

Chapter 18

Gehenna of Fire – Not Hell

When people engage in a discussion of hell, it is not uncommon for many to state that Jesus spoke on hell more than anybody else; therefore, hell is real. They are correct that Jesus did speak on it more than anyone else; in fact, He was the only one to refer to it, but not as hell. He referred to it as the *gehenna of fire*.

What follows is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the physical aspects of *gehenna of fire* in relation to ancient Israel-Judah and their national judgment unto death. The last part focuses on God's purifying fire, not specifically *gehenna* fire, that deals with the sinful, carnal nature of man in general. Both parts deal with the carnal nature to bring about the same result; however, the first one works in the realm of physical death, and the second one works in the realm of fleshly death, death of the sinful nature.

It is rather telling that only Jesus referred to the *gehenna of fire* (aka *hell*); His disciples never did. Peter used the word *tartarus*, not hell, and James used the word *gehenna* in reference to the tongue, not in reference to an endless existence of torture. Paul, the apostle of the nations, never once used the word *gehenna* or referred to *hell* as a place of torment or torture. If hell, as it is taught today, were so important, don't you think that the apostles would have mentioned it in some manner as a warning? Of course, John saw the *lake of fire* and many call this *hell*; but, as is discussed in Chapter 19, this is not hell in the sense that it is viewed today.

Now, eleven of the twelve references to *gehenna* are directly attributed to Jesus (Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5). The twelfth citation is found in the book of James (3:6) in reference to the tongue.

To prove that this is not made up, the following are the *gehenna* verses according to Matthew.

Yet whoever may be saying, 'Stupid!' shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire [fiery gehenna].
(Matthew 5:22 CV [REB])

'But, if thy right eye doth cause thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast from thee, for it is good to thee that one of thy members may perish, and not thy whole body be cast to gehenna.
(Matthew 5:29 YLT [CV, REB])

'And, if thy right hand doth cause thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast from thee, for it is good to thee that one of thy members may perish, and not thy whole body be cast to gehenna.
(Matthew 5:30 YLT [CV, REB])

'And be not afraid of those killing the body, and are not able to kill the soul, but fear rather Him who is able both soul and body to destroy in gehenna. (Matthew 10:28 YLT [CV, REB])

'And if thine eye doth cause thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast from thee; it is good for thee one-eyed to enter into the life, rather than having two eyes to be cast to the gehenna of the fire [fiery gehenna] (Matthew 18:9 YLT [REB])

'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye go round the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and whenever it may happen—ye make him a son of gehenna twofold more than yourselves. (Matthew 23:15 YLT [CV, REB])

'Serpents! brood of vipers! how may ye escape from the judgment of the gehenna? (Matthew 23:33 YLT [CV, REB])

A Garbage Dump

In Jesus' day, *gehenna* referred to a big garbage dump outside the city walls, south of Jerusalem, where refuse, including dead human bodies, especially those of criminals and beggars, was burned day and night and where worms consumed the organic matter, such as human flesh, that was not consumed by fire. **It was a place of death, not a place of torment.** One had to be physically dead to be thrown into *gehenna*.

The dead cannot be tormented, for they are dead! The dead know nothing! It was a literal place of death that all could see and smell as the smoke of its burning went up day and night. Thus, when He spoke of *the gehenna of fire*, Jesus referred to something that most Jews living in Jerusalem would have easily understood in a physical and literal sense.

The Jews, particularly the devout ones, would have also understood the historical significance of this dump, for *gehenna* was synonymous with *the valley of Hinnom*. One of the worst chapters in the history of Judah was played out in *the valley of Ben-Hinnom* or *the valley of the sons of Hinnom* (Joshua 15:8; 18:16; 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Nehemiah 11:30; Jeremiah 7:31, 32; 19:2, 6; 32:35) that led to severe judgment of God's people.

According to Joshua, the valley ran south of Jerusalem, marking the territories of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. The *Dung Gate*, which was on the east side of Jerusalem, had a common sewer that ran to the brook *Kidron* and the valley of *Hinnom*. Within the valley of *Hinnom*, there was a place called *Topheth*, which means "a place that burns" (2 Kings 23:10; Isaiah 30:33; Jeremiah 7:31, 32 (twice); 19:6, 11, 12, 13, 14).

One of the lowest points in the history of Judah occurred at the high place called *Topheth* when God's people committed great acts of idolatry as they offered human sacrifices to the false gods of Baal and Molech (Jeremiah 7:30-31; 32:35). They had fallen away from the Lord by committing gross sin more in line with what would be expected of heathen nations. They were *idolatrous* and *apostate*. Consequently, the Lord spoke through Jeremiah of a pending slaughter of these idolatrous Jews.

(32) "Therefore, behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of the Slaughter; for they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place. (33) And the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky, and for the beasts of the earth; and no one will frighten them away." (Jeremiah 7:32-33 NASB)

Please take special note of the fact that the Lord referred to their dead bodies as food for the birds and the beasts. This was not a place of torment for so-called *living souls* but a place of dead bodies.

Undoubtedly, when He spoke of *gehenna*, Jesus not only had the prophetic words of Jeremiah in mind but also those of Isaiah.

And they will go forth and see the corpses of the mortals who transgressed against Me, for their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched, and they will become a repulsion to all flesh. (Isaiah 66:24 CV)

An unquenched fire means it will do its job fully and completely. Worms are also found in garbage dumps, for they feed off organic matter. Both will outlast the flesh, for their purpose is to consume all flesh. Notice that the fire and worms are associated with the consumption of corpses, which means the person is **dead** and not alive in some fiery torment. The Lord prophesied of **the corpses of mortals**, ones who are not beyond death. Contextually, Isaiah speaks of the fate of apostates that are denied entrance into the Kingdom of Christ. The fact of the matter is they are **dead**.

When there is no more material to serve as fuel for the fire to consume and no more organic matter to serve as food for the worms to consume, what do you think happens to the fire and the worms? They both cease, for their source of "life" has been exhausted.

This should dispel any notion that *the gehenna of fire* is a living hell, as held by so many.

It is worth repeating. *Ge-Hinnom* or *the valley of the sons of Hinnom* was where the Jews who worshipped Baal sacrificed their children to Molech (Jeremiah 32:35), an act that was an abomination to the Lord that led to His divine judgment by death. Through Jeremiah, the Lord declared that it would become *the valley of slaughter* in which **the dead bodies of this people will be food for the birds of the sky and for the beasts of the earth** (Jeremiah 7:32-33; 19:6).

By the way, the law of God requires that the victim of a crime be made whole by the perpetrator. Only the victim can forgive and show mercy to the perpetrator; however, if the victim is murdered, he or she cannot exercise this right. Consequently, the law demands death for premeditated murders, and judgment on the part of the victim is put on hold until the Great White Throne, at which time justice is meted out based on the crime.

Jerusalem – A Broken Jar

Within this same context, the Lord directed Jeremiah **to break the jar in the sight of the men and declare: Just so will I break this people and this city, even as one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot again be repaired; and they will bury in Topheth because there is no other place for burial** (Jeremiah 19:10-11).

Once an old jar is broken, it is of no further value because it cannot be repaired. According to the word of the Lord, there is only one place to dispose of the broken jar, and that is in Topheth. In other words, Jerusalem was going to be broken and cast aside like garbage thrown into a city dump. Jerusalem was going the way of *gehenna*. Jeremiah was commanded to speak a death sentence to the city of Jerusalem and its people because they had turned away from the Lord, no longer trusting Him, but instead had turned to false gods, becoming so morally corrupt that their actions were an abomination to the Lord.

In the short term, this prophecy of divine judgment was fulfilled when the Babylonians captured and destroyed Jerusalem. However, it was later rebuilt under the leadership of Nehemiah, only to be destroyed again in 70 AD by the Romans. Like a cat with nine lives, Jerusalem was rebuilt again, and it is now the religiously divided city of the state of Israel.

But take note that this sentence has finality to it. The potter's vessel was to be broken, which cannot again be repaired. In other words, the ancient city of Jerusalem must be broken (destroyed) in such a way that it will never be repaired. Given the fact that ancient Jerusalem has been rebuilt in Israel, there is only one fate awaiting the present Jerusalem; it is the divine judgment of *gehenna*. It must be cast out (Galatians 4:21-31).

If Jeremiah's prophecy is to be believed, and there is good reason to believe it, then a day must come when Jerusalem will be destroyed again, never again to be repaired.

The fact of the matter is that God is now building New Jerusalem, not an earthly city of bricks and mortar but a celestial city of glorified and immortal people, the Body of Christ. Therefore, the earthly Jerusalem, no matter how many times it is rebuilt, must one day be destroyed, never again to be repaired.

Now, why must Jerusalem face the divine judgment of *gehenna*?

(29) 'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and adorn the tombs of the righteous, (30) and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. (31) So that ye testify to yourselves, that ye are sons of them who did murder the prophets; (32) and ye—ye fill up the measure of your fathers. (33) Serpents! brood of vipers! how may ye escape from the judgment of the gehenna?' (Matthew 23:29-33 YLT)

"Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify.... (Matthew 23:34 NASB)

(37) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. (38) Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!" (Matthew 23:37-38 NASB)

Jesus is the Prophet who came to fulfill the Prophets (Matthew 5:17; 21:11, 46; Mark 6:4); and the very ones who should have accepted Him and believed in Him, for they knew who He was (Matthew 21:37-39), were the ones who rejected Him, even demanded His crucifixion (Mark 15:13, 14; John 19:15). **The Jews both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets** (1 Thessalonians 2:14-15).

Jesus spoke many parables to hide the mysteries of the Kingdom of the Heavens from the unbelieving Jews. His parables often spoke of those who will enter His coming Kingdom because they believe in Him and those who will not enter because they are enemies of God, that is, enemies of the cross, because they do not believe on God's Son. Excerpts from two of His parables prove the point.

(1) Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying, (2) "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. ... (6) and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them. (7) But the king was enraged, and he sent his armies and destroyed those murderers and set their city on fire." (Matthew 22:1-2, 6-7 NASB)

(14) "But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us.' ... (27) "But these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them in my presence." (Luke 19:14, 27 NASB)

The enemies and citizens who refused His reign were unbelieving Judahites who lived in Judea and the city of Jerusalem, a fact that was not lost to Paul when he wrote to the Philippians.

(18) For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, (19) whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (20) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.... (Philippians 3:18-20 NASB) [Note the difference between enemies and citizens.]

Why would Paul weep over these enemies? Because they were of his kindred flesh; that is, they were Jews who rejected Christ (Romans 9:1-3).

These few points are enough to make it clear that the valley of *Hinnom* signified the death of God's people, not the heathen nations; and when Jesus spoke of *gehenna*, He spoke to Jews, not to gentiles (the nations).

In the context of ancient Israel's apostate history, *gehenna* refers to the judgment of death and destruction due to moral corruption of the highest order, in the same vein as the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. They had failed miserably to obey God's law as given to them through Moses.

Consequently, when He walked among the Jews of that day, Jesus put His finger on the pulse of the condition of the Judahites. They were in danger of *the gehenna of fire*, which could be likened to capital punishment (judgment by death), because they had sunk to a low moral state in which they, as ones called of God through the fathers, refused to believe His Word, which led them to profanely demand the death of God's Son.

In 70 AD, they faced *the gehenna of fire* as Jerusalem was destroyed and many Jews were killed by the Romans. Contrary to the thinking of many Christians, the same destiny awaits the modern-day nation of Israel that has usurped Joseph's birthright and continues to reject Christ.

Gehenna is not the pagan concept of hell; it is God's judgment of those who profanely turn from Him, and, in the context of ancient Israel, it speaks of physical death, not torture.

In spite of how horrific this might sound, it is actually good news. Those who suffer the fate of *gehenna* (i.e., death) will be raised from the dead at the second resurrection to face the lake of fire, a judgment of works, a purifying work that will ultimately lead to their reconciliation and restoration.

Thus, *gehenna* refers to God's divine judgment that came upon ancient Jerusalem and its unbelieving, apostate citizens, and to a prophetic judgment that is yet to come upon modern Jerusalem and its unbelieving citizens that continue as enemies of the cross. If they, along with all the unrighteous of the world, are to avoid *gehenna*, they must repent and believe in the very One their fathers demanded be crucified, Jesus, the Savior of the world; they need the grace of God and the faith of the Son. If they do not believe, then *gehenna* and exclusion from the Kingdom of Christ awaits them.

But, there is good news. Those who suffer the fate of *gehenna* will come out of the state of death at the second resurrection to face the lake of fire, a purifying judgment of the works of the flesh; **so all Israel will be saved** (Romans 11:26). Paul stated this knowing that all the nations, including ancient Israel, along with all mankind, will be saved by being brought into subjection to Christ. Ultimately, all things on earth and in heaven will be reconciled to God at the consummation of the eons, so that **God the Father may all in all new**. Mercy to ALL!

Is the Soul Immortal?

'And be not afraid of those killing the body, and are not able to kill the soul, but fear rather Him who is able both soul and body to destroy in gehenna.' (Matthew 10:28 YLT)

This verse is often cited in defense of man's hell and the immortality of the soul. Keep in mind that man is spirit, soul, and body; a fact given to us by Paul.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23 NASB)

This is an important verse, for some see spirit and soul as one and the same, making no distinction between the two. This creates confusion.

Consider these few points.

First, soul comes forth when the breath of the spirit of life is breathed into an inanimate body. When spirit enters the body, it becomes animated as **a living soul**. By the way, soul is more a phenomenon than an entity; therefore, it could be called *soul* without the article *the*.

Second, if soul only comes into being when body and spirit are joined, then it only follows that soul does not exist prior to the body becoming a living soul. It only becomes *soul* when the breath of the spirit of life enters the body. This is an important point, for it proves that soul is not immortal, at least on the front end or before life comes into the body. In other words, it does not exist in some mystical state that we have no conscious awareness of prior to our birth. Another way of stating this is that it is not eternal in the sense of existing before birth.

Third, *soul* is the animation of the body and its relationship and interaction with the environment in which it lives and partakes. It is not life per se but the human experience of living in a body that sees, touches, tastes, smells, etc. We could define *soul* as the experience of life in a body as experienced through the sensations and feelings of seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling. As such, soul could be likened to a phenomenon and a capacity.

Fourth, **the soul [nephesh] of the flesh is in the blood** (Leviticus 17:11 DNT), which means that soul is intimately joined to the blood of the body. Take away the blood, and what happens to the soul? Herein lies the answer to the question of whether soul is immortal or not.

If the blood is drained out of a body, what happens to the body and the blood? Obviously, the body dies and returns to the soil and so does the blood, except the blood dries up and is absorbed back into the soil much faster than the bones of the body.

Pour out (drain) the blood, and both the blood and the body die, meaning the living soul dies. So, if the soul of the flesh, that is, of the body, is in the blood, and death ensues when the blood is poured out, then logic dictates that soul dies too. Death brings an end to the experiences of the body. They are no more, and surely their experiences are gone as well.

Death is death, which is a cessation of life; it is not life in what some call afterlife or life in heaven or in death or, for that matter, even in what people call *hell*. You cannot have life in death; it is an oxymoronic statement requiring death to be redefined to include life.

The fact of the matter is that there is no scriptural evidence that soul departs the body and goes to heaven or into some afterlife *in* death. There is no evidence that the phenomenon called *soul* is immortal, for immortality means that one comes into a life that is beyond the reach of death, never to experience it again.

It is safe to state that believing in the immortality of the soul has led to the popular belief that when people die, they go to either heaven or hell. However, this concept is more in line with pagan religion traced to ancient Egypt and Babylon and, later, the Greeks. By the time of Jesus' first advent, the Jews had a long history of being exposed to Greek philosophy that believed in the immortality of the soul, and this thinking had infiltrated into Jewish teaching.

Some state that this error came through the philosophy of Plato (428-348 BC) and his student Socrates. Evidently, Plato's thinking was a strange blend of ancient Babylonian and Egyptian thinking. Plato and Socrates taught that the soul was immortal and, at the time of death, the body and soul separate. Unfortunately, Christians were corrupted by Greek philosophy early on as well. By 200 AD, the belief in the immortality of the soul had become a controversy amongst Christians.

This has become so entrenched in Christendom today that there is hardly any controversy, at least, until someone comes along who challenges or simply questions the common thinking of the day; thinking that seems more like the **tradition of men** that Jesus spoke strongly against.

One recent example is Rob Bell who has been labeled a heretic by some for his book *Love Wins*. It is rather telling when someone writes on the love of God and is labeled a heretic by his own brethren in Christ. Are we any better than the Latin church of the Middle (Dark) Ages that labeled as a heretic anyone who disagreed with the doctrine of the pope?

When it comes to what Jesus spoke, especially to His detractors, many have taken His words and created church doctrine and dogma. One example is the *parable* of the Rich Man and Lazarus. However, Jesus often exhorted the religious elite of His day by using things they believed even if they were error. Simply, He did not always correct them but, instead, sort of threw their error right back at them.

For example, when the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, Jesus did not correct them by telling them that the Baal-god, which was known as the god of flies or of dung, was a false god to be ignored. Instead, Jesus asked: **"If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges"** (Matthew 12:27). Some teach that Beelzebub is Satan, but Jesus was using the word as a parody, which treats a serious subject in a nonsensical manner, as in ridicule. *Beelzebub* is of Chaldean origin

and referred to baal-zebul, which was a special deity of the Ekronites. Notice how Jesus hit them head-on using their own terminology. We could say that He threw dung at them.

We must be careful not to make every word of Jesus' into some deep theological or universal, doctrinal truth. Unfortunately, a lot of this has been done to support doctrines involving heaven, hell, and the immortality of the soul.

This leads to Matthew 10:28. What did Jesus mean by **fear Him who is able to destroy (kill) both soul and body in *gehenna* (hell)?**

Taken at face value, this means no one is alive in hell, for they (soul and body) are destroyed (killed). However, Jesus was not defining a new doctrine. Simply, He was challenging the Greek teaching on the immortality of the soul without directly propounding a doctrine that refuted it. He knew what was taught in that day and what some of the Jews, even His disciples, erroneously believed. They knew the body died but believed the soul went on to some afterlife in death. Jesus cut right to the heart of the matter that the soul and body die.

The message Jesus conveyed was about fearing God who judges through the ***gehenna of fire***, which is divine judgment unto death or **God's capital punishment**. Ones killed by *gehenna* will rise up to be judged before the Great White Throne. The soul is included because it too dies with the body. The dead do not know anything. Likewise, in the *gehenna of fire*, the dead (body and soul) do not know anything either. There is no knowledge because death is the cessation of life; take the body away, and the soul ceases to exist, for it is the experience of the body.

There is one more point. Although Paul does not use the word *gehenna*, he indicates that believers can be judged unto the point of death as well. He exhorted the Corinthians that some had not judged the body rightly; therefore, they had been judged by the Lord even unto death (sleep) (1 Corinthians 11:27-32). He also exhorted them with the example of many Israelites who fell (died) in one day and others who were destroyed by the serpents and the destroyer (1 Corinthians 10:8-12). Paul even delivered an immoral man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh (1 Corinthians 5:1-5).

This leads to what could be called *spiritual fire*.

Spiritual Fire

On a spiritual level, ***God is a consuming fire*** speaks of God, who is Spirit and Holy, purifying the sinful flesh of man, burning up the carnal nature, not through fire as we know it in the natural realm but through spiritual fire. In a sense, all of mankind, believer and unbeliever alike, must be purified through God's spiritual fire. The difference between the two groups is the **timing** and **severity** of the fire. Thus, in reviewing verses that deal with fire, we need to be aware of the recipients that are in view, for they could be the righteous (the Lord's people) or the wicked (the unbelievers).

Holy Spirit fire purifies the spirit and soul of man, leaving nothing untouched. It is likened to removing the chaff, the unwanted hull, by threshing. The chaff is the husk of the wheat or any grain. In a figurative sense, it refers to anything **worthless**. Metaphorically speaking, the threshing is done by God's fire until the chaff is all consumed.

In reference to believers, Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit and fire and burning of the chaff.

(11) "As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (12) His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (Matthew 3:11-12 NASB)

The same concept is seen in reference to the end of the age, possibly the end of the Kingdom Age, except it is referred to as the furnace of fire that is reserved for the unbeliever.

(41) "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, (42) and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:41-42 NASB)

(49) "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, (50) and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:49-50 NASB)

Again, this must not be taken as what man knows of fire or of a literal furnace but rather *Holy Spirit fire* that consumes the sinful nature, the carnal flesh. God is not out to annihilate man, as if to wipe him out completely and forever. He is after man's sinful or carnal nature and the works that emanate from this nature. Further, it is not a place, such as a literal furnace; it is an action that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

(7) But I tell you the truth, it is advantageous for you that I should go; for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you. But if I go, I will send Him to you. (8) And having come, that One will convict the world concerning sin, and concerning righteousness, and concerning judgment. (9) Concerning sin, because they do not believe into Me; (10) and concerning righteousness, because I am going to the Father, and you no longer see Me; (11) and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged. (John 16:7-11 LITV)

As recorded by Matthew, Jesus established for His disciples a standard of righteousness that was higher than what was demanded under the Law given to Moses. Notice that in each case, Jesus referred to *gehenna*.

Yet whoever may be saying, 'Stupid!' shall be liable to the Gehenna of fire [fiery gehenna]. (Matthew 5:22 CV [REB])

(29) 'But, if thy right eye doth cause thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast from thee, for it is good to thee that one of thy members may perish, and not thy whole body be cast to gehenna. (30) 'And, if thy right hand doth cause thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast from thee, for it is good to thee that one of thy members may perish, and not thy whole body be cast to gehenna. (Matthew 5:29-30 YLT [CV, REB])

'And be not afraid of those killing the body, and are not able to kill the soul, but fear rather Him who is able both soul and body to destroy in gehenna. (Matthew 10:28 YLT [CV, REB])

'And if thine eye doth cause thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast from thee; it is good for thee one-eyed to enter into the life, rather than having two eyes to be cast to the gehenna of the fire [fiery gehenna]. (Matthew 18:9 YLT [REB])

Obviously, Jesus was not telling His disciples to maim themselves in order to enter the Kingdom of God or to avoid a place called *gehenna* (aka *hell* according to many).

He was telling them that they needed to judge themselves in this life rather than face the judgment of God, either in this life or later at the judgment seat of God. Another way of stating this is: Allow the fire of God to judge the part of you that is in sin now, so that your whole being will not have to face God's fire at the Great White Throne Judgment, that is, be condemned or be "judged against" with the unbelieving world. **And He will cut him (servants) apart and will put his portion with the unbelievers** (Luke 12:46).

Paul was quite aware of Jesus' teaching on the matter and picked up this theme in his epistles. Notice Paul's use of three Greek words: *diakrino*, which means "to separate thoroughly, discern"; *paideuo*, which means "to train children, chasten, correct"; and *katakrino*, which means "to judge against."

(31) But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged [diakrino]. (32) But when we are judged [diakrino], we are disciplined [paideuo] by the Lord so that we will not be condemned [katakrino] along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:31-32 NASB)

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned [katakrino] sin in the flesh.... (Romans 8:3 NASB)

(11) For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, (12) instructing [paideuo] us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, (13) looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, (14) who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:11-14 NASB)

(12) Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, (13) each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. (14) If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. (15) If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. (1 Corinthians 3:12-15 NASB)

Again, Paul simply elaborated on what Jesus had taught His disciples. Although he did not use the word *gehenna*, Paul did inject *fire* into the judgment of the works of the believer. Notice that Paul has the believer being judged in this life and in the day, which speaks of standing before the *bema* of Christ as the fire of God judges works. For this reason, we must **deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age.** Why? Because of **the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus!**

Obviously, there is much more that could be said about these verses, but the point is that Paul's teaching, as given to the saints, comes from Jesus' teaching, as given to His disciples; therefore, the message applies to all of us who believe in this age. The other point is that fire is involved in the judgment of God's people, and, since Jesus tied His message to His disciples, it could be likened to (but not quite the same as) the *gehenna of fire*. After all, putting aside the concept of a place of eternal torture, believers who do not conquer in this life could have a part in the second death or the lake of fire. **He who conquers will not be hurt by the second death** (Revelation 2:11).

This should cause serious doubt in the minds of those holding to the present-day concept of *gehenna-hell* as an eternal place of torture, for it means that Christians could be faced with the possibility of an eternal *hell* just as the world is; a most untenable idea. Think about it!

Now, returning to Jesus' teaching, He spoke to the unbelieving religious elite of the day that rejected Him.

'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye go round the sea and the dry land to make one proselyte, and whenever it may happen—ye make him a son of gehenna twofold more than yourselves. (Matthew 23:15 YLT [CV, REB])

'Serpents! brood of vipers! how may ye escape from the judgment of the gehenna? (Matthew 23:33 YLT [CV, REB])

The hypocritical unbelievers of Judah were under the judgment of *gehenna*. Again, their national judgment by fire came in 70 AD when God's Roman army destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, thus, making Judaism obsolete. However, individually the ones who rejected their Messiah will yet face the lake of fire, the final judgment of God.