

What's The Deal With Death?

Part 3

By

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When dealing with the subject of death from a biblical standpoint, the issue of Hell and Gehenna, and the Lake of Fire (which is the Second Death), has to be addressed. This is not an easy task, as there are a number of differing interpretations on this sobering, yet fascinating theme. In the final two parts of this series, we shall consider these important topics, while at the same time we shall also take a brief look at the more positive subject of the resurrection to life. There is good news for those who love God and have accepted the message about his Son, Jesus Christ – death has been conquered and life eternal in the kingdom of God is available to all.

So let us begin by considering some of the key passages in the New Testament (NT) that talk about the unquenchable fire of God in his judgment and wrath, and see how this relates to the eternal Gehenna of fire, and the Lake of Fire of Revelation.

(Some of the following on the subject of Gehenna and the eternal fire is taken from a portion of my work in *The Wheat and the Darnel* from my book *The Secrets of the Parables* (revised edition 2013).

Unquenchable Fire

The NT reveals that, 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 spoken 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.

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! **Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?** Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit **will be cut down and thrown into the fire.**"

"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you

with the Holy Spirit **and fire**. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn **and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.**"

(Matthew 3:7-12 NIV; see 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!'*

When Jesus began to talk about this fire in his ministry, he spoke about the *'eternal fire of Gehenna'*, using metaphors that appear quite shocking to us now. Here is a classic example, which also reveals that the *'eternal fire'* is equated with Gehenna.

"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 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).

Also, the 'fire of Gehenna' is clearly equated with the 'eternal fire' ¹ in this passage. This is important, as we shall see.

Jesus spoke further about Gehenna 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)

These are tough words to take onboard, straight from the Master himself. Whatever this judgment of fire is, Gehenna is not a pleasant destiny. And take careful note of the above texts, which plainly show that this 'Gehenna' has to do with judgment & condemnation beyond this life and world. Also, as shown above in Matthew 18, this 'Gehenna of fire' is identified as being one and the same as the 'eternal fire.' So what is this 'eternal fire' or 'Gehenna?' Is this the traditional Hell or something else? Let's take a look at this important, yet grossly misunderstood, subject.

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.² 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 have already considered Hades earlier in this series). The one used the most though 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 comes 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.³

“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 & the 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, as we have seen from the above texts, *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.⁴ (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 era, also known as the Intertestamental 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 & philosophies 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 for he was the Messiah. 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 – for the wages of sin is death? 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 in NT teaching.)

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 (rendered 'hell' in this text).

" "If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. ⁴³If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands **to go into hell, where the fire never goes out.** ⁴⁵And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet **and be thrown into hell.** ⁴⁷And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and **be thrown into hell,** ⁴⁸ where

"the worms that eat them do not die,
and the fire is not quenched.'

⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire." (NIV)

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 passage Jesus was quoting), and also 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.⁵ In the same way that literal worldly Jerusalem becomes a type and figure of a greater spiritual Jerusalem (the New Jerusalem), so Gehenna takes on a greater more spiritual significance than the 'literal' one.

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

The Fire of God's Law

For the most part of 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, since this change, I have often wondered how the few texts in scripture that do speak of fire as a purifying force are to be understood, particularly if they do not relate to the Lake of Fire, as I once thought. Well, after much study and contemplation, here are my thoughts on this.

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. (The key texts that speak of fire in this sense are 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 were **as blazing fire**"

(Revelation 1:14 NIV)

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' motif is to be understood in the same manner. Even that which can be refined will perish apart from God's power and grace.

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. We are all deserving of the ultimate second death, and only the grace of God shown through Christ Jesus can save us from it.

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.

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)

This fire is not like the 'Lake of Fire' (or Gehenna), which destroys both body and soul ⁶ (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 evidently some kind of loss can still be experienced. This is an extremely important distinction when discussing the nature of the fire of God. God *is* a consuming fire, but only he determines how that fire is manifested and applied – either to discipline and save, or to punish and destroy.

The Judgment

One of the most revealing texts about the general judgment of humanity is Paul's description in Romans 2:5-11.

⁵ But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶ God "will repay each person according to what they have done." ⁷ **To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality (Gk. *aphtharsia*; incorruptibility), he will give eternal life.** ⁸ But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. ⁹ There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; ¹⁰ **but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good:** first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. ¹¹ For God does not show favoritism. (NIV)

Paul reveals here that those who persist in good works while seeking *glory, honour and incorruption* will be given eternal life (i.e. age-abiding life, the life of the ages). This is clearly referring to believers in Christ. He also says that they will receive *glory, honour and peace*. Glory and honour are common themes throughout the NT used in relation to Christ and his people in his kingdom. In some respects, the 'peace' here seems to be parallel to the 'incorruption' of verse 7.

On the other side, Paul reveals that those who reject the truth and follow injustice (or evil), these will be given God's wrath and anger, along with affliction and distress. Elsewhere, this is described as 'eternal punishment'⁷ and the Second Death, metaphorically called Gehenna & the Lake of Fire.

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, **into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...**"

⁴⁶ "**Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.**"

(Matthew 25:41, 46 NIV)

¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. **The lake of fire is the second death.** ¹⁵ Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

(Revelation 20:14-15 NIV)

The teaching of the NT reveals that the present soulish, fleshly life that we now live is considered the **First Life**, while that which ends this life is considered the **First Death** (corporately spoken of as 'Death & Hades'). For it is destined for a person to die once and then face the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).

In the account of Jesus' discourse with Nicodemus in John chapter 3, Jesus declared that unless a person is born again (or born anew, born from above) he or she cannot see the kingdom of God. In his confusion and total lack of spiritual understanding, Nicodemus exclaimed, "surely a man cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" (cf. 3:1-12).

The **Second Birth** that Jesus was referring to here is a spiritual one, a birth into a life that can begin even now, in spirit; but the fullness of it can only occur through resurrection into a spiritual body after death. This spiritual, heavenly Life, the **Second Life**, is eternal life, so often promised to the true children of God in Christ.

And in the same way that there is a Second Life that relates to the spiritual, heavenly world or dimension, there is also a **Second Death** that also relates to the spiritual world. Flesh gives birth to flesh, spirit gives birth to spirit. Those who live according to the flesh, without being born from above and receiving the Second Birth & Life, will have to face the punishment and destruction of the Second Death.

It is the norm that all humans enter the spiritual world via death, the First Death. Thereafter, via resurrection & judgment, the body and soul of each one will receive either the Second Life (i.e. eternal life), or the Second Death (i.e. eternal destruction or death). Through his death and resurrection, Christ alone has the

power and authority to grant this Second Life to those who know him (that is, they are written in the Book of Life), for he alone is the Way and the Door into life with God the Father.

As for the rest, they have no higher authority to call on to present their case before God; therefore, apart from Christ, their judgment can only be that of death, the Second Death.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 6:23 NIV)

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. **The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death.**

(Revelation 2:11 NIV)

In Part 4 of this series we shall continue the themes of resurrection & the judgment of the Second Death, considering texts that speak of 'weeping & gnashing of teeth', destruction & corruption, and immortality & incorruption.

Endnotes

¹ Even though there is an ongoing debate as to whether the Greek adjective *aionios* should be translated as *eternal*, I don't plan to deal with this here. I have considered this issue in part two of my series *Is Universal Salvation Explicitly Taught in the New Testament?* For the purpose of this article (& series), I accept the common translation *eternal* as that which relates to God's world, the spiritual realm, which deals with things that are final as opposed to the temporary things of this world (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 & 5:1).

² [Middle English *helle*, from Old English; see *kel*⁻¹ 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>)

³ 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)

⁴ 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)

⁵ 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.' As we shall see, 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 (i.e. 'the 'devil' and his angels'). 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.

⁶ 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).

⁷ It is common among Universalists to translate the usual rendering 'eternal punishment' as 'age-abiding *chastening*'. I used to teach this view myself, but I can now no longer accept it. I do not intend to go into this issue here, but I plan to be considering it in detail in the series *Is Universal Salvation Explicitly Taught in the New Testament?*

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