

Gehenna in the Christian Scriptures

A place of abomination ...
eternal suffering ???

Gehenna

Word *Gehenna* (Greek)

... derives from *Gai-Ben-Hinnom* (Hebrew)

... meaning *Valley of the Son of Himmon*.

Gehenna

In Hebrew Scriptures

- After the Babylonian exile (6th cent BCE) ... A garbage dump in a deep narrow valley outside the wall of Jerusalem where fires were kept burning to consume the refuse. It is also the location where bodies of executed criminals, or individuals denied a proper burial, and animals would be dumped. Sulfur (brimstone) was added to keep the fires burning.
- In the Greek Hebrew Scriptures (Septuagint) the word is not used except to describe the actual place outside of Jerusalem.
- A place ... *Tophet* (fire stove) where children were sacrificed to Baal and Molech.
 - 2 Chronicles

A Place of Abomination

2 Chronicles 28:3 & 33:6

- Moreover he (*Ahaz*) offered in the valley of the son of Hinnom (*Gehenna*), and burnt his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom HaShem cast out before the children of Israel. And he sacrificed and offered in the high places, and on the hills, and under every leafy tree. (28:3-4)
- He (*Manasseh*) also made his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom (*Gehenna*); and he practised soothsaying, and used enchantments, and practised sorcery, and appointed them that divined by a ghost or a familiar spirit; he wrought much evil in the sight of HaShem, to provoke Him. (33:6)
- 2 Kings 23:10
 - Josiah stops these practices described in 2 Chronicles.
- Jeremiah 7:31, 19:2-6, 32:35
 - Jeremiah recounts the abominations of the sacrifice of children.

Gehenna

- In the Christian Scriptures (New Testament) the word *Gehenna* appears 12 times.
 - Gospel of Matthew 7
 - Gospel of Mark 3
 - Gospel of Luke 1
 - Epistle of James 1

Gehenna

Remember:

Gehenna is the Greek term for the Hebrew *Gai-Ben-Hinnom* meaning Valley of the Son of Himmon.

- It is an actual valley outside of old Jerusalem that was a smoldering garbage dump at the time of Jesus.
- Is Jesus using the **term** only to denote a horrible place ... where in antiquity there were child sacrifices ... abominations against God ... and now there was never ending smoldering stench ... that all residents of Jerusalem would be familiar with ???

Tartaroo

- Another word ... *Tartaroo* ... appears one time in the scripture (2 Pet 2:4) and is also translated as hell.
- *Tartaroo* ... the name of the subterranean region, doleful and dark, regarded by the ancient Greeks as the abode of the wicked dead, where they suffer punishment for their evil deeds.
- “For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into *Tartaroo* (hell) and committed them to pits of **nether gloom to be kept until the judgment ...**”

... **nether gloom** to be kept **until judgment**

... sounds like Sheol !!!

Hades

Nothing but the ancient
Hebrew concept
of the abode of the dead

Hades

- Recall ... The Hebrew Scriptural use of the word Sheol does not equate to modern concepts of Hell.
- The word Sheol is used 66 times in the Hebrew Scriptures.
 - The word is always translated as *Hadees* in the Septuagint (Greek language Hebrew Scriptures).
- In the Christian Scriptures the word is used 10 times
- Even in Greek mythology Hades had many sections.
 - The Elysian Fields ... similar to Paradise or Heaven.
 - Tartaroo (Tartarus) ... similar to Hell.
- Hades can be thought of as equivalent to Sheol in the Hebrew Scriptural context. The abode of the dead.

Hades

- In the Christian Scriptures the word is used 10 times
 - Gospel of Matthew 11:23 & 16:18
 - Referring to Genesis (Sodom)
 - “... the gates of Hades ...”
 - Gospel of Luke 10:15 & 16:23
 - Matt 11:23 above
 - Lazarus and the Rich Man (parable)
 - Acts of the Apostles 2:27 & 2:31
 - In both instances referring to the words of David.
 - Book of Revelation 1:18, 6:8, 20:13 & 14
 - Each time as “ ... Death and Hades ...”

Gospel of Matthew - *Hades*

“And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven?
No, you will be brought down to [Hades](#).”

For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

But I tell you that [on the day of judgment](#) it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you.” (11:23-24)

- ... down to hell ... or to “premature death.” (like in Numbers 16)
- “... it would have remained ...”
- “... on the day of judgment ...”

Gospel of Matthew - *Hades*

“Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”

“And I tell you, you are *Petros* (Peter), and on this *petra* (rock) I will build my *ecclesia* (church), and the *gates of Hades* will not prevail against it. (16:13 & 18)

– Does this mean ...

- Hell ... Satan ... will not prevail against the church ...

or

- Death will not prevail against the assembly of believers ... i.e., they will live ... and death has been defeated.

Matthew 16:18

KJV ... “... the gates of **hell** shall not prevail against it.”

NKJV ... “... the gates of **Hades** shall not prevail against it.”

NIV ... “... the gates of **Hades** will not overcome it.”

RSV ... “... the powers of **death** shall not prevail against it.”

NRSV ... “... the gates of **Hades** will not prevail against it.”

Matthew 16:18

Today's English Version (1976)

“... not even **death** will ever be able to overcome.”

Jerusalem (Roman Catholic 1966)

“And the gates of the **underworld** can never hold out against it.”

Living Bible (1971 paraphrase of 1901 American Standard Version)

“... and all the powers of **hell** shall not prevail against it.”

Acts of the Apostles - *Hades*

“For David says ... ‘I saw the Lord always before me,
for he is at my right hand ...

For you will not abandon **my soul to Hades** ...

or let **your Holy One** experience corruption.

You have made known to me the ways of life ...’

‘Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David
that **he both died and was buried**, and his tomb is with us to this day.

Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to
him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne.

Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah,
saying,

**He was not abandoned to Hades,
nor did his flesh experience corruption.’”** (Acts 2:25-31)

Christ was not abandoned to Hell ... or ... to death?

Book of Revelation - *Hades*

- “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever; and I have the keys of **Death and of Hades.**” (1:17-18)
 - Power over death
 - ... if Hell ... what about Heaven ...
- “I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider’s name was **Death, and Hades** followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, **to kill** with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth.” (6:8)
 - Death ... destruction ... is the punishment.

Revelation – The End

“Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. And **the dead were judged** according to their works, as recorded in the books.

And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, **Death and Hades** gave up the dead that were in them, and all were **judged** according to what they had done. Then **Death and Hades** were thrown into the **lake of fire**.

This is the second death, the **lake of fire**; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (20:11-15)

Death was no more ...

Apostle's Creed

- Of unknown origin ... but probably an adaptation of an early “Roman Creed” or baptismal formula.
- First mention is in 390 CE. (clearly ante-Nicene)
- Current text not “standardized” until late 8th century.

“... Jesus Christ ... was crucified, dead and buried: He descended into hell: The third day he rose again from the dead ...”

The theology of the “harrowing of hell” was that after his death, Jesus descended to the abode of the dead ... to announce “to the saints” that death had been defeated.

What would Jesus message be to those in hell.

Anastasis



The Descent into Hades

- Jesus pulling Adam and Eve from their tombs.
- Righteous Old Testament figures on the left.
- New Testament figures on the right.
- Jesus stands on the covers of the tombs of Adam and Eve ...usually in the shape of a cross.
- Below is the abode of Satan with keys and devices of torture.

Is This Hell?

- Even though it can be shown that the words ... *Sheol*, and *Gai-Ben-Hinnom* (*Gehenna*) that Jesus would have used do not (necessarily) imply the more modern interpretation of hell ... this does not negate the idea that there is no divine ... eternal punishment ...
- In the Greek translations of Jesus' words we find *Gehenna* ... and *Hades* (*Hadees*) ... but these are simply Greek versions of *Sheol*, and *Gai-Ben-Hinnom* ...
- *Tartaroo* ... is used once in the Greek Christian scripture ... in 2 Peter and best represents modern concepts of hell ... but it is not a term attributed to Jesus nor is it clearly an ancient concept of hell ... as we understand it.
 - to be kept **until judgment**

***Punishment
without place***

“Weeping and gnashing of teeth”

Punishment

“Weeping and gnashing of teeth”

- Seven occurrences of the phrase in the Christian scriptures
 - Gospel of Matthew 6
 - Gospel of Luke 1

Punishment

The centurion's servant ... Matt 8:11-12

- “I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness; there **men will weep and gnash their teeth.**“

The centurion's servant ... Luke 13:28-30 (see Matt 8:11-12)

- There **you will weep and gnash your teeth**, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.

Punishment

The parable of the weeds among the wheat ... Matt 13:37-43

- "He who sows the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the **devil**; the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels.

Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age. The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and **throw them into the furnace of fire**; there **men will weep and gnash their teeth**.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

Punishment

The evil and the righteous ... Matt 13:47-50

- ... the kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind; when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into vessels but threw away the bad. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and **throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.**

The parable of the wedding banquet ... Matt 22:13-14

- "... `Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there **men will weep and gnash their teeth.**' For many are called, but few are chosen."

Punishment

The coming at an unexpected time ... Matt 24:51

- “... the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the hypocrites; **there men will weep and gnash their teeth.**

The use of talents ... Matt 25:29-30

- ... For to every one who has will more be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness; there **men will weep and gnash their teeth.**

Eternal ?

Thrown out ... kept out ... of the Kingdom.

- “... thrown into the outer darkness ...”
- “... Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out ...”

Evildoers ... into the furnace ...

- “... his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.”
- “The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.”

Why?

Do men weep and gnash their teeth because they are “thrust out” or because of the “furnace of fire.”

Failure or torment ??

Fire

**Torment ... Cleansing or
Contact with the Divine?**

Fire

Fire as justice ...

- Gospel of Matthew 10
- Gospel of Mark 2
- Gospel of Luke 2
- Gospel of John 1
- Second Epistle to the Thessalonians 1
- Epistle to the Hebrews 2

Fire

Matt 7:19

- “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and **thrown into the fire.**”

Matt 13:37-43

- "He who sows the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world, and the good seed means the sons of the kingdom; the weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. **Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the close of the age.** The Son of man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all **causes of sin and all evildoers, and throw them into the furnace of fire**; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

Fire

John 15:5-6

- “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. **If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned.**”

Hebrews 10:26-27

- “For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a **fury of fire which will consume the adversaries.**”

Fire

But ... God's glory also appears as fire.

- Now mount Sinai was altogether on smoke, because **HaShem descended upon it in fire**; and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. (Exodus 19:18)
- And the appearance of the **glory of HaShem was like devouring fire** on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. (Exodus 24:17)
- For the **cloud of HaShem** was upon the tabernacle by day, and there **was fire therein by night**, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys. (Exodus 40:38)

Fire

Sacrifice directed by God ... with fire ...

- And **there came forth fire from before HaShem**, and consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering and the fat; and when all the people saw it, they shouted, and fell on their faces. (Leviticus 9:24)
- The terms “offering” or “**sacrifice**” ... “**made by fire**” are used over 50x in the TORAH alone.

The Coming of the Kingdom

Daniel 7 ...

- I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was **ancient of days** did sit: his raiment was as white snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; **his throne was fiery flames**, and the wheels thereof **burning fire**.

A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him; thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld at that time because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke, I beheld even till **the beast was slain**, and its body destroyed, **and it was given to be burned with fire**.

And as for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away; yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time.

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven **one like unto a son of man**, and he came even to the **Ancient of days**, and he was brought near before Him.

Fire

- And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:9-14)

Compare Daniel 7 ... and Revelation

Thus ... fire can be seen as a punishment but also as a means of purgation ... a cleansing fire.

Daniel and the Book of Revelation

Daniel 7

- “As I looked, **thrones** were placed and **one that was ancient of days** took his seat; his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; **his throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire.**”
- “... **a thousand thousands served him**, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him ...”
- “... the court sat in judgment, and **the books were opened.**”

Revelation 4 & 5

- “... a **throne** stood in heaven, with **one seated on the throne**. And he who sat there appeared like jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that looked like an emerald. **From the throne issue flashes of lightning ...**”
- “Then I looked, and ... **around the throne** ... many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and **thousands of thousands ...**”
- “... in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne **a scroll** written within and on the back, **sealed** with seven seals ... “Who is worthy to **open the scroll** and break its seals?”

Daniel and the Book of Revelation

Daniel 7

- “And as I looked, the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire ...” (7:11)

Revelation

- “The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is to ascend from the bottomless pit and go to perdition ...” (17:8)
- And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulphur. (19:20)
- “... and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” (20:10)

Apocalypticism

Apocalypticism ... “an uncovering” or “revelation.”

A dualistic expectation that God's Kingdom will be established through a series of supernatural events,

i.e., God's entry into history,

resulting in a future consummation of history that God will command.

Only God can make things right.

To What End ?

Fire

- Cleansing
- Torment

Is contact with the Divine ... an encounter with oneself ... revealing ... and cleansing?