **seasoned with salt...**"

(Colossians 4:6 NIV)

"**Have salt in yourselves** and be at peace with one another."

(Mark 9:50 FT)

Yet before we can truly have salt in ourselves, in another respect we need to be salted with the fire of God's truth and righteousness. The first disciples received this baptism of fire at Pentecost at the coming of the Holy Spirit. The presence of God as

a consuming fire was represented in what appeared to be flames of fire that rested upon each of them (Acts 2:1-4).

The giving of the Law to Israel at Sinai was begun in the Hebrew month of Sivan, when God appeared to Israel on the mountain as a fire and spoke to them, instilling them with fear at the sight and sound of his Glory (Exodus 19:1-2, 16-19; 20:18-20). Yet at Pentecost, in the month of Sivan in about 33 AD, this same fire of God came to dwell within the disciples of Jesus who were gathered at the temple courts, the house of God, waiting for the power from on high (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4).<sup>6</sup>

This Pentecostal fire, though, was in accord with the New Covenant that brings life; as opposed to the fire of Sinai, which was in accord with the Old Covenant that brings death. The pouring out of the spiritual blessings of this New Covenant was due to the recent Sacrifice of the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, who fulfilled all the old types and shadows of the Old Covenant rituals. He was the one who experienced the fire of God's wrath on behalf of us all that those who believe in him may be saved from God's wrath (cf. Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; Ephesians 2:3-4).

### "Weeping & Gnashing of Teeth"

As we near the conclusion of our study of this parable, let us consider the outcome of the judgment associated with the arrival of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and the contrasting destinies of 'the wheat' and 'the darnel'.

"The Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and they shall be pulling out of His kingdom all sins and those doing lawlessness, and they shall be throwing them into the furnace of fire. **There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.**"

(Matthew 13:41-41 FT)

"I am saying to you, 'I don't know you or where you come from! Withdraw from me, all workers of injustice!' **There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth**, when you are seeing Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out."

(Luke 13:27-28)

The phrase '*weeping and gnashing of teeth*' signifies great sorrow, mixed with anger and regret. It is used seven times in the gospels, six in Matthew (8:11-12; 13:42 & 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30) and once in Luke (quoted above). Only two of these are spoken of in the context of fire, which occurs in the parables of the Wheat and the Darnel, and the Net in Matthew 13. All the others are in the context of one being thrown into outer darkness to be excluded from participating in the 'feast' of the kingdom of heaven.

This had a particular relevance to the religious Jews of Jesus' day, as they presumed that they would automatically be accepted into the kingdom of God – but Jesus warns them that even 'the subjects of the kingdom' (i.e. the Jews) would be thrown out (cf. Matthew 8:10-12). This could also be applied to many Christians who presumptuously think that, as the people of God, no matter how they live, heaven will be waiting for them. The whole teaching of the NT warns us otherwise.

In all seven passages, the context is that of a judgment of separation at the coming of the Son of Man. Most translations render the phrase in such a way that it sounds like the 'fire' or the 'darkness' is the actual place where *'the weeping and gnashing of teeth'* will occur, but this is a little misleading. Some literal versions and Interlinears render it differently. For example, the Greek-English Interlinear by G. R. Berry translates this phrase in all instances as a statement that is related to the judgment being described, as in, "*There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

This rendering doesn't seem to indicate the location or duration of the 'weeping and gnashing', just the fact that there will be this kind of reaction from many when they are judged before Christ – due to the realisation that they are to be subsequently punished, condemned & rejected, suffering the loss of eternal life. I do not believe that Jesus was describing a 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' that would never end in a place of fiery torment, as the traditional doctrine of Eternal Torment in Hell teaches. The end of this condemnation, though, is Death – the destruction of the Second Death, the ultimate Gehenna of Fire, which destroys both body and soul (cf. Revelation 20:11-15; Matthew 10:28). Only in Christ is there Life.

**"Or are you not aware that the unjust shall not be inheriting God's kingdom?** Be not deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminates, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers shall inherit God's kingdom. And some of you were these, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."

(1 Corinthians 6:9-11 FT)

Now take special notice of this text. You can't get much clearer than this, and yet tragically, not only is the world full of such people, the whole of Christendom has been, and continues to be, riddled with these kinds of people, particularly adulterers and homosexuals, the greedy, thieves and swindlers (including those who are figuratively raping the people of God with forced tithing and 'seed-faith gifts' while abusing their positions of power). On the whole, this new Christianity has become a huge moneymaking machine, serving man and money rather than God. The People of God (as well as the people of the world) need to take heed of the words of the King himself (in bold emphasis).

"He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. **But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death...**"

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. **Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.**"

(Revelation 21:6-8; 22:14-15 NIV)

Such is the destiny of the Darnel, the sons of the wicked one!

### The Sons of the Kingdom

This should instil the fear of God into us all; and the fear of God is something that is severely lacking in the world - and even within the Church. There is open arrogance, irreverence and immaturity; sexual immorality and perversion; religious entertainment passing as the supernatural power of God, with lies, deceit, trickery & swindling; selfish ambition and greed, the flaunting of the gifts of the Spirit like some kind of stage act, seeking the blessings of God with monetary gifts, while boasting in the pride of life, etc, etc!

The fear of God is the *beginning* of wisdom and knowledge (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; 15:33), because while we are in these bodies of sinful flesh, we need the fear of God to keep us from sinning, which comes from knowing his awesome power and holiness and justice. The Church (or the world) cannot continue to break down the boundaries that God has established, or ignore the moral and spiritual laws & principles that are built into his creation. There will inevitably be consequences, for we do reap what we sow.

This was one of the reasons why God manifested his power to Israel and gave them the judgments of the Law (Exodus 20:20; Deuteronomy 6:13). And this righteous (or moral) law has not been discarded, as some would have us believe, for God has not changed. Nevertheless, a positive, healthy, reverential fear should in turn lead to spiritual maturity, leading us on to the knowledge of the love of God as our Father, which will cast out all fear of punishment and condemnation as we manifest the character of God as his sons (1 John 4:17-18).

The original plan of God in relation to the nation of Israel was for them to be a holy nation, a special people and a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:3-6). We now know from the New Testament that this chosen kingdom of royal priests goes beyond the faithful remnant of Israel herself, the original wife of Yahweh.

Not only were the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish disciples of Jesus Christ identified as the newly betrothed Bride of Christ, but this bride-nation subsequently included *all* believers in Christ Jesus out of *all* nations; the fullness of the Gentiles, who, together with the remnant from Israel, formed the Bride/Body of Christ, the Wife of the Lamb, the Assembly (or Church) of God. This heavenly Israel, the New Jerusalem, *is* the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of royal priests, who were about to rule the earth and the heavens, and all nations, in the coming ages.<sup>7</sup>

These are the Wheat, the sons of the kingdom, the ones who bear fruit to God. These are the Overcomers, the sons of God who are manifested to the world of angels and resurrected men. And all those who believe from amongst all nations since then, who become Disciples of Christ, enter into the very same kingdom, the very same Holy City – the kingdom of God.

The spiritual effects of this kingdom are felt worldwide, upon all mankind, as 'the field' represents the whole world. Now notice here that in the parable, the field belongs to Christ. We shall see from some of the other parables that Jesus gave his life for the sake of the whole world, so that he could purchase the hidden treasure in the field – the true Church or Assembly of God.

Yet the truth of the matter is that he purchased the entire world! The whole of humanity and the earth belongs to him, for he has redeemed it. The whole earth was originally his due to the rights of creation because he is its God and the Firstborn of all creation; yet he is also its Redeemer, having purchased it by his own blood; and through the resurrection, he is also Firstborn from among the dead.

Therefore, God has given us a double witness for Christ's Ownership or Sovereignty of the world, in that,

- a) He is the Creator of all (Colossians 1:15-20; John 1:1-3), and
- b) He is the Redeemer of all (Mark 10:45; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; Hebrews 9:12).

Therefore, whether it's the Old Creation or the New Creation, all belongs to Christ, for he is the Owner of all things. And all this originates from his God and Father -- who is also our God and Father in Christ Jesus.

I have taken the time to go into these things in quite some detail at this point so as to lay the groundwork for the rest of the parables. When it comes to expounding the rest of them in the following pages, the content will be somewhat briefer (most of the time) for the foundation has now been laid.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> [Middle English helle, from Old English; see kel-<sup>1</sup> in Indo-European roots.]

**Word History:** *Hell* comes to us directly from Old English *hel*. Because the Roman Church prevailed in England from an early date, the Roman that is, Mediterranean belief that hell was hot prevailed there too; in Old English *hel* is a black and fiery place of eternal torment for the damned. But because the Vikings were converted to Christianity centuries after the Anglo-Saxons, the Old Norse *hel*, from the same source as Old English *hel*, retained its earlier pagan senses as both a place and a person. As a place, *hel* is the abode of oathbreakers, other evil persons, and those unlucky enough not to have died in battle. It contrasts sharply with *Valhalla*, the hall of slain heroes. Unlike the Mediterranean hell, the Old Norse *hel* is very cold. *Hel* is also the name of the goddess or giantess who presides in *hel*, the half blue-black, half white daughter of Loki and the giantess Angrbotha. The Indo-European root behind these Germanic words is *\*kel-*, "to cover, conceal" (so *hell* is the "concealed place"); it also gives us *hall*, *hole*, *hollow*, and *helmet*.

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(Taken from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/hell>)

<sup>2</sup> The Jewish historian, Josephus, wrote the following in relation to the War.

"Now every one of these died with their eyes fixed upon the temple, and left the seditious alive behind them. Now the seditious at first gave orders that the dead should be buried out of the public treasury, as not enduring the stench of their dead bodies. But afterwards, when they could not do that, they had them cast down from the walls into the valleys beneath.

However, when Titus, in going his rounds along those valleys, saw them full of dead bodies, and the thick putrefaction running about them, he gave a groan;

and, spreading out his hands to heaven, called God to witness that this was not his doing; and such was the sad case of the city itself.”

(Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Book V, chapter 12, paragraphs 3-4; emphasis mine)

<sup>3</sup> Edward Fudge had this to say about it.

“It is commonly accepted that the literal valley served as Jerusalem’s garbage dump, “A necessary hygienic incinerator,” though some have asked for more evidence. (*In a footnote*) Shedd quotes Robinson that there is no evidence for a Gehenna garbage dump in Christ’s day... However, the proximity of the Valley of Hinnom to the Dung Gate, the constant flow of carcasses and blood of sacrificial animals from the Temple, and the discovery of sewers and latrines at the site, all support the old tradition of the Valley of Hinnom as a place of burning garbage.” (Edward William Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes*, Third Edition 2011, Cascade Books, p. 118)

<sup>4</sup> It is evident that the parallel passage(s) to Mark 9:42-48 found in Matthew’s gospel (5:29-30 & 18:8-9) equate ‘Gehenna’ with ‘*the eternal (or age-abiding) fire.*’ Matthew 25:41 & 46 identifies this ‘*eternal fire*’ as being the ‘*eternal punishment*’ for all those who do not inherit the Life of the kingdom of God. It also reveals that it is a *spiritual fire* as it was originally prepared for the rebellious spirit beings of the kingdom of darkness. The apostle Paul describes this judgment & punishment as ‘*eternal destruction*’ in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. The vision of Revelation calls it ‘*the Second Death*’ (20:14; 21:8). Hence, this could be illustrated in the following equation: Gehenna = eternal fire = unquenchable fire = Lake of Fire = Second Death = eternal punishment = eternal destruction. More will be said on these things later in this book.

<sup>5</sup> The subject of **soul** (Hebrew *nephesh*, Greek *psuche*) and **spirit** (Hebrew *ruach*, Greek *pneuma*) is not an easy one to deal with. Scripture makes it clear that we are spirit, soul and body (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23). It is also evident that the body can be separated from the spirit & soul, which occurs at death (James 2:26), while spirit & soul can only be distinguished. Generally speaking, the spirit is the higher form of a person’s being, whereas the soul is the lower form. Nevertheless, both spirit and soul describe the invisible attributes of a person, the life force and essence of an individual. Even though other creatures are said to have souls and spirits (this is particularly brought out in the book of Ecclesiastes and the Psalms) humans are different in that we are made in the image of God, therefore our spiritual, intellectual and emotional capacity is very different from the other animals. (Reference source: *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson, 1985).

In both the OT and the NT ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ are used interchangeably, indicating the intimate relationship between soul and spirit (e.g. compare Genesis 26:35 with 1 Samuel 1:10; and Psalm 35:9 with Luke 1:47). Nevertheless, Hebrews 4:12 reveals that soul and spirit can be distinguished, although there isn’t any intimation that they can be separated. Jesus showed that the body can be separated from the soul/spirit in death, yet in resurrection the soul and the body can be destroyed or ruined in Gehenna (cf. Matthew 10:28,39).

<sup>6</sup> It is commonly believed that the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost occurred while the disciples were in an upper room in Jerusalem. For many years now I have disagreed with this scenario and have instead taught that the disciples were in the temple courts, with the emphasis that this was a public event in the heart of Jerusalem on this special feast day.

In the days before Pentecost, the group of Jerusalem disciples, which included the apostles, numbered about 120 (cf. Acts 1:15). This number is not without symbolic significance, as there were 120 priests involved with the divine dedication of Solomon’s temple, when fire fell from heaven and the Glory of Yahweh filled the temple (cf. 2 Chronicles 5:12-14; 7:1-3).

And now, in relation to the divine dedication of God's new temple on the day of Pentecost, also accompanied by divine fire from heaven, there were 120 priests of a new order (cf. 1 Peter 2:5).

Even though there is mention of the upper room where the disciples were staying in Acts 1:13, where they gathered together after the Ascension, that was still over a week before Pentecost. When the day of Pentecost came, it would've been their custom to gather at the temple. Acts 2:1-4 describes them *gathered together in one place* when the sound of a violent wind came from heaven and *filled the whole house where they were sitting*; and they saw what appeared to be tongues of fire separating, which then came to rest on each of them. This 'house' was evidently referring to the house of God, the temple courts, where they were sitting (cf. John 2:13-17; Acts 2:46). Other Jews heard the sound and a crowd gathered around the disciples, and then eventually Peter and the Eleven stood up to address the crowd (cf. Acts 2:5-15). How could all of this have occurred in an upper room!

<sup>7</sup> This 'bride' theme will be considered later in the parable of the Wedding Feast. Cf. Matthew 9:15; John 3:29-30; Romans 7:2-6; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:28-32; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2, 9-11.