

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55: 1 0 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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MORE ABOUT *GEHENNA*

The diligent student of the Word of God, when dealing with a specific subject, usually wants to see what other students have said concerning the matter. Often he is disappointed when he finds that no one has dealt exhaustively with it, and the few notes given to it by most commentators are of no value in advancing the truth. "Sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:3) is teaching that is based on conclusions arrived at after everything that is revealed concerning the subject has been considered and included.

Since future punishment is centered by the Lord Jesus in the word **gehenna**, everything declared from Genesis to Revelation that sheds any light on the meaning of this term must be carefully considered. This has been done, even though I have not been able to set forth in these compressed messages all that has been found.

There is one important Old Testament passage with which all students should be completely familiar, and its facts should be stored in our minds for future use as we come into a more complete understanding of the significance of *gehenna*. In **Isaiah 66:23,24** we are told:

And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, saith the LORD. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against Me; for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.

The first part of the two passages quoted above does not present any great difficulties as there are other portions of Scripture which tell us the same thing. In Isaiah 2:2-4 the prophet declares that **in the last** (resultant - **acharith**) **days it shall come to pass that the mountain** (government) of the LORD'S house (dynasty) shall be established in the top (head, as an outflowing entity) **of the mountains** (governments) **and shall be exalted above the hills** (lesser governments), **and all**

nations shall flow unto it. And many peoples (plural in Hebrew) shall go up and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The scene here is the kingdom of God. Anyone who believes that this beautiful picture sets forth actions that are taking place now, or that have taken place in the past, disqualifies himself as being an honest interpreter of the prophecy of Isaiah. These words give us a description of regathered, restored, and regenerated Israel in the time period and under the conditions that will exist when God governs the earth and the nations upon it (Psalm 67:4). Further confirmation of these truths is found in Zechariah 14:9 where we are told: "**And the LORD shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall there be one LORD, and His name one.**" Furthermore, it is declared: "**And it shall come to pass, that everyone that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain**" (Zech 14:16,17).

Again, let it be said and fully recognized that this will take place only after God has assumed sovereignty and the kingdom (government) of God is a reality. Thus it is that we have no major problems with the prophesy of "all flesh" traveling to Jerusalem to worship the LORD as long as we remember that this takes place under a condition of divine government which is actually operating at that time. We must also remember that "all flesh" is the nations of the earth at that time, and we should recognize that when nations assemble they do so in their representatives, so that one man may be the ambassador for millions of people. What a privilege it will be to act as a surrogate in that day!

However, there is more to the picture, and we will err greatly if we think that in the time period and under the conditions of the kingdom of God that everyone is perfect, and that no one ever becomes involved in unrighteousness. It is revealed that when God governs, divine justice will be of such nature that every sin and transgression shall receive its just recompense of reward. If any sin should be a capital crime against God, it is written that the soul (person) that sinneth shall surely die. There will be no delays, no court battles, no postponements, no hung juries, no miscarriages of justice. All punishment will be in the hands of God, not one feature of it will be in the hands of men. It is He who will withdraw life from the sinner, transport the dead body to its place of disposal, cause it to be viewed by responsible witnesses, and these witnesses returning to the people they represented can say: "We were there. We saw the dead bodies. There is such a thing as death for sin, even as our Lord Jesus forewarned."

Every student of this subject will also need to remember that when this earth is under God's government very few will ever have seen a dead body. The death that flows out of Adam's sin will be abolished the day that God begins His government. From that day forth no one will die from such things as cancer or heart disease. All deaths that take place under God's government will be the result of divine action, the punishment for sin.

There is no question but that we must link up Isa. 66:24 with the future gehenna in the kingdom of God. The carcasses there are the bodies of dead men who have transgressed against God. Their lives were extinguished as the divine penalty. So, we need to remember the words of our Lord **‘But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear Him which after He hath killed hath power to cast into gehenna, I say unto you, fear Him** ‘Luke 12:5).

There are two actions set forth here; death for sin and casting into gehenna. The first does not necessarily mean that the second one follows. The first act is one of punishment. The second is one of disposal that is fraught with great significance. It is God's extreme act that comes upon certain sinners. It is said of them that "**their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched.**" And it should be noted here that it is said of these men and not of gehenna. It is "their" worm. Therefore, it has to be that during the lives of these men they sinned in such manner that they brought upon themselves a condition of guilt which is described by the words "their fire" and "their worm." How else could the Lord and Isaiah speak of such a sentence of guilt if it was not upon them?

In Matt. 5:22 our LORD warned his disciples that if under His government they called anyone **moros**, a word that means "a wicked reprobate, destitute of all divine knowledge," they would be in danger of "the gehenna of fire." These words make a clear distinction between the gehenna that existed south of Jerusalem and the future gehenna that will exist under the government of God. The one that existed in our Lord's day was a gehenna of rubbish and not a gehenna of fire. Even though there may have been many fires burning there, as there usually is in open refuse dumps, this must not be confused with the burning sulphur of the future gehenna.

Once God has enlightened the world and caused His knowledge to fill the earth, one will not dare to call another man "stupid." If he does he will be insulting God's Spirit which has been poured out on all flesh. The common practice of hurling gratuitous insults at one another is going to come to an end when God governs the earth.

Our Lord repeated warnings such as this on several occasions where he used the word gehenna, but added no information as to its nature. However in Mark 9:43,45, and 47 we find that the translators have Him saying: **"into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched,"** but the Greek says, **"into gehenna, into the unquenchable fire,"** and adds the statement "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." These are the same words that we found in Isaiah 66:24 and they need to be carefully examined.

The fire spoken of in these passages does not in any way refer to the fires that may or may not have been burning in our Lord's day in the refuse heap that was south of Jerusalem, neither do they refer to the fire that will characterize the lake of molten sulphur that will exist in the day of the kingdom of God. This "fire" in all passages has to do with "the fire" of the individual who is cast there. It is specifically called "their fire," and is said to be unquenchable, and to this is added that "their worm" (personal and singular) never dies.

If there is any place in Scripture where we find the metaphorical use of words it is here in these passages. Some personal condition that is related to these sinners is called "their fire" which is not an actual state of combustion, and something is called "their worm" which is not a worm at all. There were, for sure worms in the rubbish heap south of Jerusalem, as there are worms in every part of the earth, but there was no such thing on earth as a never dying worm. There is no such thing as an immortal worm.

Since this is clearly the individual's "fire" and the individual's "worm," we need to find what these two metaphors mean. As to the term "fire," we can say that when God makes an adverse determination concerning a person, a verdict as to his guilt, that decrees a certain punishment that shall be exacted, that becomes that one's fire. This usage of the word "fire" is seen in Psalm 97:3, **"A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His enemies round about."** It is seen also in Jeremiah 5:14 where God said to this prophet: **"Because ye speak this word, behold I will make My words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them."** This "fire" was God's verdict upon an idolatrous people, the sentence of death that was laid upon them because of their sins. Of course, a sentence could be reversed, but of the sentence of gehenna God has said "their fire shall not be quenched."

With every divine decree that consigned a person to gehenna there was the additional shame, there was an additional act of degradation, **"and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh"** (Isa 66:24). This is the shame, disgrace, infamy and stigma of all that are destroyed in gehenna. It is spoken of as "their worm."

This use of the word "worm" is seen in one of the great prophecies concerning Jesus Christ. In a great miscarriage of justice, He was tried, and determination was made concerning Him by the ruling clique in Israel. They decreed that His punishment should be death by crucifixion, the most shameful and humiliating death that one could die. Of this He had spoken in advance; **“But I am a worm, and no man, a reproach of men, and despised of the people.”** (Psalm 22:6). This was His fire, the worm that came upon Him when He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Philippians 2:8). However, His fire was quenched and His worm died, for as we read on we find that God reversed the judgment of men, raised Him from the dead, highly exalted Him, and has given Him a name which is above every other name.

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