

## One Word Study: “Hell” -What is Hell Like?

### INTRODUCTION:

- A. Texts: Texts on “Gehenna” and “Hell”
- B. Matthew Hiatt wrote: “A Google search for ‘**most famous sermon in history**’ returns a fiery sermon by Jonathan Edwards in 1741 entitled ‘**Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.**’”
  - 1. “The sermon was a vivid description of a sinner on the brink of Hell, scarcely saved from the horrors of the wrath of God.”
  - 2. “Edwards warned the audience that they were dangling on a spider’s thread over the great and unending fire unless they repented and obeyed Jesus” (112).
  - 3. A powerful and frightful sermon indeed!
- C. **[S2] Concerning Hell:** Let’s study about what the Bible says about hell, but I want to begin with this point...
  - I. **[S2A] God Doesn’t Want You to Go to Hell.**
    - A. We hear, “How could a loving God send anyone to hell?”
    - B. God wants all people to be saved.
      - 1. **[S2B]** God “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).
      - 2. **[S3]** “The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” – 2 Peter 3:9
      - 3. **[S4]** In fact, God gave His Son to die on the cross so that you won’t have to go to hell!
  - II. **[S5] Hell is for the devil, his angels, and all who reject Jesus.**
    - A. **[S5A]** “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’ – Matthew 25:41
      - 1. Matthew Hiatt: “Jesus isn’t saying that it is a place that is prepared for them to own and operate. No! He is

describing them as the first residents, the reason that the place exists.”

2. “God invented Hell because that was the best solution for dealing with the devil. The same idea is found in Revelation 20” (116; see Revelation 20:10).

B. **[S6] Hell is the place of punishment appointed for the disobedient wicked.**

### III. **[S7] What Is Hell Like?**

A. **[S8] Background to the word “Gehenna”:** When we speak of “hell,” the place of punishment for the disobedient wicked, we’re referring to the Greek word “*géenna*.” This word is commonly transliterated into English as ***Gehenna*** (Workman in Thompson).

1. **γέεννα *géenna*, gheh'-en-nah; of Hebrew origin (H1516 and H2011); valley of (the son of) Hinnom; ge-henna (or Ge-Hinnom), a valley of Jerusalem, used (figuratively) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment: — hell.**
2. “The Greek *géenna* is the predominant term used in the New Testament to depict hell. The word “represents the Aramaic expression *ge hinnom*, meaning ‘**Valley of Hinnom**’ (Neh. 11:30; cf. Josh. 15:8), and for this reason the word is commonly transliterated into English as *Gehenna*” (Workman, 1993, p. 496). Several sites have been suggested for **the “valley of Hinnom”** (or Valley of the Son of Hinnom, Vos, 1956, 2:1183; Earle, 1986, p. 447), but most authorities now believe that it was located on **the south side of Jerusalem**. In the Bible, the valley is mentioned first in Joshua 15:8. Centuries later, the **apostates of Judah used it as a place to offer child sacrifices to the pagan god Molech** (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6)” (Thompson).
  - a. **[S8A] King Ahaz of Judah “burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had cast out before the children of Israel.” – 2 Chronicles 28:3**

- b. King Manasseh later practiced the same abomination in the same location (2 Chronicles 33:6).
  3. “When good king Josiah ascended the throne and overthrew the practice of idolatry, he “defiled” the place called Topheth (a name signifying something to be abhorred and spit upon) in the Valley of Hinnom (2 Kings 23:10). **The valley came to be reviled for the evil that had occurred there, and eventually turned into a smoldering garbage dump that served the entire city of Jerusalem.** Years later, it even was used as **a potter’s field** [paupers’ grave] (as is evident from the many rock tombs that are known to rest at its lower end)” (Thompson; see end of outline for more info.).
  4. “**A perpetual fire burned**, to prevent the spread of contagion, and **worms and maggots** performed their unseen, unsavory tasks amidst the debris and decay (see Morey, 1984, p. 87; cf. Foster, 1971, pp. 764-765).
  5. **[S9]** J. Arthur Hoyles graphically described the grisly goings-on: “Here the fires burned day and night, destroying the garbage and putrefying the atmosphere from the smell of rotten flesh or decaying vegetation. In time of war the carcasses of vanquished enemies might mingle with the refuse, thus furnishing patriotic writers with a clue as to the destiny of their own persecutors. They were destined to be destroyed in the fires that were never quenched” (1957, p. 118 in Thompson).
- B. It is the word “Gehenna” that is used to refer to the place of punishment for the disobedient wicked. “It was not to the literal Valley of Hinnom outside Jerusalem that they referred, nor anything similar to it, but rather to **‘the *Gehenna* of fire’ in a realm beyond the grave**” (Thompson).
- C. The word gehenna is used only 12 times from Matthew – Revelation. David Stevens has pointed out: “It is also significant that **eleven of the twelve times** that the word *gehenna* is used, **it is used by the Lord Himself!** Thus, it is evident that what we know about *gehenna*, we learn from the

Lord himself ” (1991, 7[3]:21 in Thompson). The other reference is James 3:6.

**D. What does Jesus say about hell? How is hell described?**

1. It is **a place of punishment** for the disobedient wicked.
  - a. **[S10]** “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the **everlasting fire** prepared for the devil and his angels.’ – Matthew 25:41
  - b. “And these will go away into **everlasting punishment**, but the righteous into eternal life.” – Matthew 25:46
2. It is a place of **“outer darkness”** where there will be **“weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**
  - a. **[S11]** “And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” – Matthew 25:30, from the Parable of the Talents
  - b. Hell is a place that is filled with “the gloom of utter darkness” (Jude 13).
3. It is a place **where “the worm does not die” and “the fire is not quenched.”**
  - a. **[S12]** “<sup>43</sup>If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched; <sup>44</sup>where ‘Their worm does not die, And the fire is not quenched.’” – Mark 9:43-44
  - b. Cf. the background of the word “gehenna” – the city dump where fires never went out and the “worms” continue to do their work.
  - c. “The worms — described in Isaiah (66:24), and pictured by Jesus in Mark 9—are **maggots**, which would be associated quite naturally with the rotting filth of a refuse heap” (Kyle Butt).

4. Hell is **being cast “away from the presence of the Lord”** and to **“be punished with everlasting destruction”** (2 Thessalonians 1:9).
  - a. **[S13]** “<sup>7</sup>When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, <sup>8</sup>in flaming fire [He will be] taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).
  - b. See also Matthew 7:13-14 – the “two roads.”
  - c. John Benton summarized this well: “Hell ... is to be **shut out of God’s presence**, cut off from all that is good and wholesome. It is to be cut off from all love, all peace, all joy forever. Jesus explains that once people realize this, once they realize what they have missed, the effect upon them will be devastating. **‘There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’** It is an unspeakably sombre picture. Men seldom weep, but in hell men weep uncontrollably. Jesus speaks of the place being totally characterized by tears.... In hell people do not just weep; they gnash their teeth. Having been shut out of the presence of God into the eternal blackness, permanently deprived of all that is wholesome and good, in bitter anger men and women grind their teeth in speechless rage [and agony! – DAS]. As they realize that once and for all, ‘I’ve been shut out!’ they are overcome with a sense of eternal loss which leads to a depth of anger and fury that they find impossible to express in words” (1985, pp. 47-48 in Thompson).
5. Hell is **the “second death.”**
  - a. **[S14]** (Rev 21:8 NKJV) "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have

their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

- b. See also Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14.

E. **What is hell like?** Consider another picture.

1. **[S15] Consider the CROSS OF CHRIST.**

2. **Let's begin with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane...** READ Matthew 26:36-39

- a. <sup>36</sup> Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." <sup>37</sup> And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed.
- b. **[S15A]** <sup>38</sup> Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."
- c. <sup>39</sup> He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*."

3. **Later, trying to please the Jews, Pilate sent Jesus to be scourged** (Matthew 27:26).

- a. "What was the flogging like?" Lee Strobel asked Dr. Alexander Metherell, a physician who has extensively studied the historical, archaeological, and medical data concerning the death of Jesus.
- b. Metherell answered: "Roman floggings were known to be terribly brutal. They usually consisted of thirty-nine lashes but frequently were a lot more than that, depending on the mood of the soldier applying the blows.
- c. "The soldier would use **a whip of braided leather thongs** with **metal balls** woven into them. When the whip would strike the flesh, these balls would cause deep bruises or contusions, which would break open with further blows. And the whip had

**pieces of sharp bone** was well, which would cut the flesh severely.

- d. “The **back would be so shredded** that part of the spine was sometimes exposed by the deep, deep cuts. The whipping would have gone all the way from the shoulders down to the back, the buttocks, and the back of the legs. It was just terrible.
  - e. “One physician who has studied Roman beatings said, ‘As the flogging continued, the lacerations would tear into the underlying skeletal muscles and produce quivering ribbons of bleeding flesh.’ ...
  - f. “We know that **many people would die from this kind of beating even before they could be crucified**. At the least, they victim would experience tremendous pain and go into **hypovolemic shock**.”
  - g. “What does hypovolemic shock mean?” asked Strobel.
  - h. “*Hypo* means ‘low,’ *vol* refers to volume, and *emic* means ‘blood,’ so hypovolemic shock means **the person is suffering the effects of losing a large amount of blood**... This does four things. First, the heart races to try to pump blood that isn’t there; second, the blood pressure drops, causing fainting or collapse; third, the kidneys stop producing urine to maintain what volume is left; and fourth, the person becomes very thirsty as the body craves fluids to replace the lost blood volume.”
  - i. The doctor explained this was why Jesus stumbled beneath his cross as He carried it to Golgotha. This is why Jesus cried out from the cross, “I thirst” (John 19:28).
4. **Then what happened to Jesus at the site of the crucifixion?**
- a. Metherell: “He would have been laid down, and His hands would have been nailed in the outstretched position to the horizontal beam. This **cross-bar**

**was called the patibulum**, and at this stage it was separate from the vertical beam, which was permanently set in the ground...

- b. “The Romans used **spikes that were five to seven inches long and tapered to a sharp point**. They were **driven through the wrists**... This was a solid position that would lock the hand; if they nails had been driven through the palms, His weight would have caused the skin to tear and He would have fallen off the cross. So the nails went through the wrists, although this was considered part of the hand in the language of the day.”
- c. “And it’s important to understand that the nail would go through the place where **the median nerve** runs. This is the largest nerve going out to the hand, and it would be crushed by the nail that was being pounded in...
- d. “Picture taking a pair of pliers and squeezing and crushing that nerve... That effect would be similar to what Jesus experienced.
- e. “**The pain was absolutely unbearable**. In fact, it was literally beyond words to describe; they had to invent a new word: **excruciating**. Literally, excruciating means ‘**out of the cross**.’ Think of that: they needed to create a new word, because there was nothing in the language that could describe the intense anguish caused during the crucifixion.
- f. “At this point Jesus was hoisted as the cross bar was attached to the vertical stake, and then **nails were driven through Jesus’ feet**. Again, the nerves in His feet would have been crushed, and there would have been a similar type of pain.”

5. **What was the actual cause of death?**

- a. Methereil: “Once a person is hanging in the vertical position, crucifixion is essentially **an agonizingly slow death by asphyxiation**. The reason is that



the stresses on the muscles and diaphragm put the chest into the inhaled position; basically, in order to exhale, the individual must push up on his feet so the tension on the muscles would be eased for a moment. In doing so, the nail would tear through the foot, eventually locking up against the tarsal bones.

- b. “After managing to exhale, the person would then be able to relax down and take another breath in. Against he’d have to push himself up to exhale, scraping his bloodied back against the coarse wood of the cross. This would go on and on until complete exhaustion would take over, and the person wouldn’t be able to push up and breathe anymore.
  - c. “As the person slows down his breathing, he goes into what is called **respiratory acidosis** – the carbon dioxide in the blood is dissolved as carbonic acid, causing the acidity of the blood to increase. This eventually leads to **an irregular heartbeat**. In fact, with his heart being erratically, Jesus would have known that He was at the moment of death, which is when He was able to say, ***‘Lord, into Your hands I commit My spirit.’*** **And then He died of cardiac arrest.**”
6. Metherell wasn’t done...
- a. “Even before He died – and this is important, too – the hypovolemic shock would have caused a **sustained rapid heart rate** that would have contributed to heart failure, resulting in the **collection of fluid in the membrane around the heart**, called **a pericardial effusion**, as well as **around the lungs**, which is called **a pleural effusion**.”
  - b. “Why is that significant?”
  - c. “Because of what happened when the Roman soldier came around and, being fairly certain that Jesus was dead, confirmed it by thrusting a spear

into His right side. It was probably His right side ... between the ribs.

- d. “The spear apparently went through the right lung and into the heart, so when the spear was pulled out, some fluid – the pericardial effusion and the pleural effusion – came out. This would have the appearance of a clear fluid, like water, followed by a large volume of blood, as the eyewitness John described in his gospel.”

e. **John 19:31-34**

- 1) “<sup>31</sup>Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and *that* they might be taken away. <sup>32</sup> Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him.
- 2) **[S16]** “<sup>33</sup>But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. <sup>34</sup>But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out.
- 3) “<sup>35</sup>And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. <sup>36</sup>For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, “Not *one* of His bones shall be broken.”<sup>[f]</sup> <sup>37</sup> And again another Scripture says, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”

- 7. There’s one more aspect of the crucifixion of Christ that Strobel and Metherell didn’t discuss. It’s one of the statements that Jesus made while He was hanging on the cross, writhing in pain:

- a. **[S17]** “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’

that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’” – Matthew 27:46

- b. When Jesus bore the weight of the sins of the world – including yours and mine – God allowed Him to suffer the punishment for our sins.
- c. Jesus tasted the full wrath of God against sin.
- d. “For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” – 2 Corinthians 5:21

8. **[S18] Jesus endured “hell” so that we don’t have to.**

- a. He “Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by whose stripes you were healed.” – 1 Peter 2:24
- b. **Bearing our sins in His own body meant intense suffering, painful separation from God, and death.**
- c. **Hell is like that.**
- d. **But the Good News is that Jesus endured “hell” so that we don’t have to.**
- e. **Instead, we may “receive the gift of eternal life” in heaven with Him (Romans 6:23).**
- f. **But if we reject His offer, then we will have to endure hell: suffering, painful separation from God, and the second death.**