

Jesus Talks About Hell

by J. W. Jepson

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"Forget Hell." The boldness of that bumper sticker jarred me. Forget Hell? Risk everything on the chance that Jesus Christ was wrong? What a losing gamble!

In spite of all odds, many seem willing to do just that. Ignore Jesus Christ. Forget Hell.

Preaching and teaching about Hell is risky. It does not appeal to the modern consumer mentality. Keep the message positive. Just bring people to Jesus and leave the negative alone.

Well and good. The downside is that many people might not hear everything Jesus said.

So, what *did* Jesus say about Hell?

Before Jesus Christ came and "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10), a variety of ideas had developed concerning life after death—some biblical, some not. Jesus decisively clarified all that.

Hades was the common name in the ancient world for the place of the dead. Until Christ's resurrection *hades* had two compartments: one for the righteous and one for the wicked. Jesus used the word four times:

1. The "gates" (power, authority) of *Hades* cannot overcome His Church (Matthew 16:18).
2. The cities that witnessed Jesus' mighty works but did not repent will be brought down to *Hades* (Matthew 11:23).
3. In *Hades* the rich man looked up and saw Lazarus with Abraham (Luke 16:23).
4. Christ announced that He holds the keys of (authority over) death and *Hades* (Revelation 1:18).

Hades is temporary (Revelation 20:13, 14). It is in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:40).

Gehenna is another name for Hell. *Gehenna* is permanent and final. It is the word Jesus used more commonly. *Gehenna* is the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14).

The word *Gehenna* comes from "the Valley of Hinnom," located southwest of Jerusalem. It had a history of evil. It was a vile, desecrated place. Refuse and the bodies of criminals were burned there. It is a fit metaphor for the place of everlasting punishment. *Gehenna* has been prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

Jesus said that expressions of hatred toward others would put one in danger of the fires of *Gehenna* (Matthew 5:22).

Being forever in *Gehenna* is far worse than losing a part of your body, worse even than death itself. In that place "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:48). Jesus is reaffirming what the prophet Isaiah said (Isaiah 66:24). In the Valley of Hinnom the worms (maggots) that ate the garbage and dead bodies kept dying in the fire. By contrast, the painful gnawing of the flames of *Gehenna* will continue forever. Jesus called it "the furnace of fire" (Matthew 13:42, 50) and "outer darkness" (Matthew 25:30).

The fire of *Hades* and *Gehenna* is different from any fire that we know on earth. It is not material combustion and rapid oxidation. It does not need a fuel source. Its torment does not need a physically sensory nervous system. The body of the rich man Jesus talked about (Luke 16) had been buried; yet, in *Hades* he possessed the essence of eyes, a tongue and a voice. In *Gehenna* there will be weeping and grinding of teeth (Matthew 24:51). Its reality is beyond the mortal, beyond anything we now experience or comprehend.

Ignoring Hell will not make it go away. It is still there and it is real. Jesus Christ said so clearly, graphically, and with divine authority. We must be very serious about it. God is.

That is why "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).
