

# THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;  
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,  
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God  
IN CHRIST JESUS.***

(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#04-1038

## ***Gehenna, Divine Judgment***

April 9, 2010

The last issue (#04-1037) very briefly explained the meaning of *gehenna*, which is often translated as *hell* in many English Bibles. If one wants to persist in using the word *hell*, it, at least, should be used in the manner in which the word *gehenna* is presented in Scripture, that is, to refer to judgment that leads to death and destruction and not to an afterlife or life (consciousness) in death that consists of endless torture and torment. *Gehenna* should not be confused with *sheol* or *hades*, which refer to the unseen state (unconsciousness likened to sleep) of the dead.

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

*Ge-Hinnom* or *the valley of the sons of Hinnom* was where the Israelites 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). 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 thriving capital-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*.

If Jeremiah's prophecy is to be believed, and we have no reason not 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. (Please see the series on *New Jerusalem*.) Therefore, the earthly Jerusalem, no matter how many times it is rebuilt, must one day be destroyed, never again to be repaired. I realize that this is a hard pill to swallow for many Christians who have been taught otherwise; but are we to believe Scripture or not?

Now, why must Jerusalem face the divine judgment of *gehenna*? Let us consider Jesus' words.

**(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)

**(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)

**"Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify....** (Matthew 23:34 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). It is amazing how some big-name preachers of Christian Zionism deny Paul's word on the matter.

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, refusing to 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.]

In conclusion, *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 even in this seemingly bad news. Those Judahites, along with all the unbelieving and wicked born of Adam's race, 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 purifying judgment of the works of the flesh, **so all Israel will be saved** (Romans 11:26), so that 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**.