

Part 1 (of 2 parts):

Gehenna in the Synoptics

Hans Scharen
Associate Pastor, Midlothian Bible Church
Midlothian, Texas

According to a *Newsweek* report, belief in an afterlife is alive and well in the United States. Apparently over 70 percent of Americans believe there is a heaven and think they have a good chance of getting there. Slightly over half the people surveyed believe there is a hell, but only 6 percent think "they have a good or excellent chance of getting there."¹ This latter observation appears to contradict the contemporary liberal Protestant theologians' view on the subject of hell. The same *Newsweek* report quotes the American church historian Martin Marty, who observes, "Hell disappeared. And no one noticed."² Indeed, the article continues, "Today, hell is theology's H-word, a subject too trite for serious scholarship."³ These observations indicate that while the experts have all but jettisoned the idea, over half the United States population still believes in the reality of hell, though few anticipate a destiny there.⁴

Among evangelical theologians discussion centers around a different issue. Here the discussion is concerned not so much with the

¹ Kenneth L. Woodward, "Heaven: This Is the Season to Search for New Meaning in Old Familiar Places," *Newsweek*, March 27, 1989, 53.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

³ *Ibid.*, 54-55. The article also quotes Gordon Kaufman of Harvard Divinity School, who "traces four centuries of decline in the concepts of heaven and hell; what is left is intellectually empty baggage. 'It seems to me [Kaufman] we've gone through irreversible changes.... I don't think there can be any future for heaven and hell.'"

⁴ For a corroboration of these statistics, see the poll on the subject of a belief in hell in "Hell's Sober Comeback," *U.S. News & World Report*, March 25, 1991, 56-57. The statistical evidence of this report indicates that this belief among the U.S. population increased rather than decreased over the last few years.

reality of the concept as with one of its specific aspects, namely, its duration. In a *Christianity Today* report several prominent evangelicals voiced their opinions on the everlasting destiny of the unsaved.⁵ Some of these opinions differ with the traditional conservative doctrine of hell (everlasting conscious suffering in hell for all those who have not accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior), mainly because it is too awful a destiny to consider or because it does not harmonize with the idea of an all-loving, merciful God. Some hold to universalism (all will be saved eventually, including the devil),⁶ while others hold to annihilationism (eventual total extinction or annihilation of all the unsaved).⁷ In view of these observations it seems appropriate to look once again at the concept of hell.

The Background of Gehenna

One of the more striking differences between the Old Testament and the New Testament concerns the idea of retribution in the after-life. Relevant Old Testament texts point toward a virtual absence of postmortem retribution, yet in the New Testament, especially the Synoptic Gospels, a fully developed theology of this concept is recognized. The obvious explanation for this difference is that this development must have occurred during the intertestamental period as reflected in its literature. These works evidence a transformation of the Old Testament concept of Sheol (the realm of the dead) to its New Testament counterpart with its distinctives.

In the Old Testament, Sheol is viewed as a vast underworld expanse beneath the surface of the earth but not beyond Yahweh's reach. Cosmologically opposite heaven, it is a place of gloom and darkness, of silence and oblivion where memories have faded. In all respects it is the opposite of the land of Yahweh's blessing. In the overwhelming majority of texts in which they occur, "sheol" and its semantic equivalents convey negative overtones and are unquestionably linked with the premature or evil death of the wicked.⁸ Thus the idea of judgment looms large in these contexts, bringing into focus

⁵ "Universalism: Will Everyone Be Saved?" *Christianity Today*, March 20, 1987, 31-45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 43-44. Neal Punt argues for "qualified" or "biblical universalism," which differs from universalism proper (in which all, including the devil, will be saved) in that he sees those lost "whom the Scripture expressly declares will be finally lost." Among the latter "are those and only those, who in addition to their sin in Adam, finally persist in refusing to have God in their knowledge."

⁷ *Ibid.*, 40-41. Clark Pinnock argues for this position.

⁸ For a list of passages in support of this observation see Desmond Alexander, "The Old Testament View of Life after Death," *Themelios* 11 (1986): 44.

the primary aspect of Sheol, namely, its condition and power by which it attempts to bring its victims within its domain at Yahweh's bidding and under His sovereign control. But the judgment stops at the point of death. Once a person is consigned to Sheol, the Old Testament is silent with regard to his or her fate, and retribution within Sheol is foreign to its pages. Only toward the end of its literary period does one perceive the dawn of a new era when the idea of retribution after death was faintly hinted at.⁹ This idea forms a definite and integral part of intertestamental literature.

The noncanonical literature that tells of Judaism up to and including New Testament times is extensive, considerably larger than the New Testament.¹⁰ It is traditionally divided into five categories: the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha, the Dead Sea or Qumran Scrolls, the writings of Philo of Alexandria, and the writings of Flavius Josephus.¹¹ In this literature, an indication is given of how through the interpretation, change, and creation of new traditions various groups and individuals wrestled and sought to make sense of the bewildering events and circumstances that touched their lives. These theological responses represent the theoretical undergirdings of the Jews during the turbulent times of the intertestamental period.

Recurrent themes within this literary corpus are apocalyptic speculations about (a) help from the heavenly sphere in the struggle

⁹ Two such passages are Daniel 12:2 and Isaiah 66:24. A generally held view that Old Testament Sheol is merely a neutral concept is disputed by the more recent research in this field. See Ruth Rosenberg, "The Concept of Biblical Sheol within the Context of Ancient Near Eastern Beliefs" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1981), 246-51, esp. 251. Cf. Hans Scharer, "The Development of the Concept of Gehenna and Its Use in the Synoptics" (ThD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1991), 116-19, esp. 118-19, where the author argues for a dichotomy in that a few texts imply Sheol to be the destination of all men (Ps. 89:48; Eccles. 9:10), whereas, in the majority of passages in which the term occurs it is unquestionably linked with the evil or premature death of the wicked.

¹⁰ The period is usually referred to as the "intertestamental period," which in its strict signification defines the time between the Old and New Testaments, or the approximately "400 silent years" between the Book of Malachi and the writings of the New Testament. The literary evidence, though, of this period encompasses a shorter span of time, namely, from the late third century B.C. to the early second century A.D.

¹¹ See, for example, George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 5-6. To this could be added some rabbinic material, though much of it, with its elaborate descriptive details of Gehenna and its associated punishment dates later than the first century A.D. and must be used with caution. Anyone acquainted with this literature is aware of the difficulties in dating it. Regarding this latter point, Philip S. Alexander states that some of the dates assigned to early rabbinic texts are highly questionable and are often reached on very subjective grounds ("Rabbinic Judaism and the New Testament," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 83 [1974]: 240). He points out that rabbinic literature is made up of school texts containing the deposit of a tradition that grew up over several centuries, and as such is extremely difficult to date. In many cases the margin of error could be up to 200 years.

against God's enemies, (b) the hope and expectation for a human helper, that is, a messiah, in this struggle, and (c) speculations about God's justice in a world that seemed full of injustice.¹² However, the reader looks in vain for an orderly arrangement of these concepts that would allow him to see a logical, consistent development of them. Instead he is confronted with a disarray of thought that is impulsive and often contradictory, yet true to life, in that it represents the outpourings of impassioned writers who vent their feelings of anger and ecstasy through their writings. This is particularly true in relation to eschatological predictions about the enemies of God's people and their ultimate fate. Regarding the final state of the wicked during early intertestamental Judaism, Glasson states, "As for the final fate of the wicked, there is no consistent teaching."¹³ In view of this, how is one to tackle the problem of showing the significant changes that occurred during this period in Jewish beliefs concerning the underworld, namely, Sheol (= Hades)?¹⁴

The answer to this question lies in a method of presentation that pays attention to the recognizable stages of conceptual changes about the underworld. These can be treated in three groups: the continuation of the "traditional" Old Testament view of Sheol; Sheol as an intermediate state; and Sheol, Gehenna, and Tartarus as places of final punishment. To summarize briefly, the findings in relation to this latter group indicate Gehenna, Tartarus, and Sheol to be places of final punishment, with Tartarus being reserved for the place of punishment for rebel angels.¹⁵ In some places the descriptive details of Sheol are similar to those of Gehenna, in which case these con-

¹² See Bruce M. Metzger, *An Introduction to the Apocrypha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 155-56, for this point on the Apocrypha. Cf. James H. Charlesworth, "Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:xxix-xxxiv, where he notes that frequently found theological concerns in the Pseudepigrapha are sin, evil, and the problem of theodicy; transcendence of God; messianism; resurrection and paradise.

¹³ T. Francis Glasson, "Apocalyptic Ideas of Judaism Contemporary with Our Lord," *London Quarterly & Holborn Review* 29 (1960): 168. James Thayer Addison observes that "no two writers give quite the same picture" (*Life beyond Death in the Beliefs of Mankind* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1933], 201).

¹⁴ That these changes were significant is easily recognized by the fact that in the Judaism of the first century A.D., including the New Testament, the Old Testament concept of Sheol has all but disappeared and given way to the specific concepts of Hades, Gehenna, and Tartarus. Metzger states, "The doctrine which underwent perhaps the greatest development during the intertestamental period was that which pertains to the after-life" (*An Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 156). He further notes that the intervening stages of the growth of this doctrine with its many ramifications are reflected particularly in the Wisdom of Solomon and 2 Maccabees in the Apocrypha, and the Psalms of Solomon and 1 Enoch in the Pseudepigrapha.

¹⁵ See Scharen, "The Development of the Concept of Gehenna and Its Use in the Synoptics," 160-74, for support of and a fuller discussion of these findings.

cepts coalesce. Gehenna is clearly identified as a place of punishment for the wicked. However, apart from its identification as a place of judgment for the wicked and the frequent mention of fire, darkness, and dread, inconsistencies regarding its location and various descriptive details are common. Earlier accounts locate it on earth and identify it with the literal Valley of Hinnom¹⁶ south of Jerusalem.¹⁷ Others locate it in heaven in juxtaposition to Paradise, the place of delight and reward for the righteous, one of their delights being the spectacle of punishment of the wicked in Gehenna.

This valley acquired an evil reputation because of the idolatrous practice of child sacrifices offered to Moloch there during the days of Ahaz and Manasseh, two of the most notorious kings to ever lead Judah, the southern part of the divided monarchy (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). Later, during the reign of Josiah, this faithful king had the valley desecrated in order to prevent a recurrence of this abominable practice (2 Kings 23:10). Still later the Prophet Jeremiah announced that this valley would become a place of God's future judgment, where the Lord would recompense the kings of Judah and the people of Jerusalem for their abominable deeds. Hence the valley would no longer be called the "Valley of Ben Hinnom," but the "Valley of Slaughter" (Jer. 7:30-34; 19:1-11).¹⁸ This historical sketch and the negative characteristics associated with this valley, as well as its designation as a site for a future judgment for the ene-

¹⁶ The term "Gehenna" appears abruptly in the apocalyptic literature of Judaism of the second century B.C. Bible encyclopedias and dictionaries relate its origin to "the Valley of Hinnom," which in the Hebrew Bible is variously referred to as "the Valley of the Son of Hinnom," "the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom," or simply as "the Valley of Hinnom." Transliteration of the last of these Hebrew forms, גֵּהֶנְזַיִם, led to γαίεννα in the Septuagint or γέεννα in the New Testament, where it is anglicized as the familiar "Gehenna."

¹⁷ The traditional explanation that a burning rubbish heap in the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem gave rise to the idea of a fiery Gehenna of judgment is attributed to Rabbi David Kimhi's commentary on Psalm 27:13 (ca. A.D. 1200). He maintained that in this loathsome valley fires were kept burning perpetually to consume the filth and cadavers thrown into it. However, Strack and Billerbeck state that there is neither archeological nor literary evidence in support of this claim, in either the earlier intertestamental or the later rabbinic sources (Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud and Midrasch*, 5 vols. [Munich: Beck, 1922-56], 4:2:1030). Also a more recent author holds a similar view (Lloyd R. Bailey, "Gehenna: The Topography of Hell," *Biblical Archeologist* 49 [1986]: 189).

¹⁸ Another name for this valley was "Tophet," a term used by Isaiah when he described the forthcoming destruction of the Assyrians by fire in the valley near Jerusalem, where the Lord would have a fiery furnace ready to devour the Assyrian princes and king (Isa. 30:31-33; 31:9). The same valley is probably in view in Isaiah 66:24, which speaks of a climactic slaughter of the wicked in the future in such close proximity to the south of Jerusalem that the whole ghastly spectacle would be witnessed by the righteous of that city. They would be witnesses to the judgment of God's enemies, whose "worm shall not die" and whose "fire shall not be quenched."

mies of God, lent themselves as an ideal literal basis for the metaphorical expression of an eschatological place of judgment and final abode for the wicked.¹⁹

Apart from these differing descriptive details, the concept of Gehenna underwent significant changes with regard to its domain. It was first conceived as a place of final punishment, later as an intermediate place, and finally as a purgatory, the latest stage of development being confined to rabbinic literature. In its earliest mention it is reserved for apostate Jews only but is gradually expanded to include all the wicked, Jews and Gentiles alike. The existence in Gehenna is depicted predominantly as for one's whole being (body and soul) rather than merely the soul.²⁰ All these ideas about Gehenna exist side by side in this literature.

This brief survey of the background of views on Gehenna demonstrates the advance the intertestamental literature, specifically apocalyptic eschatology, makes on the traditional Old Testament theology of Sheol. The latter makes no distinction between the wicked and the righteous, and the idea of postmortem retribution is absent apart from a few faint hints. However, within apocalyptic eschatology the different fates of the wicked and righteous become increasingly emphasized and their respective dwelling places become more absolutely differentiated. Within this development, the sudden appearance of Gehenna and its inseparable connection with the destiny of the wicked take on a prominent role.

Gehenna in the New Testament

The lack of precision in the use of terms relating to the netherworld in intertestamental Judaism makes it difficult to define them exactly in the New Testament. Strawson notes, "It must be admitted at the outset that we are considering one of the most intractable prob-

¹⁹ The difficulty for the exegete of the literature of the intertestamental period consists in distinguishing between the literal and figurative (metaphorical) uses of the term, in view of the fact that these writers lacked consistency and often blurred or telescoped eschatological events. Thus it is difficult to determine whether a certain writer viewed Gehenna as the valley south of Jerusalem in this age, or in a future aeon with a renewed earth, or as an otherworldly entity, that is, the final eschatological place or state of the wicked.

²⁰ Cf. H. C. C. Cavallin, *Life after Death: Paul's Argument for the Resurrection of the Dead in I Cor 15*, Coniectanea Biblica, New Testament Series 7:1 (Lund: Gleerup, 1974), 212. His conclusion regarding the anthropology reflected in the works of intertestamental Judaism is that "no common view on the relationship between the body and soul has been found in these texts.... In the same writings, and even the same passages, concepts and symbols from widely differing anthropologies are used in order to express the hope of personal survival of death." However, there is one common denominator among these variously expressed anthropologies, namely, "the conviction that the personality survives death in that which constitutes the personal identity."

lems of New Testament study, in trying to determine what Jesus himself said about hell, and how his words are now to be interpreted."²¹

The word γέεννα occurs 12 times in the New Testament with 11 of the occurrences in the Synoptic Gospels (all spoken by Jesus) and with one reference being James 3:6. The 11 references may be seen in three groups: (a) warnings addressed to the disciples concerning stumbling blocks (Matt. 5:29-30; 18:8-9; Mark 9:43-48); (b) warnings addressed to the disciples in relation to their personal destiny (Matt. 5:22; 10:28; Luke 12:4-5); and (c) condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:15, 33). The first group of verses is discussed in this article, and the other two categories will be discussed in an article in the next issue.

Warnings about Stumbling Blocks

In several passages Jesus gave extraordinarily severe warnings to His disciples about the need to fulfill certain conditions, namely, suffering loss of a valued member of one's body in order to gain life (ζωήν) to avoid being cast bodily into Gehenna (Matt 5:29-30; 18:8-9; Mark 9:43-48). Neither textual nor form-critical considerations are able to question seriously the authenticity of these sayings.²² The slight variations among them may be because they were repeated on more than one occasion.²³ Thus the question of which Gospel was written first²⁴ does not seriously affect the present discussion.

The larger framework of Matthew 5:29-30 is the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), whose unifying theme is the kingdom of heaven (=kingdom of God),²⁵ and in whose teaching Jesus gave a glimpse of

²¹ William Strawson, *Jesus and the Future Life: A Study in the Synoptic Gospels* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 143.

²² No variant readings are indicated in the Matthean passages, whereas the Marcan pericope contains several variants, though not to the extent that the reading is called into question. The United Bible Society Greek New Testament III is accepted, including the omission of Mark 9:44 and 46. These are lacking in important early witnesses and may well be explained as a gloss by copyists who attempted to further qualify $\tau\epsilon\upsilon\epsilon\upsilon\alpha\upsilon$ after verses 43 and 45 on the basis of verse 48. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the UBS Greek New Testament*, 3d ed., corrected (New York: United Bible Society [UBS], 1975), 102.

²³ Cf. Donald A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:151, for a similar view.

²⁴ For a defense of Marcan priority, see Christopher M. Tuckett, *The Revival of the Griesbach Hypothesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For a defense of the priority of the Gospel of Matthew, see William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1976).

²⁵ Carson, "Matthew," 8:127-28. In Carson's view, the establishment of this theme rests not so much on the frequency of occurrence of this expression, but on its occurrence at certain strategic points. "It envelopes the Beatitudes (5:3, 10) and appears in 5:17-20, which details the relation between the OT and the kingdom, a subject that leads

kingdom life through its ethical guidelines. Mere external adherence to the Law demanded by the Old Testament and amplified by the religious leaders of His day, whose teaching is reflected primarily in contemporary (with Jesus) rabbinics, was not sufficient for belonging to this kingdom. This point is aptly demonstrated in the beatitudes and the repeated saying, "You have heard that it was said . . . , but I say unto you. . . ." These indicate a departure and contrast from the teaching of the Old Testament, the contrast involving not so much contradiction as transcendence,²⁶ as indicated by Jesus' statement that He did not come to abolish "the law and the prophets" but to fulfill ($\pi\lambda\eta\rho\acute{\omega}$), in the sense of bringing or revealing its full, definitive meaning in His Person and work as the Messiah.²⁷

The immediate context of Matthew 5:29-30 is the pericope dealing with the Lord's teaching on the two closely related subjects of adultery and divorce (vv. 27-32), with verses 29 and 30 pointing to the radical sacrifice demanded for the purpose of avoiding occasions to commit sin or create stumbling blocks. The pericope begins with the above mentioned "You have heard ... but I say to you . . ." (vv. 27-28), indicating Jesus' transcendence of the Mosaic injunction against adultery (Exod. 20:14; Deut. 5:18) and divorce (Deut. 24:1-4).²⁸ Many commentators note the connection between Jesus' saying about the "eye" in verse 29 and His mention in verse 28 of the lustful gaze involving the eye when adultery is committed.²⁹ In Matthew

to another literary envelope around the body of the sermon (5:17; 7:12). It returns at the heart of the Lord's prayer (6:10), climaxes the section on kingdom perspectives (6:33), and is presented as what finally must be entered (7:21-23)."

²⁶ The viability of transcendence is well within the lexical boundaries of the particle $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$, since unlike the particle $\alpha\lambda\lambda\acute{\alpha}$, it does not always indicate a strong antithesis or contrast in Matthew (W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 3 vols., International Critical Commentary [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988], 1:506-7).

²⁷ For a helpful overview of the issues related to the numerous interpretations of $\pi\lambda\eta\rho\acute{\omega}$, see Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 482-87, esp., 485-86, and Carson, "Matthew," 141-45.

²⁸ Jesus' saying on divorce in Matthew 5:31-32 is a summary of the procedure outlined in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. The transcendence of Jesus' teaching on the subject is plain, in that He focused on the original, divine intent of marriage. For a full discussion of Jesus' teaching on divorce, including the various possible interpretations, see William A. Heth and Gordon J. Wenham, *Jesus and Divorce* (Nashville: Nelson, 1984).

²⁹ The citation of the sixth commandment, as well as the meaning of $\mu\omicron\iota\chi\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omega$, indicates that $\gamma\upsilon\upsilon\eta$ in verse 28 refers to a married woman, rather than just any woman (Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Mattaus*, Evangelischer Katholischer Kommentar Neues Testament I/1 [Zurich: Benziger, 1985], 1:264). However, this restriction of $\gamma\upsilon\upsilon\eta$ does not open the door to the possibility of lusting after unmarried women, since this would be committing adultery against one's own wife. Furthermore this would deafly involve a violation of the intent of Jesus' saying, which was to encourage sexual purity.

18:8-9 and Mark 9:43-47 the sayings are reversed and occur within the context of being a stumbling block to one of the least of those who believe and its dreadful consequences.

The basic intent of Matthew 5:28 is clear. Without negating the Mosaic injunction against the physical act of committing adultery, Jesus went beyond that to the very heart of the matter, pronouncing any man guilty of having already committed adultery in his heart when looking at a woman with a view to lust (ἐπιθυμέω) after her.³⁰ Jesus, then, judged intention as deed, tracing evil deeds to their origin, namely, an individual's thought or inner life.³¹

Verses 29 and 30 record Jesus' serious view of the breaking of the marital bond and show that Jesus called for a radical commitment to obedience.³² These Matthean verses are in the grammatical form of first-class conditions beginning with εἰ and thus assume the reality of the protasis.³³ Lusting is no mere hypothetical matter, it is a reality; and since all sin, including sexual sin, begins with the imagination, it must be dealt with radically. So if one's eye causes him to sin, he should tear it out and throw it from him. A similar radical treatment is required of the hand; it also is to be cut off and thrown away.³⁴ The sayings are repeated in Matthew 18:8a, 9a and Mark

³⁰ Through combining two of the 10 commandments, namely, Exodus 20:17, "You shall not covet [ἐπιθυμήσεις] . . . your neighbor's wife" with 20:14, "You shall not commit adultery," Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:28 brings into focus the Creator's intent in these injunctions.

³¹ James 1:14-15 describes the process of committing an evil deed. It originates in one's own evil passions and desires, which if given free reign, produce the act (sin), which in turn leads to death. This process well illustrates Jesus' transcendence of the Mosaic injunction, the latter focusing, at least on the surface, on the final outcome rather than on the initial stage and process of committing sin.

³² Luz observes that the addition of verse 29 does not merely concern itself with being a mirror of the soul which reveals one's own sin. It indicates the radical nature of the obedience required (*Das Evangelium nach Mattäus*, 266).

³³ Matthew 18:9 has the same grammatical form. But Mark 9:43, 45, and 47 are third-class condition sentences, in which the reality of the protasis is not necessarily assumed. Regarding this difference, Blass and Debrunner note that "encroachment of εἰ on the sphere of ἐάν appears to have taken place sporadically" (F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961], 189-90, par. 372[3]). As examples they cite the references under consideration. Thus the usually sharp distinction between these protases is blurred in these texts. The difference between the Matthean and Marcan use may thus be stylistically influenced.

³⁴ Carson notes that the use of "hand" may be a euphemism for the male sexual organ ("Matthew," 151). Though not the most obvious interpretation, on the basis of Isaiah 57:8, which perhaps uses the same figure, and within the context of adultery in this pericope, his observation should be given consideration. See Samuel Tobias Laths, "Some Textual Observations on the Sermon on the Mount," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 69 (1978): 108-9, for a similar interpretation. However, the use of δεξιὸς (in Matthew 5:29-30 and not in the parallels) militates against this interpretation and favors the more traditional interpretation that "right hand" refers to the more important of the

9:43a, 47a with some minor lexical variations and mention of the fool: as a member of the body that can cause stumbling and that therefore needs to be cut off and thrown away.

The second part of Matthew 5:29 and of 5:30 explains why radical obedience is required: It is better to be maimed physically than to experience absolute spiritual loss.³⁵ However, there are some minor variations within the explanatory parts of these sayings that are significant in relation to the New Testament concept of the afterlife taught by Jesus and thus pertinent to our discussion. The phrase εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν ("enter life") in Matthew 18:8b, 9b and Mark 9:43b, 45b is not included in Matthew 5:29b, 30b.³⁶ Without this positive mitigating factor, the emphasis focuses relentlessly on the judgment of Gehenna.³⁷ In Matthew 18 and Mark 9, however, the additional presence of the opposite concept, namely, entrance into life or into the kingdom of God, does not detract from the severity of the warning of these sayings. On the contrary, it allows Jesus' main concern to come more clearly into focus, which is not His listeners' consignment to Gehenna, but His urging and encouragement of people to take drastic steps to avoid at all costs such a dreaded destiny³⁸

The manner of entrance into Gehenna is depicted differently in these verses. First, entrance into this dreaded place is with one's body. This is made explicit in Matthew 5:29-30, which have people entering with "the whole body" (ὅλον τὸ σῶμά), and is implied in the other passages by the use of synecdoches, "two eyes" (Matt. 18:9; Mark 9:47), "two hands" (Matt. 18:8; Mark 9:43), and "two feet" (Matt. 18:8; Mark 9:45). This mention of a body in connection with Gehenna no doubt assumes an intervening resurrection between death and committal to this place.³⁹ Jesus clearly affirmed such a resurrec-

pair, thereby emphasizing the radical nature of the obedience required by Jesus. In the quest for eternal well-being no cost or sacrifice is to be spared (cf. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "(δέξις," by W. Grundmann, 2:38-39).

³⁵ Matthew 5:29 and 30 carry an explanatory postpositive γάρ plus συμφέρει. In the other references γάρ is lacking. The clauses begin with καλόν σοί ἐστίν (Matt. 18:8b, 9b), or καλόν ἐστίν σε (Mark 9:43b, 45b), and καλόν σοί ἐστίν (9:47b).

³⁶ Mark 9:47b reads εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.

³⁷ Cf. Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, 523. Lohmeyer sees rabbinic influence ("Das Wort ist sozusagen rabbinisiert worden") in Matthew's omission of the contrast between "life" and "Gehenna" in that the verse mentions only the avoidance of destruction in Gehenna (Ernst Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Matthaus*, 2d ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1958], 128). The saying does not contrast this with entrance into life as in the parallel texts, where entrance into life represents the focus and goal of the sayings.

³⁸ Strawson, *Jesus and the Future Life*, 145.

³⁹ As noted earlier (n. 20) the anthropological considerations of Jewish apocalyptic in relation to the afterlife were not consistent. There was considerable overlap of ter-

tion, as in, for example, John 5:28-29, where those with good deeds, that is, the just, shall come forth to a resurrection of life (εἰς ἀνάστασιν ζωῆς), and those with evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment (εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως).

The idea of a resurrection from the dead was an accepted concept in postbiblical Judaism by Jesus' time,⁴⁰ though it was rejected by the Sadducees, who engaged Jesus in vigorous discussions on the subject, attempting to make this doctrine appear ridiculous (Matt. 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40). However, it is doubtful that Jesus was making the point that the body will be raised in exactly the same condition as it was at the time of death. If a body was missing a certain limb at death, Jesus did not indicate that the body would be resurrected without that limb, through some intertestamental and rabbinic texts imply that view.⁴¹

Second, different verbs describe the manner of going to Gehenna. In five verses—Matthew 5:29; 18:8-9; Mark 9:45, 47—Jesus used a form of the aorist passive of βάλλω, with the meaning "to be cast or thrown." In two verses Jesus used the aorist of ἀπέρχομαι, with the meaning "to go off or to depart" (Matt. 5:30; Mark. 9:43). In the five verses the passive focuses on God's activity of retributive justice, whereas the use of the active voice in the other two verses shifts the focus more on individual moral responsibility (as indicated in the words "to enter into life" [εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν, Matt. 18:8-9; Mark 9:43, 45] and "to enter the kingdom of God" [εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν

minology between the terms "soul" and "spirit," which did not necessarily refer to a disembodied entity or the immaterial aspect of man, but could also refer to a person as a whole, body included, in line with the Semitic concept of man, which sees man as a unity and not dichotomized. However, the more systematized treatments of eschatology, such as those in 4 Ezra or 2 Baruch, could conceive of the idea of a disembodied being in an intermediate place/state waiting for the resurrection of the body.

⁴⁰ For a brief discussion of the development of this doctrine from its early beginnings within the history of Judaism, see the conclusion of Ohyun Kwon's dissertation, "The Formation and Development of Resurrection Faith in Early Judaism" (PhD diss., New York University, 1984), 373-79. Cf. Leonard Greenspoon, "The Origin of the Idea of Resurrection," in *Traditions and Transformation: Turning Points in Biblical Faith*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Jon D. Levenson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 247-321. Greenspoon rejects much of the commonly accepted view that sees extensive foreign influence and stimulus—such as Mesopotamian and Canaanite myths and rituals, as well as Zoroastrian beliefs regarding the reconstitution of the body—at work during the early stages of development of this belief in Israel.

⁴¹ E.g., "God himself will again fashion the bones and ashes of men, and he will raise up mortals again as *they were before*" (Syb. Or. 4.181-82 [italics added]). For some later rabbinic texts, see George F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927-30), 2:380-81. Cf. Gunther Stemberger, *Der Leib der Auferstehung: Studien zur Anthropologie and Eschatologie des palastinischen Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter (ca. 170 v. Cr.-100 n. Chr.)*, Analecta Biblica 56 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1972), 23. He notes that bodily

βασαλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ, Mark 9:47]).⁴² However, since some minor textual variants are indicated, this point of difference should not be stressed unduly.⁴³

Third, another difference among these texts is the qualifiers attached to the term Gehenna. In Matthew 5:29-30 and Mark 9:45. γέενναν occurs without any further description. In the other passages, however, it is variously characterized as "hell of fire," τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός (Matt. 18:9); "into hell, into the unquenchable fire," τὴν γέενναν, εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον (Mark 9:43); and "hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched," τὴν γέενναν, ὅπου ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται (Mark 9:47-48). Matthew 18:8 has "the eternal fire," τὸ πῦρ τὸ αἰώνιον, with no reference to Gehenna. However, the context and close proximity of Gehenna in Matthew 18:9 make it unmistakably clear that the same destiny is in view in both verses.⁴⁴

The fire metaphor associated with Gehenna may be traced to Old Testament traditions such as Sodom and Gomorrah, Sinai, and the flame of fire in the burning bush. Combined, these give the impression of a divine visitation. In addition there is the common use of fire in connection with torture and persecution. These observations indicate that this metaphor associated with Gehenna signifies the divinely decreed suffering associated with the eschatological judgment, an observation corroborated particularly by the phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" in such contexts.

The phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is confined to the Gospel of Matthew and one occurrence in Luke. In Matthew 24:51 and Luke 13:28 the phrase stands alone, but it occurs three times in conjunction with "outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) and twice in conjunction with "furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:42, 50). These five references, each spoken by Jesus, refer to the experience of those rejected from the kingdom of God who will suffer eschatological judgment.⁴⁵

resurrection is emphasized and nothing more. Such passages with reference to individual body parts merely affirm the fact of the resurrection, not its manner.

⁴² Matthew 10:28 and Luke 12:4-5 state explicitly that God casts into Gehenna. Going to Gehenna is described as a twofold process involving being killed or dying and facing the subsequent judgment. When going into Gehenna is viewed as a one-step process, human responsibility is more evident.

⁴³ These variants, listed in the Nestle-Aland 26 Greek text, indicate an overlap and distribution of the verbs among the passages. No variants are listed in the apparatus of UBS III.

⁴⁴ Dalman notes that one is "the obvious equivalent" of the other (Gustav Dalman, *The Words of Jesus: Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language*, trans. D. M. Kay [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1909], 156).

⁴⁵ *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s.v. "βρῦχω," by Thomas McKomiskey, 2:421, and "κλαίω," by Hermann Haarbeck, 2:417. McKomiskey notes that there are no parallels to the expression ὁ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὁ βρυγμὸς τῶν ὀδόντων in either secular Greek or Jewish literature. Thus its meaning must be derived contextually from the specific New Testament occurrences. He further observes,

The irreversible finality of this eschatological state is addressed by the several qualifiers of Gehenna and of fire, such as "eternal fire" (Matt. 18:8), "the unquenchable fire" (Mark 9:43), or "where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). Those who willfully disregard Jesus' warning will suffer spiritual loss. The use of αἰώνιος, though subject to a variety of meanings, supports such an interpretation.⁴⁶ There is little doubt that contextually αἰώνιον means "eternal," "endless," or "forever," since the state contemplated in Gehenna in the sayings of Jesus is contrasted with "entrance into life," or being in the kingdom of God, which shall endure forever, or eternally. The New Testament views "entrance into life" or the kingdom of God as entering "the age to come" (αἰών μέλλον), the new and everlasting creation representing the final order of things.⁴⁷ Thus a strong case can be made in support of the view that suffering in Gehenna will be endless or everlasting.

"While it is true that in many instances the usage of βρύχω in the expression 'to gnash the teeth' connotes anger, the association of the word with κλαυθμός (weeping), and the figure of torment that accompanies the term in Matt. 13:42, 50 seem to indicate that the gnashing of the teeth is not an indication of rage but of extreme suffering and remorse." Rengstorf notes that Jesus referred to the "weeping and gnashing of teeth" and "outer darkness" to describe "the state of those who are excluded from the βασιλεία, even though they were called to it," an obvious reference to the Jews, who were the rightful heirs to the kingdom of God, and yet who stubbornly refused to enter the kingdom through their rejection of Jesus Christ, God's Messiah (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. "βρύχω," by Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, 1:641).

⁴⁶ Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich list several meanings of αἰών: (a) "a very long time," time gone by or time to come, that is, "eternity" when no end of time is involved, (b) a segment of time, or an age, such as the present age, (c) the age to come, namely, the Messianic period, (d) the Aeon as a person. The adjective and cognate noun are nearly identical in meaning (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979], 27).

⁴⁷ Sasse notes that the New Testament in its two-aeon view essentially agrees with first-century apocalyptic, except for the latter's clear distinction between the present age and the age to come (Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, s.v. "αἰών," by Hermann Sasse, 1:197-209, esp. 207). In the New Testament this distinction is blurred in that believers are already redeemed from the "present evil age" (αἰών, Gal. 1:4) and "have tasted ... the powers of the age [alaiv] to come" (Heb. 6:5). The transition has already begun "in and with the resurrection of Christ, inasmuch as this is the beginning of the general resurrection (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20, 23)," though as yet, the dawning of this new aeon is concealed from the eyes of men. In Jewish and early Christian eschatology, the resurrection represents the transition point from one aeon to the other and the beginning of the new and eternal creation.

In the Gospel of John entrance into the life of God (=entrance into the kingdom of God) is equated with the kind of life received at regeneration. This is the quality of life believers receive and possess now and in the age to come "without end or interruption," and both αἰών and αἰώνιος are used of this kind of life (John 10:28; 3:36; 5:24; 6:47, 54; cf. 1 John 5:11-13). The believers, then, possess a never-ending or eternal life, and therefore Christ could claim that those who possess this eternal life shall never die (see, e.g., John 6:51, 58; 8:51-52; 11:26).

Summary

What conclusions may be drawn from these observations about Gehenna in these sayings of Jesus? Apart from Matthew 5:29-30, where the emphasis is solely on the judgment of Gehenna, one can hardly ignore the contrast between entrance into life (or into the kingdom of God) and departure to Gehenna (or being thrown into Gehenna). Entrance into life or God's kingdom is of such importance that anything obstructing this goal must be dealt with in the most radical manner. No illustration could more forcefully support this point than Jesus' demand for removal of even the most important and prized members of one's body, namely, the right hand, eye, or foot.

Conversely, a destiny in Gehenna is to be avoided at all costs, since it involves great suffering and an irreversible finality. The suffering is indicated by the "fire," a descriptive detail that occurs from the earliest appearances of this concept in the intertestamental literature. The irreversible finality of one's destiny in Gehenna is indicated by the several qualifiers of Gehenna and of fire, especially the word αἰώνιος. In contrast to the considerable variety of ideas about Gehenna in the literature of the intertestamental period, the New Testament presents Gehenna as the final eschatological punishment for all the wicked.

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Dallas Theological Seminary
3909 Swiss Ave.
Dallas, TX 75204
www.dts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu