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HELL, AND THE SAVIOR OF THE WORLD

by

Michael Anthony Bahry

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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I am grateful to our Lord for salvation through the cross; and I am grateful for everyone, and every way He has blessed me.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Versions and Sections of the Bible

DBHTNT	David Bentley Hart The New Testament
DV	Douay Version
KJV	King James Version
TJSB	The Jewish Study Bible
LXX	Septuagint
NRSVCE	New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition
NABRE	New American Bible Revised Edition
NIV	New International Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RSVCE	Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition
TKNT	N.T. Wright The Kingdom New Testament

Books of the Bible

Acts	The Acts of the Apostles
Am	Amos
2 Chr	2 Chronicles
Dn	Daniel
Dt	Deuteronomy
Ecc1	The Book of Ecclesiastes
Ex	Exodus
Ez	Ezekiel
Gal	Galatians
Gn	Genesis
Is	Isaiah

Jas	James
Jo	Josuha
Jer	Jeremiah
Jb	Job
Jn	The Gospel According to John
Jude	Jude
1 Kgs	1 Kings
2 Kgs	2 Kings
Lv	Leviticus
Lk	The Gospel According to Luke
Mal	Malachi
2 Mc	2 Maccabees
Mk	The Gospel According to Mark
Mt	The Gospel According to Matthew
Nm	The Book of Numbers
1 Pet	1 Peter
Prv	The Book of Proverbs
Ps	The Book of Psalms
Ru	Ruth
Rv	The Book of Revelation
Sir	The Wisdom of Ben Sira – Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
1 Sm	1 Samuel
2 Thes	2 Thessalonians
Ws	The Book of Wisdom

Jewish Literature

1 En 1 Enoch

Catholic Doctrine

CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church

CCD Confraternity of Christian Doctrine

RCIA Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

SJBC Saint Joseph's Baltimore Catechism

LIST OF APPENDIXES

1. SJBC Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell
2. CCC-Hell
3. Hades in the New Testament
4. SJBC Rich Man and Lazarus
5. Gehenna in the New Testament
6. Wailing and Grinding of Teeth
7. Fire and Forever

PREFACE

For as long as I can remember I have believed in God. I was baptized Maronite, went to a Roman Catholic church, and was confirmed. After dropping out of college, I began to look more deeply into my faith by reading the Bible. I visited some Protestant churches and began attending their services but that quickly came to an end. I simply could not accept that most people were destined to spend eternity in hell, except of course those who were “born again” by a specific act of faith in this lifetime, described as “accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior”. I found that theology inconsistent with the loving and merciful God I knew.

However, what I had learned in Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) classes and at home was not much different. I was taught that baptism was essential if someone was to enter heaven. I even baptized both of my children myself because I was told that it was valid if a child died before having the chance to be officially baptized by a priest. Did I really think that God sent unbaptized babies to hell or limbo? Probably not, but I figured it was smarter not to take the chance.

Another difficult doctrine taught in CCD was that if I died before confessing a mortal sin, I would go to hell.¹ I was also told that it was a mortal sin when a Catholic misses Mass “through his own fault”.² I did not then, nor do I now believe those teachings any more than I believe the Protestant teaching about the fate of the multitudes that are not “saved” (from their prospective). In my view, neither of those doctrines can be true of a loving and merciful God.

¹ *Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism*, 199.

² *SJBC*, 134.

Despite what I was taught early in life, I continued in my Catholic Christian faith. In part because I did not want to hear about who was going to heaven and who was going to hell, about who was “born again” or not; it has not been my experience that Catholics do this. Another reason I have continued my Catholic faith is weekly Mass. It gives me the opportunity to give glory to God, confess my sins publicly, recite a creed that I believe, hear readings from the Scriptures, and celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Additionally, the documents of Vatican II influenced my decision to remain Catholic, specifically: “*The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*” (*Nostra Aetate*), and “*The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*” (*Lumen Gentium*). There are statements in these documents regarding the destiny of non-Catholics, non-Christians and even non-theists that sound less judgmental. The statements imply less certainty about who goes to heaven and who goes to hell than the Protestant doctrine to which I had been exposed, or what I learned in CCD and at home.

My love for the Lord and Scripture led me to Providence College (PC) and its School of Continuing Education. I completed my first course at the age of twenty-three, in 1985, the same year I got married. By the time I graduated in 1991, I had two children.

In 2015, I decided I wanted to continue learning about Christianity, so at the age of fifty-three I returned to PC and earned a Master of Theological Studies Degree in 2017. Upon completion, I still felt compelled to continue to my studies, so in 2018, I enrolled in the Master of Arts in Biblical Studies program - again at PC.

During these past seven years, the subject of “hell” has rarely come up, in either master’s program. I certainly understand why. The notion that punishment for sin in the afterlife is spiritual, physical, and everlasting is not something easily explained as a judgement coming from

a merciful God. I can also understand that instructors focus on what is required to convey their topics within the allotted time.

Although curious for years, I have put off an in-depth study of the tough verses in Scripture that have long been associated with “hell”. Focusing on Biblical studies these last four years has led me back to this topic. More specifically, my classes with Dr. Patrick Reid on the Old Testament. He is a tremendous teacher who diligently works through the OT texts, never avoided telling his students what the Bible says; he is an honest, humble man.

Dr. Reid patiently endured my questions about the afterlife in the Hebrew Scriptures. I saw a copy of the book *That All shall be Saved* by David Bentley Hart in his office, and I asked him about it. He told me he knew Hart because he had briefly taught at PC. I was intrigued, so I bought the book and was amazed at Hart’s insights. In addition to his work, I have read other books on the subject. Most notably, *A Larger Hope?* by Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, and *Dare We Hope “That All Men Be Saved”?* by Hans Urs von Balthasar.

I have learned from these authors that *apokatastasis* is a Greek term that indicates a “restoration, reconstitution, return to an original condition”. When referring to humans, *apokatastasis* means returning to the condition proper to oneself.³ Christians who believe in universal salvation “hope that God will one day restore the whole of creation through Christ to be the good destiny for which he created it” and this theology enjoys a solid basis in the Bible.⁴ These books provide convincing evidence that many of the early church fathers believed in universal salvation. Richard Bauckham states that, “The extent to which a belief in universal salvation was held and taught in the early centuries of the Christian church has often been

³ Ramelli, *A Larger Hope?*, 2.

⁴ Ramelli, *A Larger Hope?*, 6

underestimated”.⁵ He also asserts that their theology was rooted in Scripture and “embraced a Christocentric vision of the universe and God’s purpose for it”.⁶ These scholars show that many of the fathers believed that whatever suffering is found in the afterlife is to educate the sinner,-- therapeutic and purifying, not retributive and everlasting. The books I have read about *apokatastasis*, and other books on hell have motivated me to finally learn more about what Scripture has to say about the afterlife and “hell”.

Another motivation for learning more about the Bible and the various doctrines about “hell” is that four years ago I began teaching preparation for the “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults” (RCIA) at my parish. I was given the *Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism* (SJBC) as a text to follow; it goes back to 1885, was first published in 1962, and last published in 2011. The catechism includes doctrines about hell that I learned at home and in CCD classes as a child back in the early 70’s, and I have found the doctrines in the *SJBC* difficult to teach in RCIA. I called the Diocese of Providence to see if they could supply or recommend a different text, and they had no suggestions.

According to the *SJBC*, “particular judgement” is passed on to every person immediately after death; some go to hell, some go to purgatory, and some go to heaven. The *SJBC* provides an illustration that shows what appears to be the devil (trident in hand), waiting in the fire of hell for the condemned. Those in purgatory will eventually attain heaven, but only after “God’s cleansing fires burn away the soul’s selfishness”.⁷ (See Appendix #1)

⁵ Ramelli, Bauckham, and Parry, *A Larger Hope?* xi

⁶ Ramelli, Bauckham, and Parry, *A Larger Hope?* xi

⁷*SJBC* 89-91.

In answer to the question #185, “Who are punished in hell?” The SJBC states: “Those who are punished in hell who die in mortal sin; they are deprived of the vision of God and suffer dreadful torments, especially that of fire, for all eternity”.⁸ As an example of what kinds of actions might merit eternal punishment, the SJBC informs its readers that “A Catholic who through his own fault misses Mass on a Sunday or holyday of obligation missing Mass commits a mortal sin”.⁹

Unfortunately for the unsaved who go to hell after death, their torment gets worse when Christ returns to the earth to judge the living and the dead in what, the SJBC terms “The General Judgement”.¹⁰ On that day there will be a resurrection of all the dead. Question #179 asks, “Why will the bodies of the damned also rise?” The answer is, “The bodies of the damned will also rise to share in the eternal punishment of their souls”.¹¹ This is a difficult doctrine to explain to an adult in RCIA (or to a child), that if they miss Mass on purpose and suddenly die before being forgiven by a priest they go straight to hell, and then are ultimately rejoined with the bodies for even greater suffering.

For many Christians hell is said to be the destiny of countless souls because they were not baptized, because they did not recite the sinner’s prayer, or because they believed the wrong theology. These poor unsaved souls have been said to include anyone that was not baptized a Catholic or Christian (including babies), all Jews, all Muslims, all Catholics, all non-Catholic Christians, all non-Christians, all agnostics, all atheists, etc.

⁸ *SJBC*, 91.

⁹ *SJBC*, 134.

¹⁰ *SJBC*, 89.

¹¹ *SJBC*, 88.

As a result of everything I have experienced in my life regarding the doctrines on hell, I have chosen this thesis topic.

INTRODUCTION

This introduction will start by defining what is meant by the English word “hell” from a Catholic perspective as defined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). A summary of the chapters is included that provides some basic information on what to expect moving forward. Lastly, a thesis is presented that challenges the reader to consider the definition of the word “hell” that is provided in the CCC, and whether Jesus ever spoke about such a place.

Catholic Teaching on Hell

In 1986 Pope John Paul II entrusted a commission of twelve Cardinals and Bishops to draft a catechism. After years of extensive consultation among all Catholic Bishops around the world, the CCC was published in 1993. The following are eight characteristics of “hell” included in the catechism:

1. Hell is the destiny of those who “die in mortal sin without repenting and excepting God’s merciful love”.
2. Hell is “reserved for those who to the end of their lives refuse to believe and be converted”.
3. Hell, “unquenchable fire” is something Jesus often spoke about.
4. Hell is a place “where both soul and body can be lost”.
5. Hell is affirmed by Church teaching- “it exists, and it is eternal”.
6. Hell begins “immediately after death”.
7. Hell is “the state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed”.
8. Punishments in hell are “eternal fire” and “eternal separation from God”.¹²

Portions of the definition provided in the CCC will be referenced throughout the thesis. Appendix 2., is the CCC’s teaching on hell in its entirety.

¹² CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1033.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1 is an examination of the belief in life after death in the Hebrew Scriptures, history, and tradition up to the first century; this provides important background information for what the OT has to say (if anything) about “hell”.

Chapter 2 provides a brief history of the words that have been translated to the word “hell” in various English translations of the Bible. It also demonstrates that Saint Augustine’s (354-430 AD) doctrine about punishment in the afterlife prevailed in the West and has influenced both Catholics and Protestants for almost 1600 years. Even though he did not read and write in English (he used Latin), the acceptance of his doctrine explains why the word “hell” was used so frequently in the various translations of the Bible into English in the aftermath of the Reformation and General Council of Trent, 1545-63 AD.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine verses that include the two words (αἰδης /Hades, and γέεννα /Gehenna) that have been translated as hell in the New Testament (NT). Chapter 5 examines the idiom “wailing and grinding of teeth”, which has been interpreted as describing what people will be doing in the destination or state of existence referred to as “hell”. The usage of the word’s “fire” and “eternal fire” are examined in Chapter 6, and a summary is provided in Chapter 7.

A frequent assertion of some of the proponents of the notion of a place called hell is that “no one spoke more about hell than Jesus”, therefore, Jesus’ words in the Gospels that are often associated with hell will be closely examined in this thesis.

Thesis

There are very good reasons not to use the word “hell” in English Bibles because of its definition as place of everlasting torment. The various authors of the Bible use the Hebrew word *שְׁאוֹל*/Sheol, and the Greek words *αἰδης* /Hades, and *γέεννα*/Gehenna, and some English Bibles use the word hell as a translation for some or all these words. Since different words were undoubtedly used for a reason, it seems wise to translate using words that accurately reflect the intent of the authors. It is my contention that hell is never a fit translation of any of these terms. The word hell has been rendered useless by centuries of bad translations, questionable interpretations, and questionable doctrine. In addition to the words translated at times as hell, there are other words that have been interpreted as referring to “hell”. These terms include “the outer darkness”, “the fiery furnace”, and “fire”; at times described as a place where there will be “weeping and grinding of teeth”. However, there are good reasons to believe that the verses in the Bible that include these words and terms do not support the doctrine that the condemned will suffer both physically and spiritually forever and ever. All the words in the Bible, especially Jesus’ words should lead us to contemplate our actions or inaction, and we should modify our behavior accordingly because what we do, or do not do, will be addressed in the afterlife. But if we read the words of Jesus without a preconceived notion that suffering is never ending in a place referred to in English as hell, we may find that Jesus never spoke about such a place.

CHAPTER 1 LIFE AFTER DEATH BEFORE THE INCARNATION

To help understand what Jews in the first century thought about life after death, this chapter will examine three topics. First, I will review the OT and the incidents of contact with the dead and prohibitions against communication with ghosts and spirits. Second, this chapter will examine how some of the authors used the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל , which is the word most often used to describe the abode of the dead; the English transliteration of שְׁאוֹל is “Sheol”. Third, this chapter will discuss ideas about the afterlife found in Scripture and Jewish literary works written during the Second Temple period before Jesus; this includes examining the possibility that other belief systems may have influenced Jewish authors during this period.

Contact With the Dead

The authors of Leviticus and Deuteronomy demonstrate that some Israelites believed that people lived on after their body dies. In Leviticus, communication between the living and “ghosts” and “spirits” is prohibited (Lv 19:31); it also says that mediums and clairvoyants “shall be stoned to death” (Lv 20:27). Similarly, in the OT Moses instructs the Israelites that when they enter the promised land, they are not to imitate the abominable practices of the nations that live there, and this included consulting the dead. It is worth noting that alongside the warning against consulting with ghosts and spirits, and seeking oracles from the dead, in Deuteronomy Moses warns the Israelites against sacrificing their children by fire (Dt 18:10-11). Like Deuteronomy, Leviticus prohibits communicating with the dead and warns the Israelites not to sacrifice their children to

Molech, the Canaanite underworld deity (Lv 18:21, 20:2-5). The evidence indicates that the Israelites believed that people live on after the body dies, if they did not believe this, they would not have needed laws that prohibit contacting them.¹³ It also is the case that at least some of the Israelites believed Molech existed, because they needed a law prohibiting sacrificing to him. The laws against contacting the dead and sacrificing to other deities were connected, therefore, to Israel's sole devotion to the God of Abraham. However, those laws did not deter the Judahite king Ahaz, and his grandson King Manasseh from sacrificing their children to the pagan god of the underworld during the eighth and seventh century BC (2 Kgs 16:3, 21:6, 2 Chr 33:1-6). They are the only kings mentioned by name as sacrificing their children to false gods, but the law against contacting the dead was broken by Israel's first king three hundred years earlier.

At the end of Saul's reign, the once great king drifted further and further from the Lord. When he was about to face another battle with the rival Philistine army, Saul "grew afraid and lost heart completely;" he called upon the Lord but got no answer (1 Sm 28:5-6). In despair the night before he died, the king sought the help of a woman who was a medium. Desperate for advice, Saul tells the medium to conjure up the deceased Prophet Samuel (1 Sm 28:11). When she did, Samuel was not happy about being disturbed and to make matters worse, Samuel had shocking news for the king. Not only will he and the Israelites lose the battle with the Philistines, but he and his sons will die the next day and they will be joining Samuel in the afterlife. Finally, it would be Saul's rival David, who would succeed him as king (1 Sm 28:15-19). We know that the medium saw Samuel rise out of the ground when she conjured him up (1 Sm 28:17), so we can assume that Saul and his sons went somewhere under the earth's surface when they died.

¹³ Ehrman, *A History of the Afterlife*, 92.

Given later notions about the afterlife, we would expect to read that Samuel came down from heaven when conjured by the medium. After all, Elijah was taken up to heaven by the Lord in a fiery chariot and fiery horses while he is still alive (2 Kgs 2:1, 11-12). Instead, Samuel rises from under the earth, which has long been associated with a place of punishment in many religious traditions. When Samuel appears, the medium oddly describes the old man who appears as an “Elohim” which is a Hebrew word that is used for both God and angels. Once Samuel sees Saul, he asks why he is disturbing him (1 Sm 28:13-15). While this story provides evidence of a belief in postmortem existence in ancient Israel, it gives no indication that the character of the afterlife is positively affected by one’s faith or virtue while on earth. Neither does it give any evidence that the Israelites believed that souls were punished for the lack of faith, or for wicked behavior. Saul loses his kingdom and is punished with his untimely death because he loses faith and disobeys the Lord. Nevertheless, he and his sons end up in the same unnamed place as the great Prophet Samuel, somewhere below the surface of the earth.¹⁴

There are places in the Old Testament that refer to restoring life to the bodies of people who have died, a return from a state of existence after the death of the body. These resuscitations were the result of miracles performed by the two great Prophets. During the reign of the wicked King Ahab of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (873-852 BC), the Prophet Elijah brings a child of the widow of Zarephath back to life (1Kgs 17:17-24); in second century (175 BC), the author of Ben Sira wrote that the child saved by Elijah returned “from Sheol, by the will of the Lord” (Sir. 48:5). The Prophet Elisha succeeded Elijah and did a similar miraculous work in 2 Kings 4. Another woman’s son died, and Elisha restored his life, and a man thrown into Elisha’s grave

¹⁴ Ehrman, 92.

after he died, also returned to life (2 Kgs 13:21, Sir 48:13-14). These miracles present evidence that some Israelites not only believed in life after death, but some even believed that life can be restored to one's body by a miracle. These are examples of resuscitation, which is different from resurrection, which is as a raising from death to a life that will not experience another death.¹⁵

There are passages about resurrection that are included in two of the major prophetic books that were most likely composed in the sixth century BC; the passages are regarded by some scholars as metaphorical resurrections to signal the coming of a new age. Isaiah's chapters 24-27 are referred to as the *Apocalypse of Isaiah* because of its cosmic end-of-the world focus. In part of this section the prophet declares that the Lord will "destroy the veil that veils all peoples" and "the web that is woven over all nations". As for death, it will be destroyed forever and "the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces" (Is 25:6-8, Rv 21:4). Also included is a declaration that the dead will be coming to life and that corpses will rise (Is 26:19-21). Another example occurs during the years after the destruction of the first Temple (585 BC), the Prophet Ezekiel has a vision in which the dry bones of the dead come back to life (Ez 37:1-14). The context of both prophetic utterances is the hope of the restoration of the nation of Israel, but to Christians these passages mean much more. N.T. Wright sees the echoes of Genesis 1-2 and the promise that YHWH's own breath/spirit will make the dead rise to new life. Unlike the resuscitation miracles by Elijah and Elisha, the dry bones will be brought back to life by a "new and unprecedented act of the creator god."¹⁶ Other scholars assert that both prophets were speaking only metaphorically about the restoration of Israel from Babylonian captivity and not

¹⁵ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 120.

¹⁶ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 120.

about bodily resurrection.¹⁷

The most important OT passage for Christians is undoubtedly the oblique reference to the resurrection of the suffering servant of Isaiah. In the last and most famous of the songs, the servant is “cut off from the land of the living” but triumphs over death (Is 53:7-12). For the last two thousand years Christians have consistently asserted that Jesus is the Servant of Isaiah’s four Servant Songs (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:13). Some assert that Isaiah is speaking metaphorically (Is 53:7-12) about the restoration of Israel from Babylonian captivity and not about bodily resurrection.¹⁸ Later in this chapter, the belief in bodily resurrection will be addressed further, but first we go down to Sheol.

לְאֲבוֹתָי/Sheol

God made a covenant with Abraham and gave him a glimpse of the future. Abraham learns that his descendants will be enslaved and oppressed (Gn 15:13); but as for Abraham God says, “You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace; you will be buried at a ripe old age” (Gn 15:15). God does not use a specific word for Abraham’s destination after death; He only says Abraham will be buried. However, there are words used in the OT for the destination of people after the body dies. Sometimes the authors of the various books of the OT use the words “death,” “the pit,” and the Hebrew word לְאֲבוֹתָי is often used, which is a synonym for the grave.¹⁹ The

¹⁷ Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, 71-72.

¹⁸ Bailey, *Biblical Perspectives on Death*, 71-72.

¹⁹ Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 37.

English transliteration of שְׁאוֹל is “Sheol”. It is not always clear if Sheol simply means the ground of burial or if it is referring to an underworld destination for the souls of the dead.

The word Sheol is used seventy-five times in the NABRE. Sixty-five of these instances occur in the books that are also part of the Hebrew Bible and Protestant Old Testament canon. There are other occurrences in canonical books for Orthodox and Catholic Christians. We find the first reference to Sheol in Genesis. It appears in the story of how Joseph’s brothers sold him to Midianite traders, and it is a good example of the lack of clarity about what happens when someone dies. In the story, Jacob’s sons deceive him into believing that his beloved young son Joseph had met an early violent death. Jacob was devastated and inconsolable; he told his other children that he: “will go down mourning to my son in Sheol” (Gn 37:35). This statement can mean two things: Jacob may have meant that he will mourn his son until he sees him again in Sheol in the afterlife, or it may be that Jacob was simply saying that he will be mourning Joseph right up to the time when he dies and joins him in the ground.²⁰ Later in the story, when Jacob fears the death of his youngest son Benjamin, Jacob says that such a tragedy would send his “white head down to Sheol in grief” (Gn 42:38, 44:29,31). In either case, going to Sheol would not be a good thing because it meant death and not life; but clearly dying in grief and not at peace would make death even worse. Another place in the Pentateuch the word appears is in Numbers, when the Israelites were suffering in the desert after fleeing slavery in Egypt. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebel against Moses because they believe that wandering in the desert was worse than bondage back in Egypt. As a result, the Lord made a great chasm, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed those in rebellion along with their possessions; they disappeared when the earth closed over them, and they went down alive to Sheol (Nm 16:31-33).

²⁰ Henning, *No Heaven or Hell, Only She`ol*. 2.

In both stories taken from the Torah, Sheol was an undesirable place because it meant death. There is no indication, however, that anyone thought that there would be torment in the afterlife for a lack of faith or for the sins committed during one's life.

Over half of the references to Sheol in the NABRE occur in the Wisdom Literature, and fifteen of these occurrences are in the Psalms, which is more than any other book in the Old Testament. Psalms 1-89 are most likely preexilic, but none can be dated to the tenth century BC to King David, who is said to have written seventy-three of the one hundred and fifty Psalms. Most likely, the remainder of the Psalms (Ps 90-150) were written in the exilic or postexilic period. The Psalms further demonstrate the inconclusive nature of the term Sheol. For example in Psalm 30, the Psalmist sings a thanksgiving for deliverance:

“Lord, you brought my soul up from Sheol;
you let me live, from going down to the pit” (Ps 30:4 NABRE).

It seems that the Psalmist is grateful that the Lord extended his life and seems to believe that in going down to the grave he would be like dust, unable to praise the Lord (v.10). Psalm 86 is like Psalm 30. David prays and gives thanks to God for His mercy and for saving his “soul from the depths of Sheol” (Ps 86:13 NABRE). In like manner, the Psalmist declares his love for the Lord who listened to his cries when he was “caught by the cords of death” and “the snares of Sheol”; he recalls the “agony and dread” he felt when death was at his door (Ps 116:1-4). In these three Psalms, God is being praised for granting the Psalmists continued life on earth. At the same time, it needs to be again noted that Sheol is not described as a place of punishment, it is described as a place cut off from life on earth.

Another psalmist laments the brevity of life, the frailness of man, and the reality that no one can escape the power of Sheol (Ps 89:48-49). Psalms 6 and 22 are contradictory regarding praising God after death. While Psalm 6 says that in death no one remembers or praises the Lord

(Ps 6:6), Psalm 22 declares that there will be a time when “all the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord” (Ps 22:28), and that “all who sleep in the earth will bow low before God” (Ps 22:30). Another positive declaration about life in Sheol comes from King David who prays for the destruction of his enemies, and sings of his God who is all knowing and who will be with him always, even after the death of the body:

“If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.” (Ps 139:8 NRSVCE).

This notion that God will be with someone in Sheol provides hope that God does not abandon us in death. It also indicates that Sheol is not a place of suffering.

Sheol is referenced in other books of Wisdom Literature; the word occurs nine times in Proverbs and one time in Ecclesiastes. Most likely, Proverbs was composed sometime between the late eleventh to the early sixth century BC and edited sometime after the return from exile in Babylon in 536 BC. The primary objective of Proverbs is to direct the reader to the path of wisdom, which is personified and depicted as a woman. Finding wisdom is more than simply acting prudently, finding wisdom is finding life itself:

For whoever finds me finds life,
and wins favor from the Lord;
But those who pass me by do violence to themselves;
all who hate me love death. (Prv 8:35-36)

Therefore, in God’s eyes wisdom brings order to one’s whole life²¹ and passing by wisdom is self-destructive. So, the author’s aim is to form the reader’s character through wisdom. Three of the nine times that Sheol is mentioned in Proverbs, the author is advising the reader to avoid adultery because it will lead to death and Sheol (Prv 5:5, 7:27, 9:18). Wisdom is a path of life

²¹ Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 172.

that leads the prudent upward “turning them from Sheol below” (Prv 15:24). Regarding disciplining young people, the author advises the reader to:

“Beat them with the rod,
and you will save them from Sheol.” (Prv 23:14).

The clear message from Proverbs pertaining to Sheol is that acting with wisdom will lead to a longer life and will keep the wise person from entering Sheol prematurely; it does not say that acting wisely will lead one a life in the heavens or give one eternal life with God.

It is worth noting here that the teacher of Ecclesiastes, which was most likely written in the third century BC, says men and beasts have the same fate; they both amount to nothing, and both come from dust and return to dust when life ends (Eccl 3:19-20). The fact that a wise person dies in the same way a fool dies seems to infuriate the teacher (Eccl 2:16). The teacher’s pessimism continues to challenge the reader, he says that life on earth is fleeting, and he expresses frustration that in death there is “one lot for all”; he says the hearts of humans are filled with evil and madness and that after life we all end up going “to the dead” (Eccl 9:3). His description of Sheol sounds lifeless: “there will be no work, no planning, no knowledge, no wisdom in Sheol where you are going” (Eccl 9:10). Note that the writer never mentions punishment.

Another place in the Wisdom Literature in which we find references to Sheol is Job, most likely written between the seventh and fifth century BC. It is undeniable that Job’s use of the word adds even more ambiguity to an already complex history. In contrast to Proverbs, Job does not teach that wisdom and virtue will lead to a long life, nor does the book teach that wickedness will lead to premature date with death and Sheol. In fact, the book teaches that sometimes the opposite happens, and through the test of Satan, Job’s life provides an example that terrible things happen to good people. The author says that Job was a “blameless and upright man who

feared God and avoided evil” (Jb 1:1). We also learn that he was under God’s protection and that the Lord blessed the work of his hands (Jb 1:10); Job had a wife, ten children, and was wealthier than anyone in the East (Jb 1:2-3). Because of the work of Satan and his assertion that Job only fears God because He protects and blesses him, Satan is allowed to take away Job’s blessings. As a result, Job’s life takes a tragic turn, he loses his wealth, his children, and he is stricken with “severe boils from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head” (Jb 2:7). He reflects on his miserable days and sleepless nights. He talks about death and going down to Sheol never to return, because whoever goes there does not get to come up and go home (Jb 7:9-10). Speaking to God, Job describes the afterlife as sleeping:

“So mortals lie down, never to rise.
Until the heavens are no more, they shall not awake,
nor be roused out of their sleep” (Jb 14:12).

At the same time, Job is hopeful for some time at rest in Sheol (Jb 14:13), until God’s anger passes. Even though in other parts of the book it appears that Job denies the possibility of resurrection from the dead (14:14), Job hopes that when the Lord’s anger relents, he could return from Sheol to the land of the living and again find God’s favor (Jb 14:13-17).²²

It perplexes Job that he is suffering while the wicked live long lives and “grow mighty in power” (Jb 21:7). It baffles him that the wicked sing and make merry, even though they have no use for God, that they have no desire to know His ways, and that after they have lived out their wicked lives in prosperity, they “tranquilly go down to Sheol” (Jb 21:7-14). There is no hint here of justice that awaits the wicked after death, no hint of suffering after death for their sins; Job says that they just go down to Sheol in peace.

In the final chapters of Job (38-41), the Lord presents to Job just how complex the

²² *The Jewish Study Bible, 1516.*

universe is. He starts by rhetorically asking Job “Where were you when I founded the earth?” (Jb 38:4). After the Lord finishes his summary of creation, it becomes clear to Job that he is not in the position to make the charge that the Lord is not just. Job recants, relents, and humbly refers to himself as “dust and ashes” (Jb 42:5-6). The Lord does not give Job an explanation for all the injustice that exists during our lives in this world; neither does God explain Job’s suffering. It seems that The Lord is looking for Job to trust in his wisdom. At the end of the story the Lord restores Job’s fortune twofold; he has more children; he dies when he is one hundred and forty “old and contented” (Jb 42:17), and there is no mention of Job’s destination after death. Like the Torah, the Wisdom Literature gives no clear consistent description of Sheol and there is no mention of reward or punishment after death.

The Prophets also refer to the afterlife using the word Sheol, and they often do it in ways that are like the Torah and the Wisdom Literature. In the books of the Old Testament death is bad when it comes prematurely, or when a person is not at peace, or when it is the result of violence. Often, an early violent death is the result of wickedness and an act of judgement by God. Isaiah told the Israelites that a day was coming when they would be at rest from their hardship and turmoil, and that they would be singing a taunt song against the king of Babylon. In the song, they will sing that Sheol awaits the wicked king, and that the previous kings of the earth will be there to greet him:

Below, Sheol is all astir
preparing for your coming;
Awakening the shades to greet you,
all the leaders of the earth;
Making all the kings of the nations
rise from their thrones.
All of them speak out
and say to you,
“You too have become weak like us,
you are just like us! (Is 14:9-10).

Isaiah also says that they will sing about the king's arrogance and how he said in his heart that he would be like the God:

I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will be like the Most High!"
No! Down to Sheol you will be brought
to the depths of the pit! (Is 14:14-15).

As the result of his wickedness, the king will be going to his death early and violently, and once dead, he will go to be in a place where he will be powerless, just like everyone else. The song seems to describe a place that is more than just dying and being buried in a grave.

Isaiah turns his attention to the Israelites and condemns the mistakes of both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. He uses sarcasm and restates the errors that led to the Assyrian destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in eighth century BC and denounces the alliances that Judah has made with foreign powers, and he calls those alliances covenants with death and Sheol (Is 28:15-18).

Later in Isaiah, Hezekiah the King of Judah sings a hymn of thanksgiving because the Lord saved him from an early death. Hezekiah gave thanks to God because he recovered from sickness and could still praise the Lord. Hezekiah sang:

"For it is not Sheol that gives you thanks,
nor death that praises you;
Neither do those who go down into the pit
await your kindness" (Is 38:18 NABRE).

Like Isaiah, the sixth century prophet Ezekiel uses the word Sheol, and like Isaiah, he focuses his message on men of power and their empires. When Ezekiel speaks of Pharaoh the king of Egypt, he presents Assyria as an example of what awaits the king and his kingdom. To illustrate his point, he uses a great cedar of Lebanon as an analogy for Assyria (Ez 31:3). The Assyrians were filled with arrogance, and despite their great height the Lord delivered justice:

I handed it over to a ruler of nations
to deal with it according to its evil.
I have cast it off,
and foreigners have cut it down, (Ez 31:11-12a)

When Assyria fell, other nations took notice, and the Lord says the same fate awaits its allies:

At the sound of its fall,
I made nations shudder,
When I cast it down to Sheol
with those who go down to the pit.
In the underworld
all the trees of Eden took comfort:
Lebanon's choicest and best,
all that were fed by the waters.
They too will go down to Sheol,
to those slain by the sword,
Its allies who dwelt
in its shade among the nations (Ez 31:16-17).

Again, the punishment is an early death-there is no mention of punishment in the afterlife.

How best to summarize what the Old Testament says about Sheol during the years before the Jews return from exile in Babylon? Desmond Alexander suggests that in the Old Testament Sheol "frequently, if not always" is the netherworld and abode of the ungodly after death.²³ This stands in opposition to the notion that both the righteous and the wicked are destined to dwell in Sheol after death. Alexander offers reasons why both Jacob and Hezekiah talk about descending to Sheol when they die, even though we may consider both righteous. He suggests that Jacob's grief may have been so great because he thought Joseph had received divine punishment for something he had done, and that he had gone down with the wicked in Sheol.²⁴ But he does not explain why Jacob would have thought that he would be joining Joseph in Sheol, or why years later he would say that losing Benjamin would send his "white head down to Sheol in grief" (Gn

²³ Alexander, "The Old Testament View of Life after Death.", 45.

²⁴ Alexander, 44.

42:38). It does not seem that there is any evidence that Jacob thought he deserved to be going to where only the wicked dwell after death. In addition, Alexander suggests that Hezekiah may also have thought that his destiny was to join the wicked in the netherworld because the Prophet Isaiah predicted his death.²⁵ This incident occurred when he was ill, just before the Assyrians were about to launch an assault on the city of Jerusalem. However, if Hezekiah thought he deserved to join the wicked in death, why did he weep bitterly and remind God how in his life he had been faithful and how with all his heart he had done what was good? (Is 38:3).

Other scholars like Henning assert that in the Old Testament “everyone goes to Sheol,” regardless of what kind of person they are, “Death is the great equalizer.”²⁶ Jon Levenson says that he finds it remarkable just how little we know about Sheol. He asserts that there is a disinterest in the abode of the dead in the Hebrew Bible that needs to be respected because the focus of the books is the people of Israel and their relationship to God.²⁷ In addition, Levenson says that the belief in the immortality of the soul and the doctrine of resurrection develop in Second Temple Judaism and in its daughter religions.²⁸ I agree with Henning that in the OT death is the great equalizer and that everyone goes to Sheol. I also agree with both of Levenson’s assertions, which leads us to the Second Temple period.

²⁵ Alexander, 45.

²⁶ Henning, “No Heaven or Hell, Only She’ol”, 2.

²⁷ Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 66.

²⁸ Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel*, 5.

The Second Temple Period Before Jesus

The Second Temple was built after the return from captivity in Babylonian and completed around the year 519 BC under Persian rule.²⁹ The worship facility was refurbished and expanded under Herod the Great in the first century BC. The Romans destroyed the Jews beloved Temple in 70 AD, and it has never been rebuilt. During this Second Temple period (500 BC-70 AD), in the first two centuries before the birth of Jesus, there were other Jewish books written that reference לְשֵׁוֹל/Sheol or the Greek Ἅδης/Hades. In The Wisdom of Ben Sira (written in Greek), there are ten verses that use the word Ἅδης/Hades. The Greek word/idea of the underworld as the resting place for everyone when they die is Ἅδης;³⁰ the English transliteration is Hades. The word Ἅδης is used in Greek versions of OT books written during this period and is used like the Hebrew word Sheol is used in the other OT books of scripture; it is the realm of the dead. These instances do not really differ from some of the previous references to Sheol that have already been cited. Sirach says that in Ἅδης/Hades no one can seek joy (Sir 14:16), that in Ἅδης/Hades no one can glorify God (Sir 17:27), and like others before him, he is grateful for being rescued “from the gates of Ἅδης/Hades” (Sir 51:2). It seems clear that during the Second Temple period ideas about the afterlife developed and changed in these books. We find more evidence that some Jews believed in the immortality of the soul, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and that in the afterlife there will be both reward and punishment.

One example is found in The Book of Daniel, which was written to bring comfort and confidence to Jews living through the religious persecution under the brutal reign of Antiochus

²⁹ Grabbe, 3.

³⁰ Henning, *Educating Early Christians through the Rhetoric of Hell*, 21.

IV Epiphanes (175–164 BC).³¹ Chapters 7-12 contain Daniel’s visions and his conversations with angels who interpret his dreams. At the end of Daniel’s apocalyptic visions, he is told that at the end of days:

Many of those who sleep
in the dust of the earth shall awake;
Some to everlasting life,
others to reproach and everlasting disgrace.
But those with insight shall shine brightly
like the splendor of the firmament,
And those who lead the many to justice
shall be like the stars forever (Dn 12:2-3).

What is also interesting is that punishment is not described as torment by fire, but instead there will be reproach and disgrace (Dn 12:2).

Another example of the hope of resurrection from the dead for the righteous is found in 2 Maccabees, dated in the second century BC. In chapter 7 the wicked king Antiochus arrested, tortured, and killed seven brothers along with their mother. All seven of the brothers refused to eat pork and violate God’s law, instead they bravely excepted torture and death. Three of the seven expressed their hope in resurrection while enduring the ordeal. With his dying breath the second brother who is killed declares to his executioner: “You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to live again forever, because we are dying for his laws” (v.9). His hope was for both resurrection and immortality. When the third brother is about to have his tongue cut out, and his hands and feet cut off, he says: “It was from Heaven that I received these; for the sake of his laws I disregard them; from him I hope to receive them again” (v.11). Likewise, the fourth brother expresses his hope that after death the Lord will restore him to life, and he tells his torturers that for them “there will be no

³¹ Anderson, xiii.

resurrection” (v.14). As for their mother, she also expresses faith that the Lord would resurrect her sons. Just before his death, she tells her youngest son that she will see him and his brothers again “in the time of mercy” (v.29). George Nickelsburg notes that, the King of the universe (v.9) will rescue the brothers from their destruction at the hands of a local monarch by the means of resurrection, which will be the brothers’ vindication.³²

Another example that provides proof of the belief in the resurrection of the righteous is found in 2 Maccabees in chapter 12. When his soldiers fell in a battle to take control of Judea out of the hands of Antiochus, Judas Maccabees started a collection to provide for an expiatory sacrifice in expectation that the dead would rise in the future (2 Mc 12:43-44). Resurrection underwent a change from its metaphorical meaning in Ezekiel 37, where dead bones come to life, which was an allegory for return of Judah from exile in Babylon in the sixth century BC.

Wright has this to say about resurrection in The Book of Daniel and 2 Maccabees:

The book of Daniel bears witness to the emerging, not as we saw of a totally new idea, but of the reaffirmation in a new form of ancient Israelite belief in the goodness and god-givenness of the created world and of bodily human life with in it. By the time 2 Maccabees was written the metaphor became literal, having concrete referent of re-embodiment – getting back hands, tongues, entire bodies – without losing the larger concrete referent of national restoration.³³

However, this was not the only idea of the afterlife that Jews in the first century believed. The Book of Wisdom, which was written about fifty years before the birth of Jesus, contrasts the fate of the righteous with the fate of the wicked. The book does not mention bodily resurrection, instead its focus is the immortality of the soul, a Greek notion:

The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment shall touch them.

³²Nickelsburg, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism*, 94.

³³Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 202.

They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead;
and their passing away was thought an affliction
and their going forth from us, utter destruction.
But they are in peace.
For if to others, indeed, they seem punished,
yet is their hope full of immortality;
Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed,
because God tried them
and found them worthy of himself (Ws 3:1-5).

As for the wicked who oppressed the righteous poor, did not spare the widow, and did not show reverence to the elderly (Ws 2:10)-they are allied with the devil and will experience death (Ws 2:24). They are also described as lying “in wait for the righteous one” (2:12) and eventually condemning him to death (2:20); all of which seems to undergird the NT passion narrative (Ws 2:12-20).³⁴ Because they neglected righteousness and forsook the Lord, “they will receive punishment to match their thoughts” (Ws 3:10). These thoughts were that life was brief and filled with trouble, meaningless, and death is final because no one comes back from Hades (Ws 2:1-5). There is no indication that the wicked will be punished in the afterlife for all eternity, just that there is no return from Hades, the abode of the dead.

Some have proposed that the belief systems of the kingdoms that ruled over the Israelites during the Second Temple period may have influenced Jewish authors. One proposed influence on Jewish thoughts concerning the afterlife is Zoroastrianism, the state religion of the Persian Empire.³⁵ However, there are no Zoroastrian sacred texts dated during the Persian Period that provide evidence of their belief system. If such existed, the writings were lost when their empire fell to the Greeks. The only direct evidence of what Zoroastrians believed during the time Persia

³⁴ *The New American Bible, (Revised Edition)*, p.995.

³⁵ Grabbe, 87.

ruled over the Israelites comes from Persian monuments and Greek writings.³⁶ In fact, it seems Zoroastrians relied on a long oral tradition until the sixth century AD.³⁷ The belief system includes a cosmic struggle between good and evil that climaxes with resurrection, a time when the good are rewarded and the bad punished. However, it seems that the Book of Daniel gets its influence from Isaiah and Hosea which takes this thought process back before any likely influence of Zoroastrianism.³⁸

Another proposed influence is the Hellenization of the Mediterranean through Greek literature and philosophy. Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were written well before the Second Temple Period (eighth or seventh century BC) and Bart Ehrman asserts that these works influenced Jewish (as well as Christian) ideas of the afterlife.³⁹ The works describe tours of Hades where there were no comforts, only a profound sense of loss.⁴⁰

For Plato (third-fourth century BC), the soul is the part of the human person that matters; it existed before there was a body and it will continue to live on after the body has died; Hades was desirable for most people, but the wicked souls would be punished which meant that justice triumphed.⁴¹ However, centuries before the Greeks, some Jews believed in the distinction of body and soul, and that the soul lived on after the body. What made Judaism different than the Greeks was their developing belief in the resurrection of the body.⁴²

³⁶ Boyce, Mary. "Zoroastrianism.", 237.

³⁷ Isbell, 152.

³⁸ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 125.

³⁹ Ehrman, 136.

⁴⁰ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*. 44.

⁴¹ Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 49, 52.

⁴² Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 83.

The apocalyptic I Enoch is an important non-canonical ancient Jewish text, dated to the last two centuries BC. Along with other apocalyptic literature, it seems to contribute to the change in Jewish beliefs about sin and death. Threats of an early violent death as punishment for sin in some of the books of the OT were replaced in I Enoch with threats of punishment in the afterlife for sin during one's life.⁴³ In Chapter 22 of I Enoch, both good and bad souls go to "a great and high mountain of hard rock" (I En 22:1) after death and are separated into pits where they will experience retribution for their conduct during their lives. For Enoch, the final fate of everyone's soul will be decided on the day of judgement.⁴⁴

By the first century, the belief that in death everyone shares the same fate is not the only Israelite belief about death. Some Israelites believe that justice will be served in the afterlife, this includes a belief in the immortality of the soul, and that the righteous may one day be raised from the dead.

⁴³ Henning, M. (2021). *No Heaven or Hell, Only She'ol*, 11.

⁴⁴ Nickelsburg, *I Enoch: A Commentary on the Book of I Enoch*. 302.

CHAPTER 2 BIBLE TRANSLATION AND HISTORY

This chapter discusses some of the history of Bible translation, and some of the history of doctrines about the afterlife in the early church. First, this chapter will explain how the first translation of the Hebrew Bible translated the Hebrew word for the abode of all the dead into Greek. Second, this chapter will examine how St. Jerome (347-420 AD) translated the Scriptures into Latin, specifically how he translated the Hebrew and Greek words that will appear as the word “hell” in English Bibles in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Third, this chapter will show that in the early church, some of the fathers believed that punishment in the afterlife was for purification and limited in duration. In opposition to this teaching was St. Augustine, who forcefully argued that punishment of the damned in the afterlife was everlasting. Fourth, this chapter will show that Augustine’s doctrine prevailed and has influenced the church in the west (both Catholic and Protestant), and even though he did not read and write in English (he used Latin), the acceptance of his doctrine explains why the word “hell” was used so frequently in the various translations of the Bible into English. Fifth, an examination of a few English translations of the Bible post Vatican II is provided which shows that more modern translations do not always use the word hell, “which suggests that modern English translations reflect the ongoing tradition of the church regarding the afterlife”.⁴⁵ (See Appendix #3 & #5)

⁴⁵ Discussion with Dr. James Keating 2022

Translating the Bible From Hebrew to Greek

The first translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into another language was completed under Ptolemaic rule of Palestine (301-200 B.C.). Ptolemy II financed the translation called the Septuagint (LXX), which means seventy, because it was said that seventy-two translators were used in the process.⁴⁶ In addition to being the first translation, the LXX was the Bible of the early Christian church. When New Testament authors quoted the OT, they almost always quoted the Greek LXX version.⁴⁷ In this Greek version of the Scriptures, the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל/Sheol (the abode of the dead) was most often translated as Ἅδης/Hades (the Greek word/idea of the underworld as the resting place for everyone when they die).⁴⁸

The LXX did not include all the books of the OT that contain the word Ἅδης/Hades, because some of the books were written after its translation in the third century BC. These books are Daniel, Tobit, Esther, 2 Maccabees, Wisdom, Baruch, and The Wisdom of Ben Sira; most of them were written in Greek and are part of Orthodox and Catholic Bibles. These latter books are not part of the Hebrew or Protestant Scriptures, except The Book of Daniel which is included in all three canons. Daniel was written in both Hebrew (chs.1:1-2:4a and 8-12) and Aramaic (chs. 2:4b-7:28), however, additional verses were composed in Greek and these verses are included in Catholic and Orthodox versions of the book in chapter 3.

In these books, the word Ἅδης/Hades is used in the same way the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל/Sheol is used in the LXX; it is the realm of the dead. As stated previously, there is no mention of punishment in the afterlife for the wicked by fire, or any other method of punishment in any of

⁴⁶ Metzger, 13-14.

⁴⁷ Metzger, 18.

⁴⁸ Henning, *Educating Early Christians through the Rhetoric of Hell*, 21.

the books of the OT, nor is there any mention of reward for the righteous in the afterlife. There is no hell in the OT, nor is there a heaven.

Translating the Bible to Latin

Over six hundred years after the LXX, St. Jerome (347-420 AD) who has been referred to as “the greatest scholar whom the ancient western church produced”,⁴⁹ was called upon to translate both the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures into Latin. He started the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible in 382 AD under Pope Damasus I,⁵⁰ and for well over one thousand years, the Vulgate was the recognized Christian text of Scripture throughout western Europe. In fact, in the fourth session of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Roman Catholic Church affirmed the Vulgate’s authenticity:

Moreover, the same sacred and holy Synod,—considering that no small utility may accrue to the Church of God, if it be made known which out of all the Latin editions, now in circulation, of the sacred books, is to be held as authentic,—ordains and declares, that the said old and vulgate edition, which, by the lengthened usage of so many years, has been approved of in the Church, be, in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions, held as authentic; and that no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever.⁵¹

In the OT Vulgate version, Jerome translated both the Hebrew שְׁאוֹל/*Sheol*, and the Greek *αδης/Hades* into the Latin words—*infimum, inferos, inferno, or inferi*, meaning the lower world. He used the same Latin words when he translated the Greek *αδης/Hades* in the NT. Jerome correctly understood that שְׁאוֹל/*Sheol* and *αδης/Hades* both indicate the lower world, the abode of the dead. Today we associate the word *inferno* “with fire and heat via, the Christian conception

⁴⁹ Walker, and Norris, Lotz, Handy, Robert, 195.

⁵⁰ Walker, and Norris, Lotz, Handy, Robert, 196.

⁵¹ Council of Trent-Papal Encyclicals Online.

of hell”.⁵² It does not seem, however, that Jerome had the doctrine of punishment by everlasting fire in mind when he used the word *inferno*, because fire is never used to describe the abode of the dead in the OT. (See Appendix 3.)

There is another word in the NT that has been understood as a place or state of being in the afterlife. The word has its roots in a valley called in Hebrew *ge-hinnom* (‘the valley of the sons of Hinnom’) on the outskirts of Jerusalem, south-west of the city. This Hebrew name (Hinnom) may be a family name, or it may be derived from either of the verbs “to sleep” or “to wail”, as they relate to death. Jesus would have referred to the valley in Aramaic using the word *ge-hanna*, and when the authors of the New Testament translated what Jesus said in Aramaic into Greek, they used the word *γέεννα*.⁵³ Gehenna is the English transliteration of *γέεννα*.

Gehenna is used in different ways in the NT than either *Ἅδης/Sheol* or *αἰδης/Hades*. Each time that *γέεννα/Gehenna* is used, it seems to refer to a place or state of being that one experiences because of sin. At times it is described as “fiery Gehenna” (Mt 5:22; 18:9), “the unquenchable fire” (Mk 9:43), and “where the worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” (Mk 9:48). When Jerome translated *γέεννα* into Latin, he simply used *gehennam*, or *gehennae*, the Latinized versions of the Greek *γέεννα* (See Appendix 5). He did not use *infimum*, *inferos*, *inferno*, or *inferi*, the word for lower world.

Jerome rightly followed the lead of the authors of the New Testament who used different words for *Ἅδης/Sheol*, *αἰδης/Hades*, and *γέεννα/Gehenna*. When Jerome translated the scriptures to Latin, the doctrine that every person who died outside the Church was damned to everlasting fire was not the only doctrine about the afterlife. Many church fathers expressed the belief that

⁵² <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=inferi>

⁵³ Bailey, 187.

punishment in the afterlife was to educate and purify the sinner. The next section will examine these differing doctrines.

The Early Church and the Afterlife

It is important to cite two of the early church fathers with very different doctrines about damnation and salvation. This is necessary because the doctrine that was adopted in the Western church (Catholic and Protestant) explains the use of the word “hell” in English translations of the Bible. First, there is Origen of Alexandria, a giant among early Christian theologians.⁵⁴ Origen wrote that:

Every being will be restored to be one, and God will be “all in all.” However, this will not happen in a moment, but slowly and gradually, through innumerable aeons of indefinite duration, because correction and purification will take place gradually, according to the needs of each individual. Thus, whereas some with a faster rhythm will be the first to hasten to the goal, and others follow them closely, yet others on the contrary will fall a long distance behind. And in this way, through innumerable orders constituted by those who make the progress and, after being enemies, are reconciled with God, there will come the last enemy, Death, that this may be destroyed and there will be no more enemy left. (Princ. 3:6:6)⁵⁵

For Origen, damnation was not permanent for anyone, in his view even the devil and his angels will eventually be saved once they return to God.⁵⁶

Ilaria Ramelli states that Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215), Origen (c.184-c.254), and Gregory Nyssen (c.335-c.395) were all patristic universalists, and they laid the foundation for the doctrine of purgatory. She goes on to say that it was not until the thirteenth century that purgatory was distinguished from hell, but that Clement, Gregory Nyssen, and Origen taught that

⁵⁴ Chadwick, 100.

⁵⁵ Ramelli, *A Larger Hope*, 45., (Origen, *On First Principles*.)

⁵⁶ Ramelli, *A Larger Hope*, 47.

hell was in fact a purgatory.⁵⁷ The CCC quotes Gregory the Great as a support of the doctrine of purgatory; Gregory speaks of a purifying fire that occurs before final judgement.⁵⁸ Ramelli asserts that any time that a sinner spent in “fire” was for purification, not for punishment. Fire in their view was restorative, and not retributive. Ramelli says, “The idea that if one does not repent within one’s earthly life, there will be no possibility of doing so after death, as though one’s free will should be lost, was alien to these thinkers”.⁵⁹

The second early church father who is important to cite is Saint Augustine (c.354-c.430), who was perhaps one of the most influential figures in the history of Christianity and on western civilization generally.⁶⁰ Augustine’s theology on the afterlife was very different from Origen’s theology. In one of his most important works, *The City of God*,⁶¹ Augustine refutes the idea that the punishment of the damned will not last forever. He mentions Origen, and Origen’s belief that even the devil and his angels will eventually be saved:

On this subject the most compassionate of all was Origen, who believed that the devil himself and his angels will be rescued from their torments and brought into the company of the holy angels, after the more severe and lasting chastisements appropriate to their deserts.⁶²

In Chapter XXI of *City of God*, he addresses the duration of punishment in the afterlife:

“If both are ‘eternal’, it follows necessarily that either both are to be taken as long-lasting but finite, or both as endless and perpetual. The phrases ‘eternal punishment’ and ‘eternal life’ are parallel and it would be absurd to use them in one and the same sentence to mean: ‘Eternal life will be infinite, while eternal punishment will have an end.’ Hence,

⁵⁷ Ramelli, *A Larger Hope*, 246.

⁵⁸ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, III, 1031.

⁵⁹ Ramelli, *A Larger Hope*, 29.

⁶⁰ McGonigle, Quigley, 116.

⁶¹ Saint Augustine. *Saint Augustine City of God*, ix.

⁶² Saint Augustine. *Saint Augustine City of God*, 995.

because the eternal life of the saints will be endless, the eternal punishment also, for those condemned to it, will assuredly have no end”.⁶³

In addition, he addresses such issues as how a body can endure pain for all eternity, and why it is a false notion that punishment after death is for purification.⁶⁴

Regarding the pre-Christian era, Augustine recognized that salvation was available for all who lived justly before the coming of Christ, but once the Gospel had been preached there was no possibility of avoiding damnation without orthodox Christian faith, which meant membership in the true church.⁶⁵ Rejection of the Gospel meant everlasting damnation for all pagans and Jews; he cited Mark’s Gospel as the source of his belief: “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15-16).⁶⁶

Ramelli contends that Augustine concluded that punishment in the afterlife was never ending because he could not read or write Greek. She also asserts that the Latin translations of the Scriptures that Augustine used blurred the meanings of two Greek words, *aionios* (other worldly or long lasting) and *aidios* (never ending) like God who is everlasting/eternal.⁶⁷ Punishment and condemnation in Scripture is described in Greek as *aionios* (other worldly or long lasting).

Augustine’s doctrine on the reality of never-ending punishment prevailed in the western part of the Christian world. Hans Urs van Balthasar asserts that: “Augustine interprets the

⁶³ Saint Augustine. *Saint Augustine City of God*, 1001-1002.

⁶⁴ Saint Augustine. *Saint Augustine City of God*, 989.

⁶⁵ Sullivan, 30-31.

⁶⁶ Sullivan, 35.

⁶⁷ Ramelli, *A Larger Hope?*, 219.

relevant texts in such a way that he *knows* about the outcome of divine judgement”; that those outside the church will be punished by fire, separated from God forever. Van Balthasar calls this a “turning point in Church history”, and that those who followed him and bowed to his authority in the same way became “*knowers*” about the outcome of divine judgement. Von Balthasar lists as *knowers*, “Gregory the Great through early and High Middle Ages-Anselm, Bonaventure and Thomas not excepted-to the Reformers and Jansenists”.⁶⁸

Knowing and Translating Scripture to English

The General Church Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence is an example of “*knowing*” the outcome of divine judgement. The council was held from 1431-45 AD, and regarding the church’s doctrine of baptism, mortal sin, original sin, and hell, the council states in 1439:

Also, the souls of those who have incurred no stain of sin whatsoever after baptism, as well as souls who after incurring the stain of sin have been cleansed whether in their bodies or outside their bodies, as was stated above, are straightaway received into heaven and clearly behold the triune God as he is, yet one person more perfectly than another according to the difference of their merits. But the souls of those who depart this life in actual mortal sin, or in original sin alone, go down straightaway to hell to be punished, but with unequal pains.⁶⁹

It seems that the unbaptized go straight to “hell” like those who die in actual mortal sin, but the level of suffering in “hell” will not be the same. Three years later in 1442 AD, the same General Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence restates that there is no salvation outside the church:

It firmly believes, professes and preaches that all those who are outside the catholic church, not only pagans but also Jews or heretics and schismatics, cannot share in eternal life and will go into the *everlasting fire* which was prepared for the devil and his angels, unless they are joined to the catholic church before the end of their lives; that the unity of the ecclesiastical body is of such importance that only for those who abide in it do the church’s sacraments contribute to salvation and do fasts, almsgiving and other works of

⁶⁸ Balthasar, 47.

⁶⁹Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence, 1431-49 A.D. Session 6 6 July 1439

piety and practices of the Christian militia produce eternal rewards; and that nobody can be saved, no matter how much he has given away in alms and even if he has shed his blood in the name of Christ, unless he has persevered in the bosom and the unity of the catholic church.⁷⁰

Both council statements seem to demonstrate that Augustine's theology concerning punishment in the afterlife prevailed in the Catholic Church, those outside the church seem to go to everlasting fire along with the devil and his angels.

Augustine's work undoubtedly influenced Martin Luther who joined a monastic community at Wittenberg in 1505. Luther's religious order lived by the rule of St. Augustine, and like Augustine, Luther believed that each man's fate had been decreed since the foundation of the world; some are destined for salvation, others are destined for damnation. Luther remained an important figure in the reformation movement from the day he nailed his "Ninety -Five Theses" to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg in 1517, until his death in 1546.⁷¹ He had this to say regarding forgiveness:

For where Christ is not preached, there is no Holy Spirit to create, call and gather the Christian Church, and outside it no one can come to the Lord Jesus Christ.... But outside of the Christian Church (that is, where the Gospel is not) there is no forgiveness, and hence no holiness.⁷²

Like other "orthodox" theologians, Luther concluded that humans were totally unworthy of salvation and that only through God's gift of grace, which is attained through faith in Him, can one achieve salvation.⁷³ For Luther, "no forgiveness" meant eternal punishment along with the devil and his angels.

⁷⁰ Council of Basel-Ferrara-Florence, 1431-49 A.D. Session 11 4 February 1442 (Bull of union with the Copts)

⁷¹ Bainton, 44.

⁷² Sullivan, p.82---Large Catechism, II, 45, 56: T.G. Tappert, ed., The Book of Concord, 418.

⁷³ Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian: With Related Texts*. Edited by Tryntje Helfferich. xix.

Another reformer, John Calvin (1509-1564) who published his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in the spring of 1536, was an admirer of Augustine. His work quickly became the most widely used and orderly presentation of doctrine that the Reformation produced.⁷⁴ For Calvinists, eternal damnation for most people is all part of God's plan. In Book III of his *Institutes*, Calvin relied on Augustine's doctrine to explain his assertions:

I say with Augustine, that the Lord has created those who, as he certainly foreknew, were to go to destruction, and he did so because he so willed. Why he willed it is not ours to ask, as we cannot comprehend, nor can it become us even to raise a controversy as to the justice of the divine will (See August. Ep. 106).⁷⁵

Also in Book III, Calvin says that God arranged "at his own pleasure" the fall of Adam, thus ensuring that most humans that have/will ever live have been predestined to hell. Book III says:

The decree, I admit, is, dreadful; and yet it is impossible to deny that God foreknew what the end of man was to be before he made him, and foreknew, because he had so ordained by his decree. Should any one here inveigh against the prescience of God, he does it rashly and unadvisedly. For why, pray, should it be made a charge against the heavenly Judge, that he was not ignorant of what was to happen? Thus, if there is any just or plausible complaint, it must be directed against predestination. Nor ought it to seem absurd when I say, that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his posterity; but also at his own pleasure arranged it.⁷⁶

In Book III of his *Institutes* Calvin clearly relies on the work of Augustine for his inspiration.

Augustine's influence on both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology regarding salvation and damnation extended up to and beyond the Reformation and the General Council of Trent (1545-1563). In 1856, Pope Pius IX had this to say about the afterlife:

There is only one divine faith which is the beginning of salvation for mankind and the basis of all justification, the faith by which the just person lives and without which it is impossible to please God and to come to the community of His children. There is only one true, holy, Catholic church, which is the Apostolic Roman Church. There is only one

⁷⁴ Walker, and Norris, Lotz, Handy, Robert, 473-474.

⁷⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III.23.5.

⁷⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, Book III.23.7.

See founded in Peter by the word of the Lord, outside of which we cannot find either true faith or eternal salvation.⁷⁷

Augustine's doctrine that there was no salvation for anyone outside the church, was the prevailing doctrine for both Catholics and Protestants up to and after the Reformation and the General Council of Trent. *Knowing* that the destinies of many people was eternal punishment by fire and separated from God forever, undoubtedly affected translating the Bible into English.

Due to the influence of John Wycliffe (c.1330-84), the Bible was translated into English for the first time in about 1382;⁷⁸ almost fourteen hundred years after the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. Two of the earliest and well-known English translations of Scripture are the Catholic Douay Reims Version (DV), and the Protestant King James Version (KJV). Both were published after the General Council of Trent (1545-63 AD), and after Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press in 1440 AD.

You will not find the transliteration of the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל to the English word Sheol, (the abode of all the dead) in either of these English translations. $\text{שְׁאוֹל}/\textit{Sheol}$, is translated to the word "hell" every time in the DV and thirty-one times in the KJV. When the translators of the KJV did not use "hell" as a translation of $\text{שְׁאוֹל}/\textit{Sheol}$, they used either "the pit" or "the grave". As a note of interest, the word "hell" has its origin in Norse mythology. Hel, was the goddess who ruled the cold and dark underworld of the dead, the daughter of Loki the trickster god.⁷⁹

I find it fascinating that both the DV and the KJV use the word hell as a translation for $\text{שְׁאוֹל}/\textit{Sheol}$ even though punishment in the afterlife is never mentioned in the OT nor associated with this word. Equally astounding is that the word $\text{ᾍδης}/\textit{Hades}$ also does not appear in either the

⁷⁷ Singulari Quidem-On the Church in Austria-Pope BI. Pius IX – 1856 (Par. 4.)

⁷⁸ Metzger, 56.

⁷⁹ Gaiman, 290.

DV or the KJV of the Bible. Both English versions also translate *αἰδης/Hades* into the English word hell. In the most important English Bibles, the abode of the dead became the place of everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. It seems good to recall here that Jerome translated both the Hebrew word *לִשְׁׁוֹל/Sheol*, and the Greek *αἰδης/Hades* into the Latin words' *infirmum, inferos, inferno, or inferi*, meaning the lower world, and not a place of punishment. Jerome's Latin Vulgate was the Bible that the translators of the DV used for their English translation, despite this the DV uses the word "hell". Suffering in *αἰδης/Hades* by fire is only mentioned one time in the NT in The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31), and that pericope will be addressed in Chapter 3.

The same pattern can be found in the English tradition of the translation of *ge-enna/Gehenna* in the DV and the KJV; both translate the word as "hell". This is especially egregious because when Jerome translated *γέεννα* into Latin, he simply used *gehennam*, or *gehennae*, the Latinized versions of the Greek *γέεννα*. The OT usage of the Hebrew *ge-hinnom* is examined in Chapter 4. In that chapter, I endeavor to explain why Gehenna is the correct word to use in English Bibles.

Justification, or how humans are saved from going into the everlasting fire, seems to have been a focus of the Reformation and the centerpiece of Council of Trent's work.⁸⁰ The reformers were as insistent as Catholic tradition had been on the belief that there is no salvation for anyone outside the church,⁸¹ even though their definitions of the church and its' members differed. It seems certain that the translations of Hebrew word *לִשְׁׁוֹל/Sheol*, and the Greek *αἰδης/Hades* as the

⁸⁰ Reid, Patrick. *Readings in Western Religious Thought*. New York: Paulist Press, 361. Note: Dr. Reid does not mention hell, his comments were on justification and the focus of the reformation and the centerpiece of Trent.

⁸¹ Sullivan, 82.

word hell in the DV and the KJV English versions of the Bible were affected by the doctrine of eternal damnation in everlasting fire that was held by both Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Translating to English Post Vatican II

Obviously new English translations of the Bible have been published over the years since the DV and KJV. Two of the most recent English translations of Catholic versions of Scripture are the NRSVCE and the NABRE. Both were published after the close of Vatican II in 1965, and the word hell is no longer used as a translation of the OT word *הַשְׁאוֹל/Sheol*; it appears simply as Sheol. This is the proper translation of the word because the OT never describes Sheol as a place of punishment, it is just the place where everyone goes when they die.

In both the NRSVCE and the NABRE translations of the NT, *αἸδης/Hades* is no longer translated to the English word “hell”. In the NRSVCE *αἸδης* appears as “Hades” every time. In the NABRE, *αἸδης* is translated as Hades three times in The Revelation of John, and in all other verses it is translated as “the netherworld”. Hades is not hell in these two Catholic Bibles, and these translations are undoubtedly correct because the verses that include the word *αἸδης/Hades* do not indicate a place of never-ending fire.

Regarding the more recent translations of *γέεννα*, the NRSVCE translates the word as “hell” each of the twelve times it occurs in the NT. Unfortunately, by using a different word (hell), the OT usage of the Hebrew *ge-hinnom* gets lost, and that is wrong because how *ge-hinnom* is used in the OT seems relevant to understanding what Jesus meant when he used the word. It is also wrong because the word hell is tainted by very questionable doctrine about the afterlife. However, the NABRE translates *γέεννα* simply as Gehenna, the English transliteration

of the Hebrew word. It seems clear that the NABRE and its use of Gehenna is correct because its translators followed the lead of the NT writers who used the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew word *ge-hinnom*, (like Jerome used a Latinized version of the word). An interesting contrast exists between two of the Catholic versions: The word hell appears nowhere in the NABRE, while the DV version uses the word one hundred and nine times. The NABRE properly translates using the appropriate different words, the DV translators were wrong when they used the word hell one hundred and nine times because they allowed the prevailing doctrine about the afterlife to affect their translation. The same stands true for the King James version.

One last translation of the Bible that is worth discussing here is *The Kingdom New Testament (2011): A Contemporary Translation*, by N.T. Wright. I was surprised that Dr. Wright used the word hell three times in his translation, so I e-mailed him. In my message, I let him know that I noticed that the only time he used the word hell instead of Hades was in Matthew 16:18, and that he used hell instead of Gehenna only two times (Mt 18:9; Jas 3:6). I asked him why he chose hell for those verses. This was his response:

I understand the question but it's hard to give a precise answer. I completed the NT translation twelve years ago -- all in all it took ten years because I was busy with many other things ! -- and i can't easily now remember why I took the decisions I did. One of the factors was probably my awareness that the western tradition -- catholic as well as protestant -- has all too easily imported into its reading of the NT the mediaeval heaven-and-hell scheme of thought (which is still so powerful in many circles today not least in the USA). Though I am not and have never been a universalist I am wary of simply saying 'hell' when quite a lot of the relevant NT passages seem to be talking e.g. about the upcoming fall of Jerusalem (e.g. Luke 13.1ff.). And 'Gehenna' was of course the city's smouldering rubbish-dump . . . Sorry, no time for more. Best wishes with your research and thank you for the kind words Tom Wright⁸²

I was grateful for the quick reply (4 minutes), and was fascinated by his reference to the western tradition, “not least the USA”, and its history of importing “the mediaeval heaven-and-hell

⁸² E-mail dated 4-11-2020, From Dr. Wright to mbahry.

scheme of thought” into its reading of the NT. This line of thinking seems to clearly explain both the DV and the KJV translations of Sheol, Hades, and Gehenna as the word hell. I also think it explains why he uses Hades and Gehenna most of the time instead of hell but does not explain why he chooses hell in those three verses. As much as I have been blessed by Dr. Wright’s work and appreciate his response, I think that by using hell in the three instances that I cited, he “imported into” his translation of the NT the word hell thereby importing “the mediaeval heaven-and-hell scheme of thought”. This scheme of thought is that there is ‘no salvation outside the church’, and that those outside the church will suffer both physically and spiritually forever in the afterlife.

Human choices do matter, and that is why Jesus talks about Hades, Gehenna, “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, fire etc. But I do not see in Scripture conclusive evidence that Jesus taught that afterlife condemnation is a never-ending condition of punishment by fire, separating a person forever from God. Because of its’ questionable definition, the word “hell” should never again be used in the Bible (see the NABRE). Maybe even someday it would be good to use the word to describe a doctrine that Christians once believed.

CHAPTER 3 HADES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Greek word ᾅης/Hades is used ten times in the New Testament. What is notable is that only two of the four Gospel writers thought that Hades was important enough to include in their Gospel; Mark and John never use the word. Matthew and Luke each refer to Hades twice, and each time it is Jesus using the word (Mt 11:23; 16:18 & Lk 10:15; 16:23). In The Acts of the Apostles, the word Hades also appears twice (Acts 2:27, 31), and both times it is St. Peter quoting Psalm 16:10 using Hades as a translation of the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל/Sheol. This is because the author of Acts used the LXX when citing the OT, and in the LXX שְׁאוֹל/Sheol is translated as ᾅης/Hades. Lastly, Hades is used four times in the Book of Revelation (1:18, 6:8, 20:13,14). Not one of these references to Hades clearly states that people will suffer endlessly in the afterlife.

Capernaum and Sodom

One of the references to Hades appears in both Matthew and Luke, and concerns the town of Capernaum (Mt 11:23, Lk 10:15 NRSVCE). In both Gospels, Capernaum is named as one of the places that Jesus performed many of his miracles. His miracles were signs that should have led the people of Capernaum to repentance, but unfortunately, they failed to repent.⁸³ Jesus addressed their lack of faith:

“And as for you Capernaum,
“will you be exalted to heaven?
No, you will be brought down to Hades”. (Mt 11:23, Lk 10:15)

⁸³ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 164-165.

His message to Capernaum seems to be taken from the Book of Isaiah who declares to Israel that a time is coming when they will be given rest from their sorrow, turmoil, and hard service in Babylon. On that day, when the Lord frees them from their oppressors, Israel will sing a song against the king of Babylon (Is 14:3-4). In their song they will taunt the king about how he had said in his heart that he will “scale the heavens” (Is 14:13) and “ascend above the tops of the clouds” (Is 14:14). They will also sing that the reward that awaits the king’s arrogance is not in the heavens, they will chant: “No! Down to Sheol you will be brought to the depths of the pit!” (Is 14:15). It may be that Jesus is trying to tell Capernaum that they are no different than the enemy of Israel who was responsible for destroying the Temple in 586 BC and taking many Israelites into captivity.⁸⁴

Jesus also compares Capernaum to the ancient city of Sodom and tells them that “on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you” (Mt 11:24). We know from Genesis that “the inhabitants of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord” (Gn 13:13). We also know from the story that because of their wickedness “the Lord rained down sulfur upon Sodom and Gomorrah, fire from the Lord out of heaven” (Gn 19:24). Despite Abraham’s efforts to intervene for the city it was destroyed when apparently not even ten righteous people could be found (Gn 18:32b).

Before reading about Jesus’ reference to Sodom and his condemnation of Capernaum it would be good to read an allegory of the Prophet Ezekiel written after the story of the destruction of Sodom. In the allegory Jerusalem is depicted as an abandoned female infant God rescued and cared for. Under the Lord’s care, Jerusalem grows into a very beautiful woman who is “renowned among the nations”, and because of His great love, God establishes a covenant with

⁸⁴ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 164.

her. Instead of attributing her beauty and success to the Lord, the woman trusts in her own beauty, uses her renown, and becomes a prostitute to the surrounding nations and their idols. Not only did the woman prostitute herself to the idols, but she also sacrifices by fire the sons and daughters she bore for the Lord (Ez 16:20-21). This fallen woman represents Jerusalem in the allegory, and her actions are the reasons for the exile to Babylon. In the allegory, the woman has two sisters, Samaria which represents the Northern Kingdom destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 BC, and the other was named Sodom. But Jerusalem is much worse than prideful Sodom, complacent in her wealth, greedy, and uncompassionate (Ez 16:47-49). Compared to the Jerusalem, Sodom seemed righteous. In his commentary on Matthew, St. John Chrysostom (350-397 AD) understood that Jesus may be referring to the allegory in Ezekiel 16. He believed that Jesus made the reference to the ancient cities in his effort to help the people of Capernaum return to the Lord: “Jesus alarmed them when he used every possible means to reclaim them to repentance.”⁸⁵ Likewise Fr. Daniel J. Harrington, S.J. notes that Jesus’ threats would have been “a stimulus to examine their own efforts at repentance” and that their “failure would bring about eschatological judgement”.⁸⁶

It is interesting that Ezekiel’s allegory ends on a positive note: the Lord says He will restore the fortunes of both Samaria and Sodom (Ez 16:53), and He will reestablish His covenant with Jerusalem, and He calls the new covenant “everlasting” (Ez 16:60). But how can Sodom’s fortune be restored when they were destroyed by fire from heaven? It seems there is hope for Capernaum, because with God all things are possible (Lk 18:27). It does not seem that Jesus meant to convey that every man, woman, and child in Capernaum was condemned to never

⁸⁵ Manlio Simonetti, ed., [Matthew 1-13](#), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture 228.

⁸⁶ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 165.

ending fire in hell because he said they “will be brought down to Hades.” After all, Hades is the abode of the dead, not a place of never-ending physical and spiritual suffering. His reference to Capernaum and Hades may reflect temporal destruction (Roman conquest and diaspora) rather than eschatological judgement.⁸⁷ It seems that Jesus may be letting Capernaum know that they are no better than the worst of the ancient cities, his message is a call to faith and repentance.⁸⁸ It seems eschatological judgement is also referred to by Jesus when he says: “But I tell you that on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom than for you” (Mt 11:24). It seems that the people of Sodom died and went to Hades where they await the day of judgement; it also seems Capernaum will be joining them where they will also wait for judgement day. Interestingly, Jesus does not mention that on judgment day that any of the towns mentioned will be condemned to reside in a particular place where they will be separated from God forever; Jesus does not say that the guilty will never be forgiven. He does indicate that judgement day will not be the same for everyone.

The Gates of Hades

Matthew’s Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?” (Mt16:13). After getting various answers, Jesus follows up with a question to his disciples; “But who do you say that I am?” (Mt16:15). All three synoptic Gospels contain this question, and in each Gospel, it is Simon Peter who responds. In Matthew’s account, Peter says: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). After Peter’s declaration, Jesus responds directly to Simon Peter saying:

⁸⁷ Papaioannou, 117.

⁸⁸ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 165.

“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Mt 16:17-19).

The first step in trying to understand what Jesus meant is to look to the Old Testament for references to “the gates of Sheol”, since “Sheol” is translated as “Hades” in the LXX. There are two instances where the gates of Sheol are mentioned, and both have already been cited in chapter 1 of this thesis. One instance is a song of thanks by the great King Hezekiah, who praises the Lord for saving him from “the gates of Sheol” (Is 38:10). The second is from a prayer by the author of Ben Sira who called out for help “from the gates of Sheol” (Sir 51:9). A similar expression in the Old Testament that is used in the same way “the gates of death” (Ps 9:14; 107:18; Jb 38:17), and in each case the gates seem to represent the power that death and Sheol/Hades have over one’s life.

So, what does it mean when Jesus says that “the gates of Hades” will not prevail against the church? One view is that the church is engaged in a battle between the powers of Hades and the power of heaven, and the battle started with the death and resurrection of Jesus. When Jesus rose on the third day, the gates of Hades swung open the powers of the realm of the dead began their attack on the world, and specifically on the church.⁸⁹ Jesus told Peter that the “gates of Hades”, and the realm of the dead will “not prevail over” which means it will not “be stronger than” the Church.⁹⁰ Hades cannot win against the church because Jesus promised that he would always be with the church “until the end of the age”.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Boring, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII Matthew, Mark*. 346.

⁹⁰ Boring, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII Matthew, Mark*. 346.

⁹¹ Marcus, “*The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18-19)*”, 455.

In his article, “The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt 16:18-19),” Joel Marcus asserts that in the time of Jesus and the NT, the predominant conception of Hades and Sheol among Jews and Christians, was not a place of punishment but simply the abode of the dead. It is probable, according to him, that this is how the term was used in Mt 16:18.⁹² This reference to Hades is unique to Matthew’s Gospel, and he is the only Gospel writer who uses the word Greek word *ekklesia*, in English the word is translated as ‘church’. This is of critical importance because the church will not be held in the abode of the dead forever. The Apostle Paul told the church in Corinth that there will be a resurrection of the dead and that Christ is “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20). Paul goes on to say:

For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power (1 Cor 15:21-24)

At harvest time, the first fruits are offered to God in thanksgiving, implying consecration of the whole harvest that follows. As such, Christ’s resurrection is not the end. Resurrection of the church from the realm of the dead is the harvest that follows Christ.⁹³ Later in Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus uses the word church again when he speaking to his disciples (Mt 18:15-20), and both times he follows up with words that bestow some authority or power. Giving Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven made Peter the chief teacher of the church. The keys signify teaching authority; Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees that they are hypocrites who “lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings” (Mt 23:13). Entrusting Peter with the keys, and power of binding

⁹² Marcus, Joel. “*The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:18-19)*.” 443–44.

⁹³ NABRE, 1785.

and loosing gave him the authority to apply Jesus' teaching to situations in the life of the church (Mt 16:19).⁹⁴ Matthew's Jesus also gives power to all the disciples (Mt 18:18) and says in both dialogues: "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." When Jesus speaks to Peter about Hades, he makes no mention of anyone going to a place of never-ending torment by fire; he just says that 'the gates of Hades' will not prevail against his Church. It seems here that the realm of the dead will not prevail; death will not prevail. As noted in the previous chapter, this is one of the verses that N.T. Wright translated ἀδης as "hell" instead of Hades. As much as I admire, and have been blessed by his work, I do not understand, nor do I agree that Hades should be translated as "hell". In his version of the NT, he may have inadvertently "imported" into his translation "western tradition" and its "the mediaeval heaven-and-hell scheme of thought".⁹⁵

The Rich Man and Lazarus

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31) contains what may be the most well-known reference to Hades in all of Scripture. It should be noted that of the ten times the word Hades appears in the New Testament, this parable is the only time that suffering is mentioned as part of the experience of Hades. But before delving into this parable, it is important to review some of what Luke's Jesus has say about generosity and reward, reversal of fortunes, and guarding against greed.

⁹⁴ Boring, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII Matthew, Mark*. 346.

⁹⁵ E-mail dated 4-11-2020, From Dr. Wright to mbahry.

Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about what they are going to eat, or about what they are going to wear, because life is much more than those things (Lk 12:22-23); but if they seek God's kingdom, they will have all the food and clothing that they need (Lk 12:31). He tells them not to be afraid, to sell their possessions, and give alms. In doing so they will be providing treasure for themselves in heaven, because generosity will be rewarded in the future (Lk 12:32-34). Jesus makes a connection between the anxiety for the security that possessions bring and the fear of death.⁹⁶

Jesus says that when one gives a banquet, invitations should be extended to the poor, the cripple, the blind, and the lame, as opposed to extending invitations to those who have the means to return the kindness. Inviting those who cannot repay your generosity will result in repayment when the righteous are resurrected (Lk 14:13-14). It is interesting to note that the lame, the blind, and the crippled are all excluded from the priesthood (Lv 21:17-22), and the Sadducees "deny that there is a resurrection" (Lk 20:27).⁹⁷ It also should be noted that the Sadducees were priests and opponents of Jesus, and they played a role in his death.

Another example of repayment for generosity in Luke's Gospel is a dialogue between a very rich official and Jesus. In the dialogue, the official wants to know what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him that in addition to keeping the commandments, he must sell everything that he has and give it to the poor. Jesus also tells him that when he does this, he will have treasure in heaven (Lk 18:18-22). As for the disciples who had given up everything for the sake of the kingdom of God, Jesus says they will be receiving back an overabundant return in the

⁹⁶ Johnson, Harrington (Editor), *The Gospel of Luke*, 202.

⁹⁷ Johnson, Harrington (Editor), *The Gospel of Luke*, 225.

present, and in the future age to come (Lk 18:29-30). There is no need to fear death if one is generous in this life.

Luke also writes of reversal of fortunes for the rich and the poor, the strong and the weak. When Mary goes to visit Elizabeth, she sings that the Lord has “thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly” (Lk 1:52), He has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich are sent away empty (Lk 1:53). Another example of the teaching of reversal of fortunes is Jesus’s Sermon on the Plain, which differs from his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew’s Gospel. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus lists eight blessings, but in Luke’s Gospel Jesus cites four blessings followed by four woes. Each woe and blessing are a reversal of fortune. Jesus says, the poor are blessed and will receive the kingdom, but woe to the rich because they have already been consoled. He also says that the hungry are blessed because they will be satisfied, but woe to the rich for they will go hungry (Lk 6:20-25). It seems that in the end, every injustice in this world will be resolved by the Lord.

In Luke's gospel there are numerous warnings against greed. When John the Baptist is preaching in the wilderness the crowds ask him what they should do; he replies that they should share their food and clothing, and they should be fair regarding money (LK 3:10-14). Luke’s Jesus tells a crowd that they should “guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one’s life does not consist of possessions” (Lk 12:15). He follows with a parable about a foolish rich man who wastes his time and talents building storage barns for his food and other possessions. But as soon as he finishes his new barns, God demands his life and asks who will be taking possession of his things. Jesus tells them that the same fate awaits those who value their possessions more than their relationship with God (Lk 12:16-21). The message is: life is a gift from God and no amount of possessions can make life totally secure, therefore anxiety about

possessions is a dangerous waste of time. After Luke's Jesus tells his parable about the dishonest manager, he reinforces his message by telling his disciples that they cannot serve God and money (Lk 16:13).

Having reviewed what Luke's Jesus has to say about generosity and reward, reversal of fortunes, and guarding against greed, let us look at the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31). It is interesting that Jesus dignifies Lazarus with a name (meaning "my God helps"), but he only identifies the rich man by his wealth.⁹⁸ Their lives on earth were very different. While the rich man was dressed in "purple garments and fine linen" (Lk 16:19), poor Lazarus was "covered with sores" (Lk16:20). Daily, the rich man dined sumptuously, as for Lazarus, we know he was starving because Jesus says that Lazarus would have "gladly eaten the scrapes that fell from the rich man's table" (Lk 16:21).

What is noticeable is that Lazarus spent his life, or at least part of his life, lying at the rich man's gate (Lk 16:20), yet there is no mention of interaction between the two. We know the gates were the entrance of a walled city where elders would meet to make decisions and dispense justice, allowing the weak and the poor to be heard against the will of the rich and powerful (Ru 4:1-12, Am 5:11).⁹⁹ The Prophet Amos condemned the Israelites for turning away the needy at the gates and he encouraged them to hate evil, to do good, and to let justice prevail at the gate (Am 5:12-15). Although he obviously had the chance, it seems that the rich man did not share any of his food or clothing with Lazarus at his gate; Lazarus was never invited to the rich man's banquet.

⁹⁸ Johnson, Harrington (Editor), *The Gospel of Luke*, 252.

⁹⁹Miller, 57.

It seems clear that in this parable Jesus is reiterating the advice he gives to one of the leading Pharisees. Jesus tells the Pharisee that he should invite the poor to lunch or dinner, rather than those who can repay with an invitation back, and if he did, he would be rewarded at “the resurrection of the righteous” (Lk 14:12b-14).

In the parable both men die, and when Lazarus dies, he is carried away by angels to “the bosom of Abraham” (Lk 16:22). But when the rich man dies, he is just buried, and there is no mention of any angels escorting him anywhere, he just finds himself suffering in Hades (Lk 16:22-23). We know that their lives were vastly different, and in the afterlife their conditions are also very different and there is a reversal of fortunes.

It seems that the rich man must have known Lazarus’s name when he was alive, because when he gets to Hades, he identifies Lazarus by name. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus to him to cool his tongue with water from the tip of his finger, because he was in torment in the flames of Hades (Lk 16:24). Abraham tells the rich man that during his life he received good things and Lazarus bad things, now in the afterlife it is Lazarus who is comforted, and he is now in agony (Lk 16:25). This parable and its reversal of fortunes is consistent with both Mary's song of praise, and Jesus’s Sermon on the Plain from this same Gospel.

In Scripture, metaphorical expressions are often used to help explain abstract, divine, and supernatural concepts. Orientational metaphors express well-being and misfortune; up characterizes positive fortune and while down represents of misfortune.¹⁰⁰ During life on earth, Lazarus longed for what fell from the rich man's table, so the rich man and his table were in the higher position while Lazarus was in the lower position. Conversely, in the afterlife the rich man “raised his eyes” (Lk 16:23) from what seems to be his lower position in Hades. Luke may be

¹⁰⁰ Somov and Voinov, 619.

using up/down metaphorical language to help illustrate that there has been a reversal of fates for the two in the afterlife.¹⁰¹

Luke refers to Abraham as the father of Israel five times in his Gospel (Lk 1:55, 73, 3:8, 13:16, 19:9). And Luke's Gospel is the only place in scripture that uses the term "the bosom of Abraham" (Lk 16:22). But there are similar verses in John's Gospel that use the word bosom as a metaphor for closeness. John's Gospel says that Jesus is "in the bosom of the Father" (Jn 1:18 RSV), and at the Last Supper, the disciple "whom Jesus loved" is in close proximity to Jesus at the last supper "leaning on Jesus' bosom" (Jn 13:23 KJV).¹⁰² When someone asks Jesus if only a few people will be saved, he tells them to strive to enter the Kingdom of God through the narrow door. He also warns them not to get locked out because people will be coming from all over the world "to recline at the table in the kingdom of God"; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets will be at the eschatological banquet (Lk 13:24-29). Later in Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples that they will eat and drink with him in his kingdom (Lk 22:28-30). It may be that "the bosom of Abraham" is a metaphor indicating that Lazarus is with his ancestors in the afterlife, and that he is attending a banquet, where he has the honored place of a child in a parent's (Abraham's) arms.¹⁰³

Given some of our theological notions of the afterlife, we might imagine Lazarus to be in heaven above the earth, and the rich man in a "hell" (DV, KJV) below the earth. But the geographical description is different, the two locations are not separated by the sky, they are separated by a gulf in the earth. And even though there is a great chasm that separates them, the

¹⁰¹ Somov and Voinov, 620.

¹⁰² Somov and Voinov, 626-627.

¹⁰³ Somov and Voinov, 626-627.

rich man and Abraham can have a conversation. David Bentley Hart translates the Greek word *kolpos* as “vale” or “valley” and not as “bosom” in his English version of the New Testament; he draws the conclusion that the Vale of Abraham may be a peaceful place of sheltering valleys in of the realm of the dead (Hades), that is set apart for the righteous.¹⁰⁴ There is evidence that in the first century, Hades was thought to be the place where all the dead went to wait for final judgement, and that there were different regions in Hades for the righteous and the unrighteous (1 Enoch 22:9-11).¹⁰⁵

Without a doubt, the rich man’s region in Hades sounds horrific. Even though his body has been buried he experiences physical suffering by fire, and he asks that his tongue be cooled by a drop of water from the tip of Lazarus’s finger (Lk 16:24). John the Baptist had warned the crowds who came to him for guidance to “produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance” and not to rely on the fact that they were children of Abraham (Lk 3:8). When the rich man is in agony in the flames, he calls to Father Abraham for mercy, but he is not able to help, maybe because there was no evidence of repentance in the rich man’s life. Joachim Jeremias asserts that like other double-edged parables the most important part of the parable is the second point.¹⁰⁶ In this parable the first point is that in the afterlife there is a reversal of fortunes; the rich man is in agony and Lazarus seems to be feasting at Abraham’s side.

The second point of this parable addresses the living. When his efforts to have Lazarus bring him some comfort in the flames fail, the rich man begs Abraham to send Lazarus to his father's house to warn his five brothers, so they do not suffer the same fate. The rich man insists

¹⁰⁴ Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation*, 146.

¹⁰⁵ Culpeper, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume IX Luke, John*. 317.

¹⁰⁶ Jeremias, 186.

that they will repent if someone from the dead warns them, but Abraham says they will not listen even “if someone should rise from the dead” (Lk 16:30-31); this seems to be a clear reference to those who will refuse to believe in Jesus after his resurrection. Jeremias asserts that the second point of this parable is meant to advise men who resemble the rich man and his five brothers of impending danger, and that a more appropriate name for this parable would be “Six Brothers”. Like their brother in the flames, the five remaining brothers live selfish lives; they do not give any attention to God, and they do not believe that there will be consequences after life ends.¹⁰⁷ But Abraham tells the rich man that his brothers have Moses and the prophets, and they should listen to their messages (Lk 16:24-29). Moses had warned the Israelites not to be “tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor” (Dt 15:7), and the Prophet Isaiah said to “share your bread with the hungry, bring the homeless poor into your house, and cover the naked (Is 58:6-7).¹⁰⁸ John the Baptist preached a similar message (Lk 3:7-14). Richard Bauckham stresses that when Abraham refused the remaining brothers an apocalyptic revelation from the afterlife, it brought the focus back to the inexcusable injustices of the world above, a world where the rich live alongside the poor ignoring Moses and the Prophets. In Jewish eschatology, it is assumed that God will put right the injustices of this world in the next world.¹⁰⁹

In his book *City of God*, Augustine offered an immensely influential reading of this parable for what it tells us concerning the fires of hell. “If the fire of hell is material fire, can it affect immaterial demons?” Augustine’s answer was a resolute yes:

“I should have indeed said that the spirits are destined to burn, without possessing any material body, just as the rich man was on fire in Hades when he said, ‘I am tortured in those flames’ But in fact that hell, which is also called ‘the lake of fire and

¹⁰⁷ Jeremias, 186.

¹⁰⁸ Culpeper, 318.

¹⁰⁹ Bauckham, “*The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels.*”, 246.

sulphur', will be a material fire and will torture the bodies of the damned, whether the bodies of human beings, the demons' bodies of the air – or the body together with the spirit in the case of human beings, but in the case of demons the spirits without bodies – those spirits being in contact with the fire for their punishment, not for the imparting of life to material fire. The fire will assuredly be the same for both classes of the damned, as the truth has told us."¹¹⁰

Augustine seems to take this as a literal description of conditions in the afterlife and not a parable. During the Reformation in the sixteenth century, both Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church pointed to Augustine's authority to reinforce their positions on a whole host of issues, even when their views conflicted.¹¹¹

Other scholars differ from Augustine's opinion on what Jesus intended to communicate in his parable. Jeremias, for example, believed that Jesus did not intend to teach about the afterlife in this parable, his goal was to warn people like the six brothers how dangerous it is to ignore the needs of the poor.¹¹² Likewise, Bauckham, asserts that this parable is a condemnation of the world, and the side-by-side comparison of the lives of the rich man and Lazarus reveal the complete injustice of their living conditions; one lives in luxury while the other begs. He also says that if we take the reversal of fortunes in this parable as a literal representation of God's plan for justice in the afterlife it makes no sense, simply because it is immoral. He also suggests that this is the reason why the moral character of both men is left out of the story.¹¹³ N.T. Wright also points out that parables do not give actual descriptions of the afterlife. He also says that this parable is "not to teach about what happens after death but to insist on justice and mercy within

¹¹⁰ Saint Augustine., *City of God*. XXI 10, 986.

¹¹¹ Evans, *Introduction to Saint Augustine's City of God*. XXI 10, lvii.

¹¹² Jeremias, 186.

¹¹³ Bauckham, "*The Rich Man and Lazarus: The Parable and the Parallels*.", 246.

the present life”.¹¹⁴ I agree with Jeremias, Bauckham, and N.T. Wright.

Augustine’s influence has survived to this day. The Baltimore Catechism #2 is still used to teach Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the Roman Catholic Church, and in Lesson 14 there is a picture of Lazarus with Abraham, and the rich man burning in hell. For further study on hell, the Catechism advises reading from the Bible Revelation 19 & 20.¹¹⁵ However, we get a different view of the parable in, *Spe Salvi*. There Pope Benedict XVI addresses the parable:

We must note that in this parable Jesus is not referring to the final destiny after the Last Judgement, but is taking up a notion found, *inter alia*, in early Judaism, namely that of an intermediate state between death and resurrection, a state in which the final sentence is yet to be pronounced.¹¹⁶

This is different than the SGBC which provides an illustration of the Rich Man in hell.¹¹⁷ (See Appendix 4)

It seems that the parable highlights the injustice of this world and gives hope to the suffering poor that, in the end, justice will prevail. The Parable is also a tremendous teaching tool for the wealthy, giving us all encouragement to let justice prevail at each of our “gates” (Am 5:15); generosity will be rewarded.

Revelation

The Apocalypse, or The Revelation to John, is undoubtedly the most difficult book in the New Testament to understand. It is challenging because the author very often uses symbolic

¹¹⁴ Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 176.

¹¹⁵ *SJBC*, 91 & 93.

¹¹⁶ https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20071130_spe-salvi.html

¹¹⁷ *SJBC*, 91.

language, which is characteristic of apocalyptic literature. More specifically, the work has been described by Bauckham as “an apocalyptic prophecy in the form of a circular letter”, written to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia, modern day Turkey.¹¹⁸

The word *ἀδης*/Hades always follows the word death in Revelation. The first time Hades is mentioned, Jesus has the keys “of death and of Hades” (Rv 1:18). We might imagine that the keys were a positive sign, that maybe Jesus is the way for captives to be let out of the realm of the dead. This reference to death is consistent with what Jesus told his friend Martha just before he brought her brother back to life. He told her, “I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die” (Jn 11:25). Saint Paul wrote to the church in Corinth about the power of Christ’s resurrection from the dead: “For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life” (1 Cor 15:21-22).¹¹⁹ Jesus having the keys to Death and Hades does not seem symbolic of him locking captives in a place of never-ending suffering. More likely, he symbolically holds the keys to Death and Hades because by his resurrection he has made resurrection of the dead and escape from Hades possible for all. Apocalyptic literature like Revelation (which was written to seven churches in the Roman province of Asia or modern-day Turkey) intends to give hope to the faithful who are suffering, that if they die before Christ’s return, they and their faithful deceased loved ones will be freed from Hades and death. After all, Hades is the abode of the dead and not a place of everlasting suffering by fire. It is important to

¹¹⁸ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 2.

¹¹⁹ Ford, *Revelation*, 385.

remember that neither the NRSVCE nor the NABRE translate ἄδης/Hades with the English word “hell”. Again, it is good to recall here that both the DR and the KJV erroneously translate ἄδης as “hell”.

In John’s vision, he sees the Lamb open seven seals; the first four seals each has a different colored horse, and the rider of each horse unleashes destruction. The fourth seal’s horse is pale green, “Its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed with him” (Rev 6:8). The color of the horse has been used to characterize a corpse that is at an advanced stage of corruption.¹²⁰ The focus of this verse seems to be physical death, because Death and Hades were given power in this world “to kill with sword, famine, and plague” (Rv 6:8). There is no mention of never-ending suffering in the afterlife. Both Death and Hades are personified; Death riding a horse and Hades following. The Apostle Paul also personifies death by quoting Hosea when speaking about the Christ’s resurrection, he asks, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (Hos 13:14, 1 Cor 15:55).¹²¹

At the judgement scene at the end of the Revelation it says, “The sea gave up its dead; then Death and Hades gave up their dead” (Rv 20:13). Augustine thought there may be good reason for using both terms (Death and Hades):

‘Death’, perhaps, with reference to the good, who could suffer only death, and not hell as well; ‘Hades’ with reference to the wicked, who suffer punishment also in hell.¹²²

Augustine seems to have held the belief that the “holy men of old” who believed in the Christ even before he was born, were in the netherworld “in reigns far removed from the torments of

¹²⁰ Ford, *Revelation*, 108.

¹²¹ Ford, *Revelation*, 108.

¹²² Saint Augustine. *City of God*. XX. 15, 926.

the ungodly” until Christ died and descended to those regions to rescue them. He also asserted that believers who have died after Christ’s death and descent, “have no experience at all of Hades as they wait to receive back their bodies and to receive the good things they deserve”.¹²³

The verse that follows says, “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rv 20:14-15). Remember here that the DV and the KJV translate ἀδης/Hades to English using the word “hell”. So, what is the Lake of fire? Does hell get thrown into hell?

Augustine had a different interpretation of ‘Death and Hades’ regarding verse 14; he wrote that “these terms signify ‘the Devil (as responsible for death and the pains of hell) and, together with him, the whole society of the demons’”.¹²⁴ As for verse 15, he interprets it in part symbolically, and in part literally. He explains that the book of life is a symbolic reference to those who are predestined to eternal life, because God does not need a book to remember names. As for “the lake of fire”, in his view that is to be taken literally. Augustine goes to great lengths to explain his interpretation that “the lake of fire” is a place of eternal torment by fire. A place where eventually, all wicked people will join “the Devil” and “the whole society of demons”. When the soul joins the body, the soul will sustain human life so the wicked can burn in a fire that never goes out, his explanation:

The soul gives life to the body by its presence and rules the body; and this soul itself can suffer pain, while being incapable of death. Here we have something that feels the pain and yet is immortal. This property, which now, as we know, belongs to the souls of all men, will at that time belong to the bodies of the damned.¹²⁵

¹²³ Saint Augustine. *City of God*. XX 15, 926.

¹²⁴ Saint Augustine. *City of God*. XX 15, 926.

¹²⁵ Saint Augustine. *City of God*. XX 15, 926.

In lock step with Saint Augustine, the SJBC says that “After the final resurrection, their bodies will also be tormented.”¹²⁶

However, as I have indicated, there were other early church fathers who interpreted the eternal destiny of men differently than St. Augustine. As noted in the introduction and in the previous chapter of this thesis, Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215), Origen (c.184-c.254), and Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-c.395) were all patristic universalists who believed that fire in the afterlife is for purification and not for punishment.¹²⁷

There are modern scholars who also interpret Revelation differently than Augustine, not interpreting verses literally. David Bentley Hart’s opinion about Revelation is: “For myself, for what it is worth, I do not really think that Revelation is a book about the end of time, so much as a manifesto written in figurative code by a Jewish Christian who believed in keeping the Law of Moses but who also believed that Jesus was the Messiah.”¹²⁸ Michael Gorman’s conviction regarding Revelation is that it is “fundamentally a book about Christ, worship and discipleship, and final hope for the world”.¹²⁹

Because the vast majority of Revelation uses symbolic language, it seems that there is good reason to suspect that “the burning pool of fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (RV 21:8) should also be taken as symbolic language for divine justice; not a literal description of God’s plan for never ending suffering for people in the afterlife where the condemned will be separated from their creator for all eternity while being punished by fire.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ *SJBC*, 91, 93.

¹²⁷ Ramelli, 29.

¹²⁸ Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation*, 107-108.

¹²⁹ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, 12.

¹³⁰ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1035.

CHAPTER 4 *γέεννα* /GEHENNA

The Greek word *γέεννα*/*Gehenna* appears eleven times in the Gospels, and each time it is Jesus using the word. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus says the word three times, all of which are in the same section (Mk 9:42-48). Matthew uses *γέεννα*/*Gehenna* seven times, repeating Mark's usage almost verbatim in three of the seven instances (Mt 5:29-30, 18:9). Luke only uses the word *γέεννα*/*Gehenna* one time and when he does, he uses it one of the ways that Matthew does (Lk 12:4-5, Mt 10:28, 29).

As for John's Gospel, the author has no use for the word *γέεννα*, and interestingly he never uses the word *ἀδης*/Hades either. The same is true of Saint Paul and his letters. In fact, outside of the three Synoptic Gospels, the only other place the word *γέεννα*/*Gehenna* appears in the NT is in the Letter of James. Including James, the word is used a total of twelve times in the NT and unfortunately in most English Bibles *γέεννα* is translated as the word "hell".

This chapter starts by investigating the OT as the potential reason for Jesus' use of the word. After a review of the OT, the focus will be on how the word is used in the NT. When we consider the instances that the Gospels share the same story or usage of *γέεννα* /*Gehenna*, Jesus uses the word in four ways: 1) to warn against falling into temptation 2) to teach about anger and lust 3) to encourage his disciples to stand strong when persecution comes and 4) to rebuke the Scribes and Pharisees.

In the introduction to this thesis, it is noted that in 1986 Pope John Paul II commissioned twelve Cardinals and Bishops to draft a catechism, and that after years of extensive consultation with other bishops from all over the world, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published in 1993. Part of the section of the catechism on the topic of hell states:

To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell."¹³¹

Another statement from the section states:

Jesus often speaks of "Gehenna" of "the unquenchable fire" reserved for those who to the end of their lives refuse to believe and be converted, where both soul and body can be lost.¹³²

This chapter will examine the verses in Scripture that contain the word Gehenna/Hell to see if statements from the CCC are supported by the words attributed to Jesus in those verses.

In addition, this chapter aims to demonstrate that there are good reasons why the word "hell" should not be used as a translation of the Greek *γέεννα*, and that instead Gehenna should be used. This is how the NABRE translates the word; the word hell does not appear in the NABRE. Another goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that there are good reasons to believe that the verses and dialogues that use the word *γέεννα* are not referring to a place or state of being where punishment by fire is never-ending.

The Old Testament and Gehenna

The valley of Ben-Hinnom is infamous for the wicked acts committed there. From the eighth century BC up to fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, some of the kings of Judah sacrificed their own children to false gods in the valley. During the eighth century BC, Ahaz did the unthinkable:

He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and even made molten idols for the Baals. Moreover, he offered sacrifice in the Valley of Ben-hinnom, and immolated his children by fire in accordance with the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord had dispossessed before the Israelites. (2 Chr 28:2-3)

¹³¹ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1033.

¹³² CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1034.

During the seventh century BC, Ahaz's grandson Manasseh, became king of Judah, and he followed in his grandfather's footsteps:

It was he, too, who immolated his children by fire in the Valley of Ben-hinnom. He practiced soothsaying and divination, and reintroduced the consulting of ghosts and spirits. (2 Chr 33:6)

Conversely, Manasseh's grandson the great King Josiah loved the Lord, and "defiled Topheth in the Valley of Ben-hinnom, so that there would no longer be any immolation of sons or daughters by fire in honor of Molech" (2 Kgs 23:10). But after Josiah's reign, the kings that succeeded him returned to the wicked ways of previous kings. As a result, the Prophet Jeremiah delivered a message to Judah that they were going to fall to the Babylonians for "all the evil they had done". Instead of following the Lord, "their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem" provoked the Lord (Jer 32:32). And one of the wicked things they did was sacrifice to a nonexistent underworld god: "They built high places to Baal in the Valley of Ben-hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech" (Jer 32:35). This wicked practice of sacrificing their children by fire to Molech is specifically prohibited in the law (Lv 18:21, 20:2-5, Dt 18:10). Another source that provides evidence that children were immolated by fire is the author of Trito-Isaiah (Is 56-66), which was written after the return to Judah from exile in Babylon in the 530's BC; the author says the Judahites sent ambassadors to Molech the false god of the underworld, "down even to the deepest Sheol" (Is 57:9).

In obedience to the Lord, the Prophet Jeremiah declared at the valley of Ben-Hinnom that the Lord was going to bring evil upon that wicked place so that the ears of all who hear of it will ring (Jer 19:3):

All because they have forsaken me and profaned this place by burning incense to other gods which neither they nor their ancestors knew; and because the kings of Judah have filled this place with innocent blood, building high places for Baal to burn their children

in fire as offerings to Baal—something I never considered or said or commanded (Jer 19:4-5).

Because of their wickedness, the valley made the transition from a place where the Judahites sacrificed their children, to a place of punishment for Judah:

Therefore, days are coming—oracle of the Lord—when this place will no longer be called Topheth, or the Valley of Ben-hinnom, but rather, the Valley of Slaughter. In this place I will foil the plan of Judah and Jerusalem; I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, at the hand of those who seek their lives. Their corpses I will give as food to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth. (Jer 19:6-7)

As directed by the Lord, Jeremiah breaks a potter's flask (Jer 19:10), symbolizing how the Lord will break the people of Judah for all their evil, which included sacrificing their own children to Molech in the valley of Ben-Hinnom (Jer 32:35, 2 Kgs 23:10). Just as Jeremiah had foretold, Judah and the great City of Jerusalem fell, and the people went into captivity in Babylon in 586 BC.

The book of Isaiah closes by using universal eschatological language with the Lord saying He will “gather all nations and tongues” (Is 66:18), He announces that He is making “new heavens and a new earth” (v.22), and that “all flesh shall come to worship before me” (v. 23). The last sentence of the book has been interpreted as referring to the valley of Ben-Hinnom.¹³³ Like Jeremiah, it also envisions a transformation of the valley to a place of punishment for God's enemies:

They shall go out and see the corpses
of the people who rebelled against me;
For their worm shall not die,
their fire shall not be extinguished;
and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh. (Is 66:24)

Mark's Jesus quotes this verse when he teaches about the danger of falling into temptations:

¹³³ NABRE, 1183.

“if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’” (Mk 9:48 NABRE; Is 66:24)

Again, most English translations do not use the word Gehenna, they use the word hell.

With this history of the valley in mind, let us examine the instances that Jesus uses the word Gehenna, but with no preconceived notion that there is a place of never-ending punishment by fire called hell.

Temptations to Sin

Mark 9:42-48 starts with a warning for people who cause other people to sin. The Greek verb *skandalizein*, literally means “causes to stumble”.¹³⁴ Specifically Mark’s Jesus says, “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe [in me] to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea” (Mk 9:42). It seems that when Jesus says, “one of these little ones” he is referring to the little children received in his name (Mk 9:36-37), and to those given a cup of water (his disciples) because they follow Jesus (Mk 9:40-41).¹³⁵ After warning those who cause others to sin or abandon their faith, Jesus turns his attention to his followers. He tells them that they are better off self-amputating parts of their bodies than being excluded from entering life/the kingdom of God:

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna, into the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna, where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ (Mk 9:43-48)

¹³⁴ Perkins, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII Matthew & Mark*, 640.

¹³⁵ Perkins, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII Matthew & Mark*. 640.

There is no doubt that removing parts of one's body seems to be a severe course of action, as does the notion of being thrown into Gehenna with its "unquenchable fire" (Mk 9:43). Perkins says that Jesus is a teacher, and this is an example of how he often uses striking metaphors in sayings and parables to make his point.¹³⁶ This certainly seems to be what Jesus is doing. But it has also been interpreted as a warning that people will literally be suffering by fire in the afterlife forever if they sin.¹³⁷

Matthew 18:6-9 is very similar to Mark 9:42-47. Matthew's Jesus adds the phrase "one of these little ones", and he is also referring to both children, and those who have faith in him (Mt 18:6). In general, the term "little ones" is used by the author of Matthew's Gospel to identify believers (Mt 10:42, 18:10, 14; 25:40, 45).¹³⁸ If Matthew used Mark's Gospel as a source, he adds the words "throw it away" in reference to the self-amputated body part. In addition, Matthew adds the words "whole body" to the warning of being thrown into "fiery Gehenna". However, Matthew leaves out "where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched'" (Mk 9:48). It is interesting that N.T. Wright uses the word "hell" in Matthew's Gospel, but he uses Gehenna in Mark's Gospel.

When reading these two pericopes without a preconceived notion that Jesus is referring to everlasting punishment by fire in "hell", we will notice a few things. First, he does not say in either account that Gehenna is a place or state of being in the afterlife. Second, Matthew's Jesus says that the fire is "eternal" and Mark's Jesus says the fire is "unquenchable", but he does not

¹³⁶ Perkins, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII Matthew & Mark*. 640.

¹³⁷ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1033.

¹³⁸ Perkins, *The New Interpreter's Bible Volume VIII Matthew & Mark*. 640.

say in either account that if someone is thrown into Gehenna that they are sentenced to burn forever.

As noted above, Mark's Jesus describes Gehenna by quoting the last verse of The Book of Isaiah, he says it is the place where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched' (Is 66:24; Mk 9:48). The context in Isaiah is eschatological, a time when "all nations and tongues" will be gathered by the Lord (Is 66:18); and there will be new heavens and a new earth where everyone will come to worship before the Lord (Is 66:22-23). Isaiah clearly does not say that the corpses of the rebellious people are burning and being eaten by worms alive in the underworld. Isaiah says that those who worship the Lord will go outside the walls of the New Jerusalem, (presumably to the Valley of Hinnom) to see the bodies of those who rebelled against the Lord.

¹³⁹ Remember that Jeremiah says that this is the place where Judah and Jerusalem will find themselves because the kings of Judah burned their children in offering to false gods and filled the valley with innocent blood (Jer.19:4-6). As a result, many of the Judahites die at the hands of the Babylonian invaders and many are taken into exile.

When the word hell is used as a translation of the Greek word *γέεννα*, the significance of the reference Jesus seems to make to the OT is lost. The word hell brings with it the notion that people will suffer endlessly in fire in the afterlife, and they will be separated from God forever. But Jesus does not mention those penalties.

Both Mark and Matthew's warnings about the temptations to sin are a message and reminder to all believers to evaluate their level of commitment to their faith in Jesus, and to persistently fight the urges to give into the allure of sin.

¹³⁹ NABRE, 1183.

Anger and Lust

In The Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's Jesus gives examples of what is required of a disciple, and all six examples cite a commandment of the law (Mt 5:21-22; 27-28; 32-32; 33-37; 38-39; 43-44). Jesus not only accepts the commandments, but he also requires a new level of commitment from his disciples;¹⁴⁰ they must adhere to the deeper meaning of each law, a call to "be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48).

Jesus mentions Gehenna in two of these instances, the first has to do with the command not to kill (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17):

"You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.' But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery *Gehenna* (Mt 5:21-22 NABRE).

Jesus raises the standard of the law not to kill by saying that just being angry with someone makes you liable to judgement. Insulting someone by calling them 'Raqa' (airhead or imbecile)¹⁴¹ makes you answerable to the Sanhedrin, and if someone calls another a fool, they "will be liable to the fiery Gehenna" (Mt 5:21-22). Is Jesus really saying that if someone calls someone else a fool that they will go to hell? It seems that this reference to Gehenna may be a warning of some type of divine justice and even punishment, but "eternal fire" and "eternal separation from God"¹⁴² seems an irrational penalty for the offense of calling someone a fool.

Following Jesus' lead, the author of The Letter of James also warns how harmful words can be. James asserts that the tongue is a small part of the body that "boasts great exploits"

¹⁴⁰ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*. 90.

¹⁴¹ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 190. & NABRE, 1496.

¹⁴² CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1035.

(Js 3:3-5), and he uses fire to describe the tongue, that it is “set on fire by Gehenna” and in turn it “sets on fire the cycle of nature” (Js 3:6). It seems that James is saying that the tongue can defile the whole person when it is driven by evil, and that it can alter the entire direction of a person’s existence.¹⁴³ James laments that we use our mouths not only to bless our God, but also to curse people made in His image. Humans can tame wild animals, “but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (Js 3:7-8,10). In his sermon on Matthew 5:21-22, St. Augustine made the connection to The Letter of James. In his sermon Augustine writes:

What shall we do then? Whosoever says to his brother, You fool, shall be in danger of hell fire: But the tongue can no man tame (Jas 3:8). Shall all men go into hell fire? God forbid! Let us then understand, Dearly beloved, that if no man can tame the tongue, we must have recourse to God, that He may tame it. For if you should wish to tame it, you can not, because you are a man.¹⁴⁴

Augustine seems to take the threat of Gehenna literally, but at the same time understands that the task is impossible; his solution is that God can tame the tongue for you. PHEME PERKINS concludes that James “echoes Jesus’s caution that an apparently casual insult might bring on fiery Gehenna”.¹⁴⁵ But she does not address the nature or duration of the punishment of Gehenna, nor does she address justifiable anger that may trigger someone to call someone else a fool.

In his commentary on Matthew 5:21-22, M. Eugene Boring notes that Jesus makes no distinction between “justified” and “unjustified anger”; he also notes that the differences between being liable to judgement, the Sanhedrin, and being liable to fiery Gehenna are a satirical imitation of rabbinic reasoning. Boring notes that Matthew’s Jesus does this again when he

¹⁴³ Anderson, and Keating, *James, First, Second, and Third John*, 71.

¹⁴⁴ Saint Augustine Sermon on Matthew’s Gospel

¹⁴⁵ Perkins, “*Tongue on Fire: Ethics of Speech in James.*” 373.

denounces the Scribes and Pharisees as bad examples (Mt 23:16-24). He also makes the point that being liable to fiery Gehenna for calling someone a fool is “absurdly disproportionate” when compared to the penalty for being angry with someone, and for calling someone an airhead. Boring also says that it does not seem that Jesus intended fiery Gehenna to be taken literally.¹⁴⁶ Boring’s interpretation seems correct, and I agree with him. However, historically (since Augustine) the church has interpreted this description of the afterlife literally.

So, is it ever permissible to call another a fool? If there are no exceptions, Matthew’s Jesus breaks his own law when he calls the scribes and Pharisees “blind fools” (Mt 23:17),¹⁴⁷ when he refers to a man as a “fool who built his house on sand” (Mt 7:26), and when he calls five virgins “foolish” (Mt 25:2). Based on his own usage of the word, it does not seem that Jesus intended to say that calling someone a fool is always wrong, and that it will get you thrown into “hell”. Similarly, if calling someone a fool always makes one liable to fiery “hell”, it seems that the Apostle Paul is also liable because he writes to the Galatians addressing them as “foolish” (Gal 3:1).

The second time that Gehenna is used in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking about the law against “adultery” (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18), and again he calls for higher standards. In his sermon Jesus says:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna. (Mt 5:27-30 NABRE).

¹⁴⁶ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 190.

¹⁴⁷ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 190.

In the same way that anger is the root cause of murder, lust is the root cause of adultery.¹⁴⁸ Jesus adds to the Old Testament law by declaring that just looking at another man's wife for the purpose of sexual desire makes a man guilty of adultery in his inner most being. Boring says that Jesus is not addressing natural sexual desire, but rather the intentional lustful gazing at someone else's wife.¹⁴⁹ It is the intention of the heart, and not just the physical act that makes one guilty before the Lord. In his homily on Matthew's Gospel, Hiliary, the fourth century Bishop of Poitiers (c. 315-367), doctor of the Church, and defender of orthodoxy against the Arians¹⁵⁰ said that "if the impulse of the heart is left unchanged, the cutting away of a member would be pointless".¹⁵¹

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does not say that if one dies "in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love" that they have chosen to be separated from him forever. Nor does Jesus say that Gehenna/Hell is a never-ending "state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God".¹⁵² Jesus also does not say that God will never forgive a sinner's anger or lust, never allowing the sinner to be reconciled. But he does tell them to reconcile problems with each other before offering sacrifices at the altar, and to settle their differences without going to court (Mt 5:23-25). It is very unlikely that Jesus intends to issue commands against anger and lust that are impossible to observe. It seems that he is instructing his disciples to submit their thoughts and words about others to God's penetrating judgement.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 87.

¹⁴⁹ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 191.

¹⁵⁰ *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Introduction and Biographic Information* 495.

¹⁵¹ Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew 1-13*, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 110.

¹⁵² CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV

¹⁵³ France, 190.

Most English translations of the Bible still use the word “hell” and not “Gehenna”. When the word hell is used in translation, it carries with it the notion that people will suffer endlessly in the afterlife. But in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, he never mentions suffering for all of eternity in the afterlife for being angry or for being lustful.

Who to Fear

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus sends his disciples out to announce the good news of God’s Kingdom (Mt 10:5-15). He warns them that they will be persecuted by both Jews and pagans (Mt 10:17-18), and that they will be hated because of his name (Mt 10:22). In addition, Jesus urges his disciples to have courage, because like him, they will be persecuted by the Pharisees (Mt 9:34; 10:24-25; 12:24). He tells them:

Therefore do not be afraid of them. Nothing is concealed that will not be revealed, nor secret that will not be known. What I say to you in the darkness, speak in the light; what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in *Gehenna* (Mt 10:26-28).

Matthew’s Jesus does not say that Gehenna is a place or a state of being in the afterlife, but he does say that it is a place where the body and the soul can be destroyed. Neither does he mention being punished by fire, nor does he mention any other means of punishment, nor the duration that the soul and the body will be required to stay in Gehenna before being destroyed. He just says to “be afraid of the one can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna” (Mt 10:28b).

Some Christians use Mt 10:28b to support their belief that “hell is the situation in which those who do not avail themselves of the atonement made possible by Jesus in his suffering and death must make their own atonement by suffering and then death, separated from the sustaining

life of God and thus disappearing from the cosmos”. This view is called “annihilationism”, “conditional immortality”, or “terminal punishment”.¹⁵⁴

In Luke’s Gospel, there is a very similar account of Jesus encouraging his disciples to be courageous:

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body but after that can do no more. I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one who after killing has the power to cast into *Gehenna*; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one. Are not five sparrows sold for two small coins? Yet not one of them has escaped the notice of God. Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows. I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others the Son of Man will acknowledge before the angels of God. But whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God (Lk 12:4-9 NABRE).

Like Matthew’s account of this saying to his disciples, Luke’s Jesus does not specifically say that Gehenna is a place in the afterlife, but he does say “after killing has the power to cast into Gehenna”, which may mean that Gehenna is a place or a state of being in the afterlife. Like Matthew’s account, Jesus does not mention any punishment that takes place in Gehenna, and he does not mention any amount of time one may spend in Gehenna.

Scholars differ on who exactly Jesus is advising his disciples to fear. W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison assert that the disciples were instructed to fear God, and not men, because only the Lord has real power over men.¹⁵⁵ Allen R. Culpeper shares this view; God is the one to fear “because God can cast persons into eternal torment”.¹⁵⁶ But eternal torment is not mentioned, and why would God do such a thing? But N.T. Wright sees it differently from Davies, Allison, and Culpeper. He believes it is the opposite, God is the one we do not have to fear; in fact, he

¹⁵⁴ Sprinkle, 61.

¹⁵⁵ Davies, and Allison, 206-207.

¹⁵⁶ Culpeper, 252.

says that we can trust God with both our bodies and our souls. Demonic powers are at work, battling for souls, they are the ones to fear.¹⁵⁷

Both Gospels are messages of hope for the disciples and reveal the reality of suffering of the early Christians in Matthew and Luke's communities. In addition, each Gospel shows that pastoral concern is generated by that suffering.¹⁵⁸ In both Gospels, it seems that Jesus is telling his disciples not to fear earthly powers who can kill them. Maybe the persecuted early church would have taken Jesus' words of encouragement and warning to heart and looked forward a time in the future when God will bring about His justice.

Whether hell or Gehenna are used as an English translation of *γέεννα*, Jesus never mentions that anyone will suffer endlessly in the afterlife by fire when urging his followers to have courage under persecution.

Scribes and Pharisees

In Chapter 23 of Matthew's Gospel, there is a series of seven woes that are issued by Jesus. This woe form is used by the three major OT prophets (Is 45:9-10; Jer 13:27; 48:46; Ez 16:23). The setting is Jesus speaking to the crowds and to his disciples, but Boring asserts that the author of Matthew's Gospel is using a literary device that addresses someone not actually present.¹⁵⁹ In this series of woes, Matthew's Jesus is addressing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees; hypocrisy that embodies a turning towards what others think as a point of reference for one's

¹⁵⁷ Wright, Tom. *Matthew for Everyone*, 119-120.

¹⁵⁸ Allison, "Matthew 10:26-31 and the Problem of Evil." I applied Allison's assessment of Matthew to Luke as well.

¹⁵⁹ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 434.

life, rather than turning to, and trusting in God.¹⁶⁰ Jesus says that “they preach but do not practice”, that their interpretation of the law places “heavy burdens” on others, that “their works are performed to be seen”, and that they love places of honor in public (Mt 23:3-7).

The first two woes concern missionary work and the harmful results of the activity of the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter” (Mt 23:13).

It seems important to address here the term “the kingdom of heaven”. Citing the Lord’s Prayer from his Sermon on the Mount, N.T. Wright notes that Jesus instructed his followers to pray that God’s kingdom come, and his will be done “on earth as in heaven”. He has an interesting way of looking at Matthew’s use of the term:

The “kingdom of heaven” is not about people going to heaven. It is about the rule of heaven coming to earth. When Matthew has Jesus talking about heaven’s kingdom, he means that heaven---in other words, the God of heaven---is establishing his sovereign rule not just in heaven, but on earth as well.¹⁶¹

Perhaps it is good to keep this in mind when reading Matthew’s use of Gehenna, that maybe like the kingdom of heaven, Jesus is not always referring to a place or state of being in the afterlife.

Regarding Gehenna N.T. Wright says:

The point is when Jesus was warning his hearers about Gehenna, he was not, as a general rule, telling them that unless they repented in this life they would burn in the next one. As with God’s kingdom, so with its opposite: it is *on earth* that things matter, not somewhere else.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 435.

¹⁶¹ Wright, N. T. *How God Became King*, 43.

¹⁶² Wright, N. T. *Surprised by Hope*, 176.

Earlier in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says he will give Peter the keys to the kingdom of heaven, the metaphor of keys is thought to be that of authority to unlock the meaning of the Scriptures (Mt 16:19).¹⁶³ Apparently the scribes and Pharisees are not using their position as religious leaders to help the people understand Scripture and their God, in fact it seems they are distorting its meaning.

The next woe is one of two that mentions Gehenna:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves. (Mt 23:13-15).

This woe is the result of the harmful missionary work of the scribes and Pharisees; their work brings destruction to their converts, making them ‘twice’ the ‘son of Gehenna’ as a scribe or a Pharisee. Davis and Allison assert that ‘child of Gehenna’ is most likely a traditional Semitism that means ‘worthy of’ or ‘destined for’ Gehenna, and ‘twice’ may be a reference to the enthusiastic zeal that converts have for a new belief system.¹⁶⁴ But it may be that Jesus is pointing to what happened in the valley, and that the scribes and Pharisees are true descendants of the idolatrous Israelites who sacrificed their own children by fire to nonexistent gods. This notion of Jesus saying that the scribes and Pharisees are true children of their sinful ancestors is again stated in the other woe that mentions Gehenna.

In the seventh and last of his woes Jesus says:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the memorials of the righteous, and you say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets’ blood.’ Thus you bear witness against yourselves that you are the children of those who murdered the prophets; now fill up what your ancestors measured out! You serpents, you brood of vipers, how can you flee from the judgment of Gehenna?” (Mt 23:29-31).

¹⁶³ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 346.

¹⁶⁴ Davies and Allison, 289.

Some scholars question whether this statement goes back to the historical Jesus. Daniel J. Harrington asserts that the author of “Matthew focused on points of conflict between the Jewish Christians and the more powerful early rabbinic movement”.¹⁶⁵ Harrington goes on to say that Matthew has Jesus use the woe form of prophetic denunciation to warn his own community against following the flawed leadership of the scribes and Pharisees.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, Boring says that for Matthew, “the woes represent a conflict between the rabbinic movement and Matthean Christians, not an outburst of the historical Jesus against the 30 CE Pharisees, and it is Matthean readers who are actually addressed”.¹⁶⁷ If these are correct readings of this part of Matthew’s Gospel, it seems reasonable to ask whether Jesus ever really said that converts to Judaism were twice the sons of Gehenna that the scribes and Pharisees were. And if he did not, did Jesus ever really say that the religious leaders were a “brood of vipers” and question if it was possible for them to “flee from the judgement of Gehenna”?

N.T. Wright says that these types of interpretations are unnecessary. He notes that the religious leaders of Jesus’ day were like previous generations; the scribes and Pharisees are the “true children of their prophet killing ancestors” because they were about to hand over the greatest prophet of them all.¹⁶⁸ Wright says that Jesus was in constant conflict with “parties in Judaism with rival agendas” and that the woes were a denunciation of their misguided teaching. Wright also says Jesus’s criticism was against those who were leading Israel astray when their Messiah had come.¹⁶⁹ I agree with N.T. Wright’s interpretation.

¹⁶⁵ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 327.

¹⁶⁶ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 327.

¹⁶⁷ Boring, M. Eugene, *Matthew, Mark*. (p.434)

¹⁶⁸ Wright N. T., *Matthew for Everyone*, 104.

¹⁶⁹ Wright N.T., *Matthew for Everyone*, 103.

Unlike our definitions of Hell, Jesus' does not say in either of his woes that Gehenna/Hell is a place in the afterlife. He never says that it is a place of suffering by fire, and he never mentions that Gehenna/Hell is a place or a state of being where punishment never ends.

Why use the word Gehenna?

In his article "*Gehenna the Topography of Hell*", Lloyd Bailey quotes Rabbi David Kimhi from his commentary on Psalm 27 from about the year 1200 AD:

Gehenna is a repugnant place, into which filth and cadavers are thrown, and in which fires perpetually burn in order to consume the filth and bones; on which account, by analogy the judgement of the wicked is called "Gehenna".

Kimhi asserts that rabbis like Jesus compared the afterlife punishment of the wicked with the valley that was the city garbage dump, and Bailey says there is a modern consensus that Kimhi's explanation is correct. However, Bailey also says that there is no literary or archaeological evidence that supports the claim the valley was a garbage dump.¹⁷⁰

Among the scholars who accept that Gehenna was a garbage dump is N.T. Wright. He says, "when Jesus was warning his hearers about Gehenna, he was not, as a general rule, telling them that unless they repented in this life they would burn in the next one."¹⁷¹ He also says that Jesus' intended to convey a political message to his contemporaries: If they did not repent and give up their aim to establish God's kingdom their own way in a rebellion against their oppressors, then Rome would extend the garbage dump to include the city Jerusalem itself. Wright also says that when Luke's Jesus says, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish"

¹⁷⁰ Bailey, "Gehenna: The Topography of Hell.", 188-189.

¹⁷¹ Wright N.T., *Surprised by Hope*, 176.

(Lk 13:3b), Jerusalem's destruction was "the primary meaning he had in mind."¹⁷² Even if Gehenna was never a garbage dump, Wright may still be correct that a political message is what Jesus intended. It was the sins of Gehenna that led to Judah's downfall in 586 BC; maybe the threat of Gehenna was a reminder of the sins that caused the destruction of the Temple, Jerusalem, and exile to Babylon. Maybe Jesus was telling them if they did not repent, Rome would conquer them just as Babylon had six hundred years earlier.

Bailey's assertion that there is no evidence that Gehenna was a garbage dump makes sense to me because I cannot imagine that a dump in the first century would have the kind of waste that would keep a fire perpetually burning. Moreover, Mark's Jesus quotes Isaiah 66:24 with his reference to Gehenna (Mk 9:48), and I cannot imagine that Jesus thought Isaiah was referring to the city garbage dump in the sixth century BC.

Bailey also says that in the ancient Semitic world, an altar of sacrifice connected the realm of the worshipers to the realm of the deity. He also says that worshipers made a sacrificial altar in the valley of Ben-Hinnom because it was a low place and believed that down in the valley was entrance into the underworld.¹⁷³ Another scholar, Chaim Milikowsky says it is possible that Gehenna became a term for the fiery underworld given its history as the seat of an underworld cult.¹⁷⁴ These assertions may be true, and may help explain why people have understood hell as being presided over by the devil in an underground kingdom. But the question is, did Jesus believe that there was a god called Molech, and was he saying that people are sent to

¹⁷² Wright N.T., *Surprised by Hope*, 176.

¹⁷³ Bailey, "Gehenna: The Topography of Hell.", 189-190.

¹⁷⁴ Day, 84.

Molech's underworld domain to burn for all eternity? I do not think many scholars would agree that he did.

It may be that Jesus is referring to what happened in the Valley of Ben-hinnom on the outskirts of Jerusalem. The place where Israelite kings sacrificed their own children to appease a god that did not exist, the ultimate act of idolatry. The actions of the Israelite kings seem to be the inverse of what Jesus did on the cross as both the high priest and the sacrifice (Heb 7:26-27). Although he was innocent of any sin, he offered up himself for the sins of the whole world. A self-giving act of love by God Himself. It may be that Jesus intended to say that giving in to anger and lust, hurting children, leading others astray, fearing what men will say and do rather than fearing God, and being a hypocrite, are all rebellions against God, like the sins of Gehenna. And Gehenna led to exile.

After reading the passages in the Bible that include the word Gehenna/Hell without a preconceived notion that it is a place where the condemned, separated from God, will suffer forever in fire, it certainly is not clear that Jesus spoke of such a place. I agree with David Bentley Hart when he says, "It is not possible for anyone to know exactly what Jesus meant by Gehenna's fire, nor is it possible to know how much time he thought someone would spend there."¹⁷⁵ I also agree with N.T. Wright's statement: "Jesus simply didn't say very much about the future life; he was, after all, primarily concerned to announce that God's Kingdom was coming "on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10).¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Hart, 115.

¹⁷⁶ Wright N.T., *Surprised by Hope*, 176.

It seems there are good reasons to stop using the word hell (see the NABRE). This does not deny that Gehenna is a reference to divine justice, it indicates that Gehenna does not seem to be what is defined by the word “hell” in the CCC.

CHAPTER 5 WAILING AND GRINDING OF TEETH

This chapter will examine the idiom “wailing and grinding of teeth” (NABRE), or “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (NRSVCE), which has been associated with, or interpreted as, what the damned will be doing in Hell. Regarding weeping and gnashing teeth, the CCC states:

Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where *"men will weep and gnash their teeth."*¹⁷⁷

The idiom appears seven times in the Bible, all seven are in the NT, and six of the seven occurrences are in Matthew. (See Appendix #6)

Matthew’s Jesus refers to the place or state of being “where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” in three ways. First, he describes a place or state of being as “the darkness outside” or “outer darkness” (Mt 8:12; Mt 22:13; Mt 25:30). Second, Jesus says that angels will throw the wicked into “the fiery furnace” and describes the furnace as a place “where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” (Mt 13:42; Mt 13:50). Third, Jesus says in the parable of the faithful and unfaithful servant, that the unfaithful servant will be assigned “a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” (Mt 24:51). Luke’s Jesus also uses the idiom, but only once when he gives an answer to the question, “Lord, will only a few people be saved?” (Lk 13:23).

The goal of this chapter is to see if the verses that contain the idiom “weeping and gnashing of teeth” clearly refer to what the damned will be doing forever, in a place called hell.

¹⁷⁷ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV-1036.

‘Outer Darkness’, or ‘the Darkness Outside’

In the OT, sometimes the word ‘darkness’ describes conditions in the afterlife, but the adjectives ‘outer’ or ‘outside’ are not used along with darkness. When Job was suffering and craving death, he told Bilad the Shuhite:

Are not my days few? Stop!
Let me alone, that I may recover a little
Before I go whence I shall not return,
to the land of darkness and of gloom,
The dark, disordered land
where darkness is the only light. (Jb 10:20-22)

And again, when he thinks his plans for a bright future had come to an end, Job says:

My days pass by, my plans are at an end,
the yearning of my heart.
They would change the night into day;
where there is darkness they talk of approaching light.
If my only hope is dwelling in Sheol,
and spreading my couch in darkness.
If I am to say to the pit, “You are my father,”
and to the worm “my mother,” “my sister,”
Where then is my hope,
my happiness, who can see it?
Will they descend with me into Sheol?
Shall we go down together into the dust? (Jb 17:11-16)

There are similar instances in the OT, that depict the afterlife as a place of ‘darkness’. In the book of Tobit, for example, written in the second century BC, a man named Nadin is said to have committed a “disgraceful crime” and the result was that he “went into the everlasting darkness” (Tb 14:10). As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, the OT does not mention punishment or reward in the afterlife; ‘darkness’ is just one of the conditions used to describe the place everyone goes when their body dies.

As for the word ‘light’ in the OT, in one of his Psalms, King David asks, “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear?” (Ps 27:1). Another Psalmist praises God calling

His word a “lamp” and a “light” for his path (Ps 119:105). The Book of Baruch, which was most likely written in the second century BC, uses light to describe how God leads the nation:

For God is leading Israel in joy
by the light of his glory,
with the mercy and justice that are his. (Bar 5:8-9)

The words light and salvation, justice, and mercy in the OT represent God, while darkness is at times depicted as not alive, what Sheol is like. There are however other times where darkness describes the condition of those who are alive but not following the Lord:

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
Upon those who lived in a land of gloom
a light has shone. (Is 9:1)

Isaiah follows with a prophecy about a young woman who will give birth to the Prince of Peace (Is 9:5). For Christians, these are clear references to the virgin Mary and the birth of Jesus (Mt 1:23; Lk 1:27). Regarding light and darkness, John’s Jesus tells the scribes and Pharisees, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8:12).

Matthew’s Gospel uses the Greek word for darkness (σκότος) seven times, and his Gospel is the only place in the Bible that uses the term ‘darkness outside’ or ‘outer darkness’. The first time Matthew’s Jesus uses these words, he had just witnessed the faith of a gentile military officer who requested healing for his servant. When Jesus offered to go to his home to perform the healing, the centurion replied that he was not worthy to have Jesus enter his home; he believed if Jesus simply spoke the words of healing, his servant would be healed (Mt 8:5-8). Jesus was amazed by his faith:

“Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith. I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the

banquet in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom will be driven out into the outer darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” (Mt 8:10b-12).

W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison interpret the ‘many’ as privileged Jews, and the ‘children of the kingdom’ as unprivileged Jews; for these scholars Jesus’s words have nothing to do with gentiles.¹⁷⁸ But N.T. Wright asserts that the ‘many’ who ‘will be coming from east and west’ are gentiles like the centurion, and they will be from all around the world; for Wright, ‘the children of the kingdom’ are non-believing Jews.¹⁷⁹ Daniel Harrington’s interpretation is like Wright’s.¹⁸⁰ The teaching that someday gentiles will be coming from all over the world to worship the God of Israel, and attend the eschatological banquet is found in the writings of some of the prophets (Is 2:2-4; 25:6; Mi 4:1-4; Zec 2:11-12; 8:20-23).¹⁸¹ Wright and Harrington seem to have the correct interpretation. However, does this mean that all Jews who do not believe in Jesus will be going to “hell” with no chance of reconciliation with God if they die with the wrong belief system? This certainly has been the interpretation by some Christians throughout the centuries.

Earlier in chapter three of this thesis, the notion of exclusion from the eschatological banquet is discussed in the story of the rich man and Lazarus. Whereas Lazarus in the afterlife, is depicted in comfort at an honored position beside Abraham at the great banquet (Lk 16:19-31), the rich man, conversely, dies after a life of feasting only to find himself in torment in Hades. Despite being a descendant of Abraham, he is excluded from the comfort that Lazarus is experiencing. The rich man’s torment seems to be the result of what he did not do during his life;

¹⁷⁸ Davies and Allison, 28.

¹⁷⁹ Wright N.T., *Matthew for Everyone*, 84.

¹⁸⁰ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 114.

¹⁸¹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 114. and Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 226.

he failed to share his good fortune with Lazarus, even though he had the means to do so.

Jesus' response to the faith of the centurion indicates a different reason for exclusion from the banquet. He says, "the children of the kingdom" (Mt 8:12) will be excluded because of their lack of faith in him, not because they failed to help the poor. It is interesting that in Matthew's Gospel "the children of the kingdom" do not end up in Hades like the rich man (Lk 16:24), they "will be driven out into the outer darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth" (Mt 8:12). Note that "the kingdom" is not referring to *heaven* in the afterlife in this instance, it is a present reality from which they will be "driven out". Jesus does not mention Gehenna or Hades, nor does he say they will be in agony in flames, he just says "outer darkness". Neither does he say that the "outer darkness" is a condition in the afterlife. As far as how long "the children of the kingdom" will spend "wailing and grinding their teeth" in "outer darkness", Jesus never says how long. He never says the Jews will be separated from God for all of eternity.

There are two other references to "darkness outside" in Matthew's Gospel that are followed by "where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth", and both are in parables. First there is The Parable of the Wedding Feast (Mt 22:1-14), which is another example wherein the kingdom of God is represented by the image of a banquet feast. Jesus says the invited guests not only refused to come to the event, some mistreated and killed the servants who brought them the invitation from the king (Mt 22:1-6). At this, "The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city" (Mt 22:7). Some scholars see this as a reference to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70, a judgement against the Jews who rejected Jesus as their Messiah.¹⁸² When the invited guests refused the invitation to the feast, the king

¹⁸² Wright N.T., *Matthew for Everyone*, 84. & Davies, and Allison, 201. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 309. & Boring, 418.

dispatches his servants into the streets with the instructions to invite “bad and good alike” to his feast (Mt 22:10). When the king arrives at the event, he notices a man who was not dressed in the proper wedding attire. He questions the unprepared guest about his attire, but the man has no response, so the king tells his attendants to: “Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” (Mt 22:13-14a). Citing Matthew 22:13, the CCC warns us:

Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where "men will weep and gnash their teeth." ¹⁸³

Boring notes that in early Christianity, the language of putting on a new set of clothes expresses leaving one’s old way of life behind and living a new life in Christ (see Rom 13:11-14; Gal 3:27; Eph 6:11; Col 3:12). He notes that The Parable of the Tenants (Mt 21:33-46) is like The Parable of the Wedding Feast. In that parable Jesus tells the chief priests and the elders that, “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit” (Mt 21:43). The ‘fruit’ corresponds with the putting on the proper clothes, both represent evidence of a new life in Christ.¹⁸⁴ Note that, in this instance, the kingdom of God is not heaven in the afterlife, it is a present possession that “will be taken away”. For Jeremias, the wedding garment “introduces the principle of merit, it emphasizes the necessity for repentance as the condition of acquittal at the last Judgement”.¹⁸⁵ Augustine interpreted the garment in a similar

¹⁸³ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1034.

¹⁸⁴ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 418

¹⁸⁵ Jeremias, 66.

way, he said, “The garment that is required is in the heart, not on the body”.¹⁸⁶

The Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30) is Matthew’s other parable that refers to someone being thrown “into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” (Mt 25:30). Luke has a very similar version of this story; it is called The Parable of the Ten Gold Coins (Lk 19:11-27). In Matthew’s Gospel three men were given talents (each talent equivalent to fifteen years’ worth of day labor for one man),¹⁸⁷ and in Luke’s Gospel ten men were each given a gold coin (Lk 19:13). In both stories, most of the men did some good with their time and the gifts they personally possessed; they multiplied the money they were given.

Let us focus on the one man in each of the stories who failed to use the money to make more money. Because they feared losing the money, both men do not even try to increase what they were given, so when the one who invested in them returned, they would be able to give him back his original investment. In Luke’s Gospel, the unhappy nobleman takes back his gold coin from the fearful unproductive man, and he gives it to the man who had earned the most profit. Taking back the coin is the extent of his punishment (Lk 19:24). As for the fearful unproductive servant in Matthew’s Gospel, he also has what was invested in him taken back, and again it is given to the most profitable man. Unfortunately for him, the punishment is much worse, in fact it is beyond understanding if interpreted as a literal sentence of never-ending torment by fire in hell, separated from God forever. The master has the man thrown “into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” (Mt 25:30). What a tremendous disparity in the punishments received. Did Luke forget to let his readers know that if they are unproductive like the scribes and Pharisees they would go to hell? N.T. Wright’s assessment is

¹⁸⁶ Manlio Simonetti, ed., [Matthew 14-28](#), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, 147.

¹⁸⁷ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 352.

that first century readers would have understood both parables as a story about God and Israel. He notes that as the leaders of Israel's believing community, the scribes and Pharisees were given so much from God, and the most important gift was the promise that He would bless their nation and the whole world through Israel.¹⁸⁸ If Jesus intended to teach that being fearful and unproductive (like the scribes and Pharisees) would result in never ending punishment in the after-life, it seems that Luke and Matthew would both have understood and conveyed the message the same way. How could Luke possibly leave out the penalty of eternal separation from God in the fire of hell? It is difficult to believe that Matthew's Jesus intends to warn his readers about an eternal penalty in a place we have come to call hell.

It is important to note that Matthew uses the word 'darkness' in other ways that are not associated with 'hell'. At the beginning of Jesus' Galilean ministry, Matthew writes that Jesus fulfills a messianic prophecy of Isaiah:

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the way to the sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles,
the people who sit in darkness
have seen a great light,
on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death
light has arisen” (Is 9:1; Mt 4:15-16).

In this instance, the word “darkness” is the condition of the world before the incarnation; darkness stands in contrast to the “great light” that is Jesus. Another example occurs during Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. He tells his disciples not to store up “treasures on earth” (Mt 6:19), and he says:

“The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in darkness. And if the light in you is darkness, how great will the darkness be” (Mt 6:22-23).

¹⁸⁸ Wright N.T., *Matthew for Everyone*, 137-138.

Jesus is addressing his disciples' attitude toward money and material possessions. If their eyes are bad, darkness and confusion will reign within them and the whole of one's life can be distorted.¹⁸⁹ It seems in this instance, darkness is an inner condition. There is no indication here that "darkness" is an afterlife condition that never comes to an end.

Fiery Furnace

Once again, I think looking to the Hebrew Scriptures is a good place to begin to help understand how Jesus used certain words. In the OT, the words "fiery" and "furnace" occur together twice. One occurs in a thanksgiving Psalm for a victory of King David, and it refers to the wrath of God:

Your hand will find out all your enemies;
your right hand will find out those who hate you.
You will make them like a fiery furnace
when you appear.
The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath,
and fire will consume them. (Ps 21:8-9)

This may simply reflect the reality that cities were set ablaze during war.¹⁹⁰ Clearly, this Psalm is not referring to a condition for the damned in the afterlife.

The other time that the words 'fiery furnace' is used together is in an addition to The Book of Daniel written in Greek, when the Lord sent an angel to rescue three Israelites from king Nebuchadnezzar's "white-hot furnace" (Dn 3:6, 11, 15, 20). From an addition to Daniel, we learn that from the midst of the furnace, they praised their God:

"Bless the Lord, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael;
sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever.

¹⁸⁹ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 210.

¹⁹⁰ *The Jewish Study Bible, TORAH NEVI'IM KETHUVIM*. Greenstein, 1298.

For he has rescued us from Hades and saved us from the power of death,
and delivered us from the midst of the burning fiery furnace;
from the midst of the fire he has delivered us.
Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his mercy endures forever” (Dn 3:88-89).

It is interesting that when the three are rescued, they thank God for rescuing them from the fiery furnace, and from going to Hades---because they do not die. Again, no fire in Hades in the OT---
-just death. The Prophet Isaiah also references a furnace:

Now, therefore, says the Lord,
the Lord of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel:
Ah! I will take vengeance on my foes
and fully repay my enemies!
I will turn my hand against you,
and refine your dross in the furnace,
removing all your alloy. (Is 1:24-25)

According to Isaiah, God uses a furnace and fire for the purification of Jerusalem. Universalists like Origen interpret this reference as evidence in the OT of how God uses the words “fire” and “furnace” as metaphors for how He cleanses or refines those who sin.¹⁹¹

Among the Gospel writers only Matthew’s uses the term ‘fiery furnace’, and each time Jesus follows with, “where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth”. Jesus does this twice, and both times (Mt 13:37-43; 13:49-50) he is giving allegorical interpretations of parables about the kingdom of heaven, the end of the age, and warnings against having a false sense of security.¹⁹² In the explanation of The Parable of the Weeds Among the Wheat (Mt 13:24-30), the slaves are instructed not to remove the weeds among the wheat because they will be dealt with at the harvest, Matthew’s Jesus says:

He who sows good seed is the Son of Man, the field is the world, the good seed the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who

¹⁹¹ Ramelli, 103.

¹⁹²Jeremias, p.85

sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. Just as weeds are collected and burned [up] with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear (Mt 13:37b-43).

The title “son of man” evokes the everlasting king that the Prophet Daniel envisions “coming with the clouds of heaven” to receive “dominion, splendor, and kingship” (Dan 7:13-14).¹⁹³ At the end of the Parable of the Weeds Among the Wheat, Jesus says that “the righteous will shine like the sun” (Mt 13:43a), which also seems to be allusion to The Book of Daniel. In the twelfth chapter Daniel says that at the resurrection of the dead:

Many of those who sleep
in the dust of the earth shall awake;
Some to everlasting life,
others to reproach and everlasting disgrace.
But those with insight shall shine brightly
like the splendor of the firmament,
And those who lead the many to justice
shall be like the stars forever. (Dn 12:2-3)

N.T. Wright references Daniel 12:2 when he examines a passage in John’s Gospel where Jesus responds to the Jews who were trying to kill him because he broke the sabbath and called God his own father, thus making himself equal to God (Jn 5:18b). He again evokes the title “son of man” and tells them:

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come to condemnation, but has passed from death to life. Amen, amen, I say to you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For just as the Father has life in himself, so also he gave to his Son the possession of life in himself. And he gave him power to exercise judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this, because the hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out, those who have done good deeds to the resurrection of life, but those who have done wicked deeds to the resurrection of condemnation. (Jn 5:24-29)

¹⁹³ Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 724.

Wright says that passages like these “belong with those who see the wicked being raised along with the righteous, so that they may be condemned in their full human existence rather than simply fading away without having to be confronted with their own wickedness.”¹⁹⁴ It should be noted that John’s Jesus does not use the idiom “weeping and grinding of teeth”, he does not use the term “eternal fire”, nor “Hades”, nor does mention “Gehenna”.

Regarding the “weeds” in Jesus’s explanation of The Parable of the Weeds Among the Wheat (Mt 13:36-43), they are described as the “children of the evil one” and “all who cause others to sin and all evildoers”. Boring asserts that this corresponds to the Pharisees who are blind guides and are not planted by the Father, and Jesus says they will be uprooted (Mt 15:12-14).¹⁹⁵ This connection makes sense to me. As for being thrown into the “fiery furnace”, this may be another allusion to Daniel, this time chapter three, even though the chapter is not apocalyptic like the parable of the weeds.¹⁹⁶ In Daniel’s story, the men who cast Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego into the fiery furnace were consumed during the process, but the three faithful men did not burn. Concerning the idiom “wailing and grinding of teeth” in the explanation of the parable, Boring says that the idiom, highlights eschatological judgement, is intended more as a warning to the insiders, and is not an occasion for glee over the fate of outsiders.¹⁹⁷ There is no mention of outer darkness, Hades, or Gehenna. There is only a reference to the fiery furnace which hopefully is another metaphor for divine justice (and not real time in a

¹⁹⁴ Wright N.T., *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, 442.

¹⁹⁵ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 310.

¹⁹⁶ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 206.

¹⁹⁷ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 310.

furnace) that awaits the Pharisees (and men like them), and hopefully this will be a condition that eventually comes to an end.

Matthew is the only Gospel writer that uses the expression “the Son of Man will send his angels”, and he uses it again in two other passages (16:27; 24:31). A literal interpretation of angels collecting evildoers and throwing them into “the fiery furnace” sounds horrific. In any event, Matthew’s Jesus does not say that they will live on in the furnace burning in torment forever and ever, unable to repent during their suffering, unable to die, nor does he say they will be separated from God for all of eternity.

The Parable of the Net is the other parable that uses the term “fiery furnace” along with “where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth”. Matthew’s Jesus says:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net thrown into the sea, which collects fish of every kind. When it is full they haul it ashore and sit down to put what is good into buckets. What is bad they throw away. Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. (Mt 13:47-50)

This interpretation (Mt 13:49-50) follows the same pattern as the interpretation of The Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat. Angels conduct the final sorting of “the wicked from the righteous” at the end of the age. Origen has this to say about what is thrown into the furnace:

But when, as we have indicated, he gathers from the whole kingdom of Christ all things that make people stumble, and the reasonings that produce lawless acts are cast into the furnace of fire, and the worse elements utterly consumed ... then shall the righteous, having become one light of the sun, shine in the kingdom of their Father.¹⁹⁸

For Origen, everything that makes people sin is addressed, all bad thoughts, and all bad actions are consumed by the fire. Matthew’s Jesus does not say any of these things in his parable. But neither does he say the wicked will suffer in the fiery furnace forever and ever, he does not say

¹⁹⁸ Manlio Simonetti, ed., [Matthew 1–13](#), Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, 284.

that they will be “wailing and grinding their teeth” for all eternity, nor does he say that they will be separated from God forever—all of which we have been taught are descriptions of hell.¹⁹⁹

A Place With the Hypocrites

The last occurrence of the idiom “where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” in Matthew’s Gospel is in the parable of The Faithful and Unfaithful Servant. Matthew’s Jesus says:

“Who, then, is the faithful and prudent servant, whom the master has put in charge of his household to distribute to them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master on his arrival finds doing so. Amen, I say to you, he will put him in charge of all his property. But if that wicked servant says to himself, ‘My master is long delayed,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eat and drink with drunkards, the servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth” (Mt 24:45-51).

Regarding how the master punishes the servant, “severely” can mean literally “cut in two”, or even “cut him off”.²⁰⁰ The master assigns a place for the unfaithful servant “with the hypocrites” (Mt 24:51); not the “outer darkness”, and not the “fiery furnace”. Matthew uses the word hypocrites twelve times, and in six of the twelve instances Jesus is referring to the scribes and Pharisee’s in the woes of 23:13-36. Some have noted that the author of Matthew’s Gospel tended to interpret Jesus’ parables allegorically and understood this parable as especially relevant for leaders in the church who abused their authority because Jesus had yet to return.²⁰¹

In Luke’s version of this parable (Lk 12:35-48) Jesus says:

But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, to eat and drink and get drunk, then that servant’s master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour

¹⁹⁹ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1036.

²⁰⁰ Davies, and Allison, 390.

²⁰¹ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 448. & Davies, and Allison, 391. & Jeremias, 57.

and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the unfaithful. That servant who knew his master's will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will shall be beaten severely; and the servant who was ignorant of his master's will but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating shall be beaten only lightly. Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more. (Lk 12:45-48)

Luke's Jesus tells a version of a parable that is different than Matthew's Jesus; the wicked servant is not assigned a place with the hypocrites, he is assigned "a place with the unfaithful" (Lk 12:46). Nor does Luke use the idiom "where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth". What is even more interesting, in Luke's account there are different levels of punishment for an unfaithful servant, dependent on the level of guilt (Matthew's Gospel says "punished severely" which can also mean "cut in two"). For a "servant who knew his master's will but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will", he will be beaten severely. As for a servant who was "ignorant of his master's will but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating" (Lk 12:48), he would be beaten only lightly. Like the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, it seems that the Jewish notion of reversal of fortunes is what Luke's Jesus is conveying; the servants who beat other servants when his master's return is delayed will in turn be beaten.

Obviously, Luke's ending to the parable is much different than Matthew's and that raises questions: If the version of the parable in Matthew's Gospel is a reference to "hell" ("where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth" 24:51)²⁰², what is Luke referring to? If in Matthew's Gospel the "place with the hypocrites" is "hell", is the "place with the unfaithful" in Luke's Gospel also "hell"? If yes, are the descriptions "beaten severely" and "beaten lightly" different levels of never-ending punishment in hell (Lk 12:47-48)? Are the servants really beaten? If yes,

²⁰²Davies, and Allison, 390 & Jeremias, 58.

who does the beating? Or are these metaphors for a different temperature as they burn in the real flames of hell where they are separated from God for all time?

If “wailing and grinding of teeth” is in fact what the damned will be doing forever with no chance of reconciliation with God, one would think that Luke and Matthew’s parables would be consistent regarding the fate of the servants, but they are not. But what is consistent in these parables is that: 1) neither parable says that Jesus is speaking about the afterlife, 2) Jesus never mentions fire, 3) Jesus never says that the beatings are unending, nor does he say the wailing and grinding of teeth will go on for all of eternity, and 4) Jesus never mentions separation from God forever. Both parables are powerful warnings that use metaphorical descriptions to convey that divine justice awaits the wicked, but neither parable seems to be describing what the CCC uses as the definition of hell.

The Narrow Door

The author of Luke’s Gospel uses the idiom “wailing and grinding of teeth” one time, and it is the only other place in the Bible (beside Matthew) that the expression is found. When Jesus is asked if only a few people will be saved, he says to try “to enter through the narrow door”, because many will not be strong enough to enter (Lk 13:24). Again, Luke’s Jesus uses the notion of being excluded from attending the eschatological banquet. He tells his listeners:

“Strive to enter through the narrow door, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough. After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ And you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.’ Then he will say to you, ‘I do not know where [you] are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!’ And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out. And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the

kingdom of God. For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” (Lk 13:24-30).

R. Alan Culpeper points out that Jesus warns that at the end of the age there will be reversals of fortunes and that will come as a surprise (the last will be first and the first will be last), and he advises his followers to strive as if admission into the kingdom was based totally on their own doing.²⁰³

Timothy Johnson makes a connection of this exclusion from attendance at the great banquet to the blessings and woes of the Sermon on the Plain and reversals of fortune. Those who are hated, excluded, insulted, or denounced because of Jesus, will leap for joy. As for those who laugh now, Jesus says they will “grieve and weep” (Lk 6:25b).²⁰⁴

Luke’s Jesus does not mention suffering torment by fire forever in the afterlife, he only mentions being excluded from attending the eschatological banquet. Furthermore, Luke’s Jesus is referring to those who will say, “We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets” (Lk 13:26), to them the master of the house will say “Depart from me, all you evildoers!” (13:27b). Luke’s Jesus goes on to say that “there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out” (Lk 13:28), which indicates he was speaking to Jews. But does this mean all Jews will be going to hell separated from God forever because they refuse to believe and be converted before they die? The CCC states that hell is “reserved for those who to the end of their lives refuse to believe and be converted”.²⁰⁵ What is fascinating is that Luke’s Jesus says, “For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (Lk 13:30), which may imply

²⁰³ Culpeper, 278-279.

²⁰⁴ Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 217.

²⁰⁵ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1034.

eventual entry into the kingdom of God for those who will be “cast out”, those who will be “wailing and grinding their teeth”. In any case, Luke’s Jesus does not seem to be describing what we have come to know as hell.

The “the wailing and grinding of teeth” that the Jews will be doing when they are cast out of the kingdom of God may again be a metaphor for divine justice; maybe it is like the “reproach and “everlasting disgrace” that is mentioned in Daniel 12:2 (Lk 13:28), a sense of tremendous regret for failures during one’s life.

I have attempted to effectively address the doctrine that punishment will last forever in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6 The LORD, FIRE, AND FOREVER

The previous chapter addressed the term “fiery furnace” along with the idiom “wailing and grinding of teeth”, but the association of fire with the Lord is found in other ways throughout the Bible. Sometimes fire describes the Lord, or how He administers judgement and justice. Other times, fire is used as a metaphor for how He brings blessing, deliverance, or purification. In addition, at times the usage of the word “fire” has been interpreted as describing “hell”, a place of everlasting suffering where people are separated from their creator forever.

In an attempt to understand the notion of a place called “hell” and its “fire”, this chapter: 1) examines the word fire in the OT, 2) delves into what John the Baptist and Jesus have to say about fire, 3) examines how the Gospel writers use the word “fire” along with the Greek word *aionion*, which has been translated to English as “eternal” or “everlasting”; also it will examine how some scholars have noted that *aionion* can also be translated as “long lasting”, “the world to come” or “other worldly,”²⁰⁶ 4) examines The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats; how it lacks clarity, and how it references fire, punishment, and life, and 5) considers what Matthew’s Jesus says about forgiveness alongside the notion of “eternal punishment” in hell.

Fire In The Old Testament

In an effort to shed some light on how the word fire is used the New Testament, again we look to the Hebrew Scriptures to see how the authors use the word. We will start by looking at Genesis, and a story of sin and destruction. The author says that the sins of the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah were so grave, “the Lord rained down sulfur upon Sodom and Gomorrah, fire from

²⁰⁶ Ramelli, 218.

the Lord out of heaven” (Gn 19:24). This story is a prime example of how fire is used in the OT for judgement and justice, it is a fatal punishment for a city filled with wicked men. Fire certainly is not an instrument of torture, and there is no indication that the punishment by fire continues eternally in the afterlife. However, the destruction by fire seems to be more a quick resolution to the wickedness of the residents, who even attempt to rape visitors to the city. Before its destruction, the Lord told Abraham that, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great, and their sin so grave, that I must go down to see whether or not their actions are as bad as the cry against them that comes to me” (Gn 18:20b-21). But there are other ways the word “fire” is associated with the Lord in the OT.

When the Lord decides to liberate the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, He calls out to Moses from a bush that appeared to be on fire, but it was not consumed (Ex 3:1-6). And when the Lord leads the Israelites out of Egypt, He precedes them “at night by means of a column of fire to give them light” (Ex 13:21), in this instance the fire brings the blessing of light and salvation. And when the Israelites arrive at Mount Sinai after leaving Egypt, “the Lord came down upon it in fire” (Ex 19:18) and “the glory of the Lord was seen as a consuming fire on the top of the mountain” (Ex 24:17), but the fire did not consume the mountain. When Moses and the Israelites set up the Tabernacle as instructed, the Lord’s presence is with them: “The cloud of the Lord was over the tabernacle by day, and fire in the cloud at night, in the sight of the whole house of Israel in all the stages of their journey” (Ex 40:38). In Deuteronomy, before the Israelites enter the promised land, Moses reminds them of their experience at Sinai: “Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Dt 4:12). In these instances, fire did not bring destruction,

judgement, or justice, instead, fire brought blessing. However, before reaching the promised land, fire from the Lord brought destruction for some in Israel.

When Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu used embers from an unapproved fire source they paid the ultimate price: "Fire therefore came forth from the Lord's presence and consumed them, so that they died in the Lord's presence" (Lv 10:2). Similarly, as punishment for rebellion against Moses - Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were punished by fire. Also, "fire from the Lord came forth which consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering incense" (Nm 16:35). When Moses warns the Israelites about the consequences of idolatry, he tells them, "the Lord, your God, is a consuming fire, a jealous God" (Dt 4:24). He also says that the Lord will lead the way into the promised land and cross the Jordan River before they do "as a consuming fire", to destroy the Anakim (giants) who inhabited the land (Dt 9:3). In Psalm 97, the Lord is pictured in powerful terms:

Fire goes before him,
consuming his foes on every side.
His lightning illumines the world;
the earth sees and trembles.
The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,
before the Lord of all the earth.
The heavens proclaim his justice;
all peoples see his glory. (Ps 97:3-6)

The Lord is the king of the earth, and fire is the means of showing His power, and administering His justice. In many instances, the purpose of His fire is reparative and not retributive. In the Old Testament, God's fire is never used as a means of administering spiritual or physical punishment in the afterlife.

Fire is also used to demonstrate the Lord's power when the prophet Elijah challenges the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal to see whose god can provide the fire to roast an animal sacrifice (1 Kgs 18:30-39). Baal is unable, clearly because he does not exist, but even after Elijah

has the altar, the animal, and the wood doused with water, “The Lord’s fire came down and devoured the burnt offering, the wood, the stones, and the dust, and lapped up the water in the trench” (1 Kgs 18:38). This was not a destructive fire; it was used to show the Lord’s power. More than that, it was used to recall Israel to its covenantal promises.

In the eighth century BC, the Prophet Isaiah also uses fire to describe the Lord’s coming in a storm as a “consuming fire” (Is 29:6; 30:30). In judgement against Assyria’s attack on Jerusalem Isaiah says:

See, the name of the Lord is coming from afar,
burning with anger, heavy with threat,
His lips filled with fury,
tongue like a consuming fire,
Breath like an overflowing torrent
that reaches up to the neck!
He will winnow the nations with a destructive winnowing
and bridle the jaws of the peoples to send them astray. (Is 30:27-28).

Like the references in the Torah and the Psalm 97, the prophet depicts the Lord as fire, this time Isaiah proclaims that the Lord is bringing justice to the nations who oppose Israel.

Fire is also a metaphor for purification in the OT. In the eighth century BC, Isaiah receives his call to be a prophet to Israel, and he has an awesome vision. He sees the Lord enthroned high above the temple and suddenly fear overtakes Isaiah:

Then I said, “Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Then one of the seraphim flew to me, holding an ember which he had taken with tongs from the altar. He touched my mouth with it. “See,” he said, “now that this has touched your lips, your wickedness is removed, your sin purged.” (Is 6:5-7)

In this case, the fire at the altar of sacrifice is used for purification, preparing Isaiah for his mission as a prophet.

The wisdom literature contains references to fire for testing and purifying precious metals, using fire and metals as metaphors for the purification of people. One example is found

in Proverbs: “The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, so a person is tested by being praised” (Prv 27:21).

Another example from the Psalms says:

You tested us, O God,
tried us as silver tried by fire.
You led us into a snare;
you bound us at the waist as captives.
You let captors set foot on our neck;
we went through fire and water;
then you led us out to freedom. (Ps 66:10-12)

As fire tries and purifies silver, suffering also purified the Israelites. Most descriptively, The

Book of Wisdom talks about the righteous dead:

For if to others, indeed, they seem punished,
yet is their hope full of immortality;
Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed,
because God tried them
and found them worthy of himself.
As gold in the furnace, he proved them,
and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself. (Wis 3:6)

Citing the above verses, James Dunn makes the point that in the OT ‘fire’ represents not only destruction and judgement, but also blessing and purification.²⁰⁷ It should be noted again, that there is no afterlife punishment mentioned in the OT, no never-ending torment by fire in Sheol. We should consider how the word fire is used in the Old Testament when we seek to understand how the word fire is used in the New Testament. What is most interesting is that fire seems to be a characteristic of God, and at the same time a means of administering justice and purification.

²⁰⁷ Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire Baptism.”, 87.

The Baptist and Jesus on Fire

In the New Testament, another prophet speaks of justice, fire, and the Lord. John the Baptist tells a crowd that includes Pharisees and Sadducees, to “produce good fruit as evidence” of their repentance. He tells them they should not say “we have Abraham as our father”, because God can raise up children of Abraham from stones. The Baptist goes on to say, “Therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt 3:7-10; Lk 3:8-9). His preaching seems to allude to Psalm 1, wherein the man who finds his joy in the Lord and meditates on His law day and night is like a tree that yields its fruit in season (Ps 1:2-3). John switches from using trees that do not produce good fruit as a metaphor for people who do not do good things with their lives, to using the “chaff” portion of wheat that is not good to eat, as a metaphor for people who show no evidence of repentance. Again, seemingly alluding to Psalm 1 John says of the wicked, “They are like chaff driven by the wind” (Ps 1:4b), and referring to Jesus, John tells the crowd that:

I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire” (Mt 3:11-12, also Lk 3:16)

Recall how Isaiah speaks of the Lord winnowing the nations “with a destructive winnowing” (Is 30:28). Regarding the baptism by Jesus with “the holy Spirit and fire”, Dunn asserts that it is like ‘fire’ in the OT, which will bring not only blessing and purification, but also destruction and judgement. This seemingly foreshadows Jesus saying: “I have come to set the earth on fire, and how I wish it were already blazing!” (Lk 12:49)²⁰⁸ Undoubtedly, the author of Luke and Acts, understands that the Baptist’s words are fulfilled after Jesus’ resurrection during Pentecost. Acts

²⁰⁸ Dunn, “Spirit-and-Fire Baptism.”, 87.

says that “there appeared tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest each of the apostles and they were filled with the holy Spirit” (Acts 2:1-4).²⁰⁹ This recalls the covenant at Sinai when the Lord came down upon the mountain and his glory appeared as a consuming fire (Ex 19:18; Ex 24:17).

It is fascinating that the author of Matthew’s Gospel has Jesus repeating verbatim John the Baptist’s quotation about trees that do not bear good fruit (Mt 3:7-10; Lk 3:8-9). During his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns the crowds to be wary of false prophets who bear bad fruit. He tells them that, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Mt 7:19). But does this statement made by both John and Jesus mean that people will be burning in a place referred to as “hell” with no chance of escape?

Another question regarding this statement made first by the Baptist: was it John’s mission to declare that everyone who does not “produce good fruit as evidence of repentance” will be cut down and thrown into the fire of “hell” to burn forever and ever? No prophet before him ever addressed condemnation in the afterlife, let alone condemnation that came with a sentence of punishment by fire that never comes to an end. Maybe John uses hyperbole to warn that the Messiah is bringing judgement and justice. After all, John was a prophet, and prophets used strong language to warn of coming judgement for those who do not repent. Jesus, as God’s Son, certainly would have the authority to threaten and impose a real sentence of never-ending torment by fire in the afterlife. But the question is, would a loving God ever impose such a cruel sentence for not showing evidence of repentance during this very short life? It should be noted that neither John nor Jesus definitively says in these passages that the punishment is in the

²⁰⁹ Culpeper, 85-86.

afterlife and eternal, and neither of them mentions being separated from God forever.²¹⁰ It seems clear that both John and Jesus are talking about divine justice, but there is no mention of punishment that never comes to an end.

Matthew's Jesus gives testimony about his cousin the Baptist, that he was even "more than a prophet" (Mt 11:9). Jesus referred to the Prophet Malachi to identify who John was:

Now I am sending my messenger—
he will prepare the way before me (Mal 3:1a; Mt 11:10b)

Malachi says the following about the one the messenger is preparing the way for:

And the lord whom you seek will come suddenly to his temple;
The messenger of the covenant whom you desire—
see, he is coming! says the Lord of hosts.
But who can endure the day of his coming?
Who can stand firm when he appears?
For he will be like a refiner's fire,
like fullers' lye.
He will sit refining and purifying silver,
and he will purify the Levites,
Refining them like gold or silver,
that they may bring offerings to the Lord in righteousness. (Mal 3:1b-3)

According to Malachi, fire will be used by the Lord for refining and purifying, not for never-ending torture and isolation from His presence. The Baptist says that Jesus will baptize with the "holy Spirit and with fire", and that Jesus will "burn the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mt 3:11-12). It may be that Jesus literally burning people "with unquenchable fire" and separating them from God forever as a punishment²¹¹ is not the message that was intended. It seems that interpretations of verses like this one ought to be done in the light of the whole of the use of the word fire in the Bible. Recall that in the Old Testament, fire is a characteristic of God, wherein He is a "consuming fire", but He calls out to Moses from a bush that appeared to be on fire, but it

²¹⁰ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1033.

²¹¹ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1034.

was not consumed (Ex 3:1-6). Also, He led them to freedom “at night by means of a column of fire to give them light” (Ex 13:21), and He spoke to the Israelites as a “consuming fire” from mount Sinai, but the mountain was not consumed (Ex 24). When we consider Jesus’ citation of Malachi, it seems that the fire he and John refer to may be for refining, not for punishment.

Fire and Forever

In chapter three of this thesis, it was noted that Matthew may have used Mark (Mk 9:42-48) as a source for his version of Jesus’ discourse on temptations to sin (Mt 18:6-9). In both Gospels, Jesus says that removing body parts that cause sin would be better than being thrown into Gehenna with one’s body intact. In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus says that sin will lead to Gehenna’s “unquenchable fire” (Mk 9:43), but he goes on to say:

Everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if salt becomes insipid, with what will you restore its flavor? Keep salt in yourselves and you will have peace with one another (Mk 9:49-50).

Hart contends that, “This fire is explicitly that of Gehenna, but salting here is an image of purification and preservation-for “salt is good” (Mk 9:50).²¹² Therefore, in his view the duration for the sinner in the unquenchable fire will eventually come to an end. In addition, Hart points out that the fire of Gehenna is purifying and in fact good, the notion that “everyone will be salted with fire” and that “salt is good” strongly suggests that it is not a permanent condition.

In the Matthean version of Jesus’ warning about the temptations of sin, the adjective “eternal” is used to describe the fire of Gehenna. Jesus says:

If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into *eternal fire*. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is

²¹² Hart, 116.

better for you to enter into life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into fiery Gehenna. (Mt 18:8-9 NABRE)

But does the use of the term “eternal fire” mean that sin will never be forgiven, and that the damned will burn forever and ever?

Chapter two of this thesis briefly discusses two Greek adjectives that have been translated as the English word “eternal” or at times “everlasting”. One of these words is *aidios*, and Ramelli contends that this word is almost exclusively used to describe God who has no beginning and no end; He is eternal. She also says that the other word, *aionios* is different, it means “long lasting”, “the world to come” or “other worldly” but not strictly “eternal”. She notes that only *aionios* is used to describe punishment of people in the afterlife, never *aidios*.²¹³ Hart shares Ramelli’s assessment of the meaning of the words *aidios* and *aionios*, and he asserts that believing that a penalty can be both “eternal” and “just”, is “a failure to think through what the word ‘eternal’ actually means”.²¹⁴

The expression “eternal/everlasting fire” occurs twice in Matthew’s Gospel (Mt 18:8, 25:41), and his is the only Gospel that uses these words together. Matthew is also the only Gospel that uses the Greek term “κόλασιν αἰώνιον” / “eternal punishment” (Mt 25: 46). In all three instances the Greek word *aionios* is translated as “eternal” or “everlasting” in most English versions of the Bible.

Ramelli and Hart attribute use of the word “eternal” or the word “everlasting” in English Bibles to the theology of Augustine; as discussed in chapter 2, Augustine believed that punishment in “hell” was never ending. Undoubtedly his perspective had a tremendous influence

²¹³ Ramelli, 218.

²¹⁴ Hart, 37.

on Western Christian eschatology, and when the Scriptures were translated to English, the word eternal was used.²¹⁵ Both scholars assert that Augustine could not read or write in Greek, and therefore he did not appreciate the difference in the adjectives *aidios* and *aionios*. Both note that in the early church, punishment and condemnation were almost exclusively described by Church fathers as *aionios* (other worldly or long lasting); they reserved *aidios* to describe God.²¹⁶ This seems to lend some support for their position that eventually everyone will be saved. But I'm not convinced that anyone *knows* that *aionios* strictly means "long lasting", "the world to come" or "other worldly", and never "eternal". My sense is that like many words, *aionios* has different meanings, and that Augustine understood that there were different meanings for this word. It seems plausible that he believed that when the New Testament writers used the word they intended to convey "never ending" or "eternal" and not "long lasting" or "otherworldly". As stated in chapter 2, Augustine undoubtedly understood Origen's position that the Biblical authors intended to convey "other worldly" or "long lasting" and did not agree with him.²¹⁷

N.T. Wright is not a universalist, but he also has an issue with the word "eternal" or "everlasting" being used as a translation of *aionios*. In his book *How God Became King, The Forgotten Story of the Gospels*, he addresses the meaning of the term *zoe aionios*, which has been translated as "eternal life" or "everlasting life". He says that many ancient Jews believed that time was separated into two *aions*; the "present age" and the "age to come"; the "age to come" would arrive one day to usher in God's justice, peace, and healing for a world groaning in toil in the "present age". Wright says Jesus inaugurated the "age to come" and that, "*there is no*

²¹⁵ Ramelli, 219. Hart, 49.

²¹⁶ Ramelli, 219. Hart, 49.

²¹⁷ Saint Augustine. *Saint Augustine City of God*, 995.

sense that this “age to come” is eternal in the sense of being outside space, time, and matter”.

He uses Luke 18:18 as an example of how *zoe aionios* has been incorrectly translated as “eternal life”. Wright also notes that in his translation of the NT, Luke 18:18 reads, “Good teacher what must I do to inherit the *life of the age to come*?” He also notes that his translation of John 3:16 does not end with the traditional KJV “*have everlasting life*”. Instead, it reads, “This, you see, is how much God loved the world: enough to give his only, special son, so that everyone who believes in him should not be lost but should share in *the life of God’s new age*” (Jn 3:16 TKNT).²¹⁸ Wright asserts that:

Among the various results of this misreading has been the earnest attempt to make all the material in Jesus’s public career refer somehow to a supposed invitation to “go to heaven” rather than to the present challenge of the kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven.²¹⁹

It seems to be a reasonable assertion that can be supported by numerous references to Jesus in the Gospels. I believe Wright is correct on this, and that maybe this line of thought should be applied to many of the verses that have been historically perceived as referring to “eternal” punishment in “hell”.

But Wright does not apply this translation of the word *aionios* in every verse of his version of the New Testament. For example, this is his version of what is said to those who have not provided for the poor, the sick, or those imprisoned: “And they will go away into *aionios/everlasting* punishment, but the righteous will go into *aionios/everlasting* life” (Mt 25:46 TKNT). If Wright had used the same premise for translating the word *aionios* that he did for Lk 18:18 and John 3:16, his translation of this verse would be different. It probably would have been

²¹⁸ Wright N. T., *How God Became King*, 44-45.

²¹⁹ Wright N.T., *How God Became King*, 44-45.

something like Hart's translation which says: "And these will go to the chastening *of that Age*, but the just to the life *of that Age*" (Mt 25:46 DBHTNT). Hart notes that he translates the Greek word κόλασιν as "chastening", which has the connotation of "correction" in the afterlife.²²⁰ This supports his contention that punishment or chastisement in the afterlife is for purification,²²¹ and reflects his belief '*that all shall be saved*'. It also seems that Wright's translation reflects his belief that hell is what happens when humans reject God and want to stop being the image and likeness of God in the good world He has provided.²²²

But to Wright's credit, he makes it clear that he is not a *knower*, he says: "The last thing I want is for anyone to suppose that I (or anyone else) *know* very much about all this. Nor do I want anyone to suppose I enjoy speculating in this manner".²²³ Wright also says that what happens to people after death is not the central question that centuries of theological tradition have supposed it to be. He asserts that the framing question is that of God's purpose is to rescue and recreate the entire cosmos.²²⁴

This seems an important question to ponder: If "eternal" or "everlasting" (and not "of that age") is the correct way to translate the word *aionios* when it is used with fire (Mt 18:8, 25:41; Rv 14:11), does that necessarily mean that the condemnation for sin is an eternal sentence? The answer may in fact be no. It seems possible that the fire can be eternal, but the sentence or duration in the fire may be limited in time (not eternal). Fire is a characteristic of God, He is both

²²⁰ Hart, *The New Testament: A Translation*, 53.

²²¹ Hart, *That All Shall Be Saved*, 116-117.

²²² Wright N.T., *Surprised by Hope*, 182.

²²³ Wright N.T., *Surprised by Hope*, 183.

²²⁴ Wright N.T., *Surprised by Hope*, 184.

“eternal” and a “consuming fire”, it may be that His fire is for bringing justice by consuming sin but not the sinner, a process of purification.

What about “*aionios* punishment”? If “eternal” or “everlasting” (and not “of that age”) is the correct way to translate the word *aionios* when it is used with punishment, it seems that punishment for sin may never come to an end. But, as stated above, the only instance that the term “*aionios*/eternal punishment” or “*aionios*/everlasting punishment” are put on the lips of Jesus is a verse in The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Mt 25:46). (See Appendix #7)

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Mt 25:31-46)

In this parable, Matthew’s Jesus uses the term “*aionios* fire” for the second time. He also uses the unique self-reference “the Son of Man”, which is an allusion to Daniel’s vision the son of man is coming on the clouds of heaven (Dan 7:13). This suggests pre-existence and recalls pre-existent Wisdom described in Proverbs 8, and the servant of the Lord in Isaiah (Is 49:2).²²⁵

Matthew’s Jesus says:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him. And he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. (Mt 25:32-33)

Wright makes the point that according to the OT, the judgement and shepherding of the nations was to be the Messiah’s responsibility (Ps 2:8-12; Ez 34:23-24), and that may be the reason why the image of sheep and goats is used.²²⁶ In this parable, the nations will be judged based on how they treated “τούτων τῶν ἐλαχίστων” (“the least of these”), not on faith, and not on baptism. The

²²⁵ Collins, *The Son of Man in First Century Judaism*, 458.

²²⁶ Wright N.T., *Matthew for Everyone*, 357.

sheep on His right will be rewarded and will inherit the kingdom because when they fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the ill, or visited those in prison. Their acts of mercy “to the least of these” will be counted as acts of mercy done directly to Jesus (Mt 25:31-40). The goats on his left performed no works of mercy for “the least of these” and are sent “into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt 25:31), their recompense will be “eternal/aiōnion punishment” while the righteous will be rewarded “eternal/aiōnion life” (Mt 25:46 NABRE).

There are two major questions and proposed answers that arise from this parable. One question is, who are “all the nations?” Two groups have been proposed: the nations may represent all the people who have ever lived (universal interpretation), or just a smaller group of Gentiles or Christians (restrictive or narrow interpretation). The second question is, who are “the least of these”? Again, more than one answer has been proposed: the “least of these” may be anyone in the world that is in need (universal interpretation), or they may be Christians/Christian missionaries that are in need (restrictive or narrow interpretation).²²⁷

Interpreting this parable both narrowly and universally started with the early church. Sherman Gray did a comprehensive study on this pericope, and he surveyed eleven fathers of the third century and only two of the fathers had a universal outlook. Others, including Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Cyprian identified “the least of these” as Christians.²²⁸ The differing opinions continued in the fourth century, and Jerome is the first to address the problem that the pericope it is not clear.²²⁹ Gray investigated 504 references to the identity of “the least of these”

²²⁷ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 456.

²²⁸ Gray, 332.

²²⁹ Gray, 333.

referred to in Matthew 25:31-46 in the writings of the early church fathers from the second century to the eighth century. He found that 62% were neutral, 33% had a narrow interpretation, and only 5% interpreted “the least of these” as any person in the world in need.²³⁰ Since the early church fathers, theologians throughout these many past centuries have continued to interpretate this parable in different ways.

There are verses in Matthew’s Gospel that shed light on this issue and seem to indicate that “the least of these” or “little ones” may be Christians, which supports the narrow or restrictive interpretation. One example occurs after Jesus talks about the conditions of discipleship (Mt 10:37-39); he tells his disciples that when someone receives them, that person is also receiving him, and the one who sent him (Mt 10:40). He says that just giving a cup of water to “one of these least ones” will be enough to ensure a reward (Mt 10:42). This is very similar to the parable of the sheep and the goats when the king invites those on his right to inherit the kingdom because of their kindness; he tells them that “whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). This evidence that “the least of these” refers to Christians or Christian missionaries in Matthew 25:31-46 is substantial.

The author of Matthew refers to both children and Christians as μικρῶν/mikron “little ones” when he asked the rhetorical question: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”:

He called a child over, placed it in their midst, and said, “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me. “Whoever causes *one of these little ones* who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea (Mt 18:1b-6).

²³⁰ Gray, 338-339.

Daniel Harrington asserts that the term is “one of these little ones” is used metaphorically to describe members of the believing community.²³¹ Donahue contends that “little ones” is used by Matthew for vulnerable members of the Christiann community and “the least of these” for Christians most in need.²³² Matthew’s Jesus will use the term “one of these little ones” again in The Parable of the Lost Sheep, where he says that “it is not the will of your heavenly Father that “one of these little ones” be lost’ (Mt 18:10-14).

But if this narrow interpretation is the correct way to understand The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, then the judgement cannot include every person that has ever lived. If someone never encounters a Christian or Christian missionary (“one of the least of these”) in need, that person does not fit the description of a sheep nor a goat. Certainly, this leaves millions upon millions of souls with no basis on which to be judged. Therefore, the judgement or the identification of the nations would have to be interpreted narrowly, addressing a specific group, a group that had encountered Christians in need.

Despite the evidence in Matthew’s Gospel that “the least of these” and “these little ones” are Christians, there has been a change in how this pericope is understood. Gray notes that there has been an increase in the universal interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46 starting in the twentieth century, and he suggests that global events have been the main factor. He cites two world wars, guilt over the Jewish holocaust, and the Second Vatican Council as contributing factors.²³³ More often than not, “all the nations” is interpreted as involving all of humanity, and “these least brothers of mine” is interpreted as any person in need. John R. Donahue, S.J. echoes this

²³¹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 264.

²³² Donohue, “The 'Parable of the Sheep and the Goats”, 4.

²³³ Gray, 338-339.

assessment of the “universalistic” application, he says that care for everyone in the world is what is required and asserts that this “is especially strong within contemporary Catholicism”.²³⁴

However, like the early church fathers there is no consensus among modern scholars.

Daniel J. Harrington asserts that Gentiles are the ones being judged by their deeds of mercy done for Christians, because when they performed those deeds, they in fact were done for the Son of Man. In this interpretation of Matthew 25:31-46, Harrington says that a separate judgement for Israel will take place wherein the twelve apostles will be the judges (Mt 19:28).²³⁵

Joachim Jeremias has a similar interpretation of Matthew’s last judgement, he asserts that the judgement scene concerns Gentiles, and by what criterion they will be judged. He contends that Jesus is saying that “at the Last Judgement, the heathen will be examined by the acts of love which they have shown to me in the form of the afflicted”. Furthermore, he says that grace and a share in the kingdom will be granted if they have fulfilled the duty of love which is the Messiah’s law of loving neighbor as oneself (Jas 2:8).²³⁶ Jeremias’ view differs from Harrington in that he does not say that the “afflicted” or “the least of these” pertains to only Christians.

Like Jeremias, M. Eugene Boring agrees that “the least of these” is not restricted to Christians or Christian missionaries. However Boring differs from both Harrington and Jeremias because he says this scene is meant to encourage Christians to endure to the end, and to warn them that deeds of love and mercy performed for those in need is what will count at the judgement. He says that this is not “an actual address to all the nations, but to the Christians

²³⁴ Donohue, “The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats”, 4.

²³⁵ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 358-359.

²³⁶ Jeremias, 209.

themselves. The scene does not picture Gentiles who are condemned for failing to minister to Christians or Christian missionaries”.²³⁷

Donahue notes the fact that many modern scholars and homilists teach the universal interpretation, but he still takes the position that “the least of my brothers” refers to Christian disciples or missionaries. But he also stresses that the text is not just a sectarian ethic, that it is relevant for contemporary ethics and homiletics. In addition, he also says that Matthew’s teaching on discipleship needs to be engaged, because it “gives the periscope a richer dimension than its contemporary generalized use allows”. Donahue clearly affirms the value of seeing every person that we encounter in need as “one of the least of these” even though he believes the original intent was a reference to Christians in need. His interpretation is more like Boring’s; he says the pericope concerns endurance until the end, and that the Church needs to be a living witness by treating those in need with love and generosity.²³⁸

It is fascinating that not one of these scholars addresses the description of be “eternal/*aiōnion* punishment” by fire. There is no attention given to the fact that if taken literally, such a never-ending punishment seems extremely cruel. Nor is there any mention of the possibility that the fire may be for the purification of those who fail to show mercy to others. Harrington does briefly address the word “everlasting” also translated as “eternal”. Like Ramelli and Hart, Harrington notes that the Greek adjective *aionion*, used three times in Matthew 25:31-46 (“*aionion* fire”, “*aionion* punishment”, and “*aionion* life”), pertains to the age/world to come and not eternal in the sense of never ending. He says, “The assumption behind the experience is

²³⁷ Boring, *Matthew & Mark*, 456.

²³⁸ Donohue, 25.

the Jewish apocalyptic schema of “this age/world” and “the age/world to come”.²³⁹

This survey indicates that we cannot be certain who “the nations” are, nor can we be certain who “the least of these” are. If *aionion* punishment is an “eternal punishment” and not a “punishment in the age to come”, it seems that the identities of “the nations” and “the least of these” would be abundantly clear, but they are not. Tim Mackie makes the point that “there is a big part of our culture that values being concise and clear and to the point and Jesus was almost never any of those things”. Mackie goes on to say that Jesus used parables that were puzzling to force us to do the thinking and listening as we consider what he is saying.²⁴⁰ Although this pericope may not be considered a typical parable,²⁴¹ it certainly seems designed to challenge the hearer to think deeply about its’ meaning. Maybe we should consider that punishment “in the age to come” is what the word *aionion* means in this instance.

Forgiveness in Matthew

In addition to the teaching about the effects of sin i.e., “Hades”, “Gehenna”, “outer darkness”, “weeping and grinding of teeth”, and “fire”, Matthew’s Jesus teaches about forgiveness. This is important because if we truly believe that God will never forgive anyone who dies outside the Church, it may be that we are saying His teachings about forgiveness are hypocritical. It is important to notice that these teachings about forgiveness often occur in the Gospels in connection with verses we may have understood as indicating “never ending” punishment by fire in hell. One example occurs in his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that

²³⁹ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 357.

²⁴⁰ Mackie, Parables: How we listen. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1jZsoNJGJgs&t=1704s>

²⁴¹ Donohue, 10.

“whoever says, ‘You fool,’ will be liable to fiery Gehenna” (Mt 5:22). But he immediately follows this warning with a statement about the importance of forgiveness, Jesus says:

Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny. (Mt 5:23-26)

Leaving room for eventual release from “hell”, Hans Urs von Balthasar notes that “this imprisonment is severe, but not eternal”.²⁴² In making an argument that punishments in the world to come will be limited in duration, Hart asserts that the word “until” in this verse should be taken seriously; until implies an end to the punishment.²⁴³

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus also teaches his listeners how to pray, and that forgiving is essential. He says: “If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions” (Mt 6:14-15). The prayer Jesus teaches does not include accepting him as ‘personal savior and Lord’, nor does he mention baptism as an essential component of being forgiven, just the requirement of forgiving others.

It is fascinating that shortly after Matthew’s Jesus warns of the “*aionion* fire” and “fiery Gehenna” (Mt 18:8-9), he tells the Parable of the Lost Sheep. In the parable, God is like a shepherd who rejoices over the recovery of one lost sheep more than he rejoices over the ninety-nine that did not stray (Mt 18:10-14). Balthasar makes the point that: “according to Gregory of Nyssa and other Fathers, the lost sheep that Christ carries back to the ninety-nine (the angels) is

²⁴² Balthasar, 145.

²⁴³ Hart, 116.

mankind as a whole”.²⁴⁴ This seems more like the Jesus who emptied himself and took the form of a slave, the One who in obedience sacrificed himself on a cross (Phil 2:7-8) for the salvation of the world (Jn 1:28; 3:17; 4:42).

After Jesus tells his parable about recovering the lost sheep, Peter questions him about how many times he is required to forgive his brother, he asks if seven is the number (Mt 18:21). Jesus’ response can be translated as either 77 times or 490 times, but it seems the point is that there should be no limit to our willingness to forgive those who do us wrong²⁴⁵ (Mt 18:21-22). Next, Matthew’s Jesus tells The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, which reiterates the fact that forgiving others is a prerequisite of being forgiven by God. It seems irrational to believe that God would hold weak fallen creatures to a higher standard than He holds himself. Nor does it seem rational to believe that God will torture a person for all of eternity if they fail to forgive someone before they die.

Maybe Matthew is using hyperbole to underscore the importance of forgiving each other, and that there are real consequences for failing to forgive. It seems possible that people do not lose free will after death, and maybe God still allows people to repent after death. But clearly this is not what the CCC says:

To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him forever by our own free choice.²⁴⁶

But it may be that people can forgive each other in the age to come. Or sadly, it may be that people can choose to withhold forgiveness forever, and in doing so they choose to reject God

²⁴⁴ Balthasar, 31.

²⁴⁵ Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 269.

²⁴⁶ CCC Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1033.

forever.²⁴⁷

Maybe the gift of eternal life is available forever if the fallen just use their freewill to accept it, and maybe eternal fire is a never-ending fire, the eternal fire of God's love burning away the sins of everyone in need of purification, the purification made possible only by the cross.

²⁴⁷ CCC Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1033.

CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY

It seems good to bring this thesis to closure by providing a summary of the chapters.

Before The Incarnation

Reward and punishment are not mentioned as part of the afterlife experience in the Hebrew Scriptures. There is no heaven, and there is no hell in the Old Testament; everyone goes to “Sheol”, “the pit”, or “the grave”.

When the Hebrew Scriptures are translated into Greek for the first time in the third century BC, the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל/Sheol (the abode of the dead) was most often translated in the LXX as ᾍδης/Hades (the Greek word for the underworld as the resting place for everyone when they die).²⁴⁸

By the first century, the notion that everyone shares the same fate in the afterlife is not the only Israelite belief about death. Some believed that justice will be served in the afterlife, and some believed that the righteous may one day rise from the dead. I examined beliefs about the afterlife in the early church, to answer how it became an official church teaching, that “hell” is a real place of never-ending punishment by fire in the afterlife.

Some History

The authors of the NT wrote down in Greek what Jesus said in Aramaic, and they used two Greek words that will eventually be translated to the English word “hell”. These words are ᾍδης/Hades and γέεννα/Gehenna, and they have very different meanings. Hades is like Sheol, it

²⁴⁸ Henning, *Educating Early Christians through the Rhetoric of Hell*, 21.

is the abode of the dead, all the dead. The word *γέεννα*/Gehenna is different, it seems to be a reference to the place where Israelites offered their children in sacrifice to pagan gods, it is a valley on the outskirts of Jerusalem. Jesus uses the word Gehenna metaphorically to reference a place or state of being where people may find themselves on account of their actions or inactions. I have noted that *ἀδης*/Hades and *γέεννα*/Gehenna each appear in only four of the twenty-seven books of the Greek NT. In Matthew's Gospel, Luke's Gospel, and Acts *ἀδης*/Hades is used twice, and it is used four times in Revelation. There are twelve instances that *γέεννα*/Gehenna is used in the Greek NT; seven instances are found in Matthew's Gospel, three occur in Mark's Gospel, and there is one instance in both Luke's Gospel, and one in the Letter of James. It is fascinating that neither word is used in John's Gospel, John's letters, Paul's letters, Peter's letters, Hebrews, nor do they occur in Jude. More importantly, when *ἀδης*/Hades and *γέεννα*/Gehenna are used in the Bible, it is not clear in any of the instances that they refer to a place of never-ending suffering by fire, where one is separated from God forever.

We know that there was no consensus in the early church regarding salvation and punishment in the afterlife. A significant number of the early church fathers believed in universal salvation. Their hope was that one-day God will restore the whole of creation through Christ; their theology was rooted in Scripture and was centered on Christ. In their view, punishment in the afterlife is for purification, and limited in duration. Among those in opposition to this teaching was St. Augustine, who insisted that punishment of the damned in the afterlife is everlasting. In his famous work *City of God*, he explains how a body can endure pain for all eternity, and why it is a false notion that punishment after death is for purification.²⁴⁹ He also believed that without orthodox Christian faith and membership in the true church, there was no

²⁴⁹ Saint Augustine. *Saint Augustine City of God*, 989.

possibility of avoiding damnation.²⁵⁰ Thus ignorance or rejection of the Gospel, meant everlasting damnation for all Pagans and Jews. Augustine’s doctrine prevailed and has influenced the church in the west (both Catholic and Protestant) for the last 1600 years. Even though Augustine spoke and wrote in Latin, his teaching about the afterlife still explains why the word hell is used in the various translations of the Bible into English long after he died. In fact, an English translation of the Bible did not exist until just before the Reformation and General Council of Trent in 1545-63 AD, and the most widely used versions came shortly after Trent.

Sheol, Hades, and Gehenna

After examining how the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל/Sheol, and the Greek word ᾠδης/Hades are used in Scripture, it is reasonable to assert that they should not be translated as the English word “hell”. Sheol and Hades both refer to a place or state of being in the afterlife, but the verses that include these words never indicate that the condemned will experience a permanent “state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed”. Neither do they indicate that, “Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, “eternal fire”.”²⁵¹ Therefore, I believe that I have made the case that using “hell” as a translation of the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל/Sheol and the Greek word ᾠδης/Hades is clearly wrong. This is supported by the fact that the more modern English versions of the Bible like the NRSVCE and the NABRE do not translate these words as “hell”.

Regarding the word γέεννα/Gehenna, when it is translated into English using the word “hell”, the OT history of child sacrifice in the valley of Ben-Hinnom is lost, and I have suggested

²⁵⁰ Sullivan, 30-31.

²⁵¹ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV. 1035.

that we also lose the reason Jesus chose the word. Furthermore, the word hell is an inappropriate translation because the verses in the Bible that use the word Gehenna do not clearly indicate that it is a place or state of being in the afterlife where punishment by fire and separation from God is a never-ending condition, which is how the word hell is defined.²⁵² Unfortunately, most Bibles still translate *γέεννα* with the word “hell”, and that includes the NRSVCE and the NIV, two of the most popular English translations. To its translators’ credit, the NABRE translates *γέεννα* as Gehenna, the English transliteration of the word; you will not find the word hell in the NABRE. An interesting contrast exists between two of the Catholic versions of the Bible: The word hell appears one hundred and nine times in the DV version published back in the early 17th century, and it appears nowhere in the NABRE which was published in 1991.

Hell is never a fit translation of the Hebrew word *לֶשֶׁת*/Sheol, and the Greek words *αἴης*/Hades and *γέεννα*/Gehenna because “hell” and its definition are the result of questionable theology. This thesis also addresses words that have been interpreted as describing what people will be doing in hell.

Wailing and Grinding of Teeth

Matthew’s Jesus uses the idiom “wailing and grinding of teeth” to describe what people will be doing in “the outer darkness”, “the fiery furnace”, and in “a place with the hypocrites”; all of which we have been taught are descriptions of hell.²⁵³ However, when Jesus refers to these places, he does not say that the condemned will be wailing and grinding their teeth for all eternity, nor does he say that people will be separated from God forever. The one time that

²⁵² CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV. 1035.

²⁵³ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV

Luke's Jesus uses the idiom, he mentions being excluded from attending the eschatological banquet, and never mentions suffering torment by fire forever in the afterlife. Instead, he seems to imply eventual entry into the kingdom of God for those who will be "cast out", those who will be "wailing and grinding their teeth". He says, "For behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" (Lk 13:30). This thesis also addresses the use of the word "fire" and the word "eternal" in the Bible, and the association of these words with "hell".

The Lord, Fire, and Forever

I have shown that "fire" represents destruction and judgement in the OT, and that it also represents blessing and purification. This thesis addressed the fact that John the Baptist and Jesus use the word "fire". They are quoted by the author of Matthew as saying almost the exact same thing regarding trees that do not "bear good fruit", that they "will be cut down and thrown into the fire" (Mt 3:7-10; Lk 3:8-9; Mt 7:19). Even though these verses reference a type of destruction, neither John nor Jesus say that they are referring to a never-ending afterlife sentence, and neither of them mentions being separated from God forever (which is how "hell" is defined).²⁵⁴

John foretells the blessing that Jesus will bring with the fire of Pentecost (Lk 3:16; Mt 3:11). He also says Jesus "will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire", but he does not say that the chaff will burn for all of eternity. When Jesus refers to John's mission of preparing for his own coming, He famously quotes the prophet Malachi:

Now I am sending my messenger—
he will prepare the way before me (Mal 3:1a; Mt 11:10b)

²⁵⁴ CCC, Part One, Section Two, Ch.3, Art. 12, IV, 1033.

By referring to this passage, Jesus also refers to his own mission as the fulfillment of Malachi which says he will “be like a refiner’s fire” and his mission is to purify (Mal 3:2).

The meaning of the Greek word *aionios* has also been examined in this thesis and that some scholars (N.T. Wright, Hart, Ramelli, Harrington) assert that the word has been mistranslated as meaning “everlasting” or “eternal”, and that it really refers to “the age to come”. If this interpretation is correct, then “eternal fire” should instead be translated as “fire of the age”. I have suggested that even if the fire is “eternal” or “unquenchable”, it does not necessarily mean that the duration that one may experience the fire will be eternal.

I have noted that the term “*kolasin aionios*” (eternal punishment) is only used one time in Scripture (Mt 25:46). This occurs in the apocalyptic Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, wherein “all the nations” will be gathered together and separated into two groups based on how each treated “the least of these”. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying, “And these will go off to *kolasin aionios* (eternal punishment), but the righteous to *zōēn aionios* (eternal life)” (Mt 25:46). I referenced a comprehensive study of the history of the interpretation of this parable, and how the study showed that the identity of “the nations” and “the least of these” has been interpreted differently by sincere exegetes for the last two thousand years. I have proposed that if this is truly a reference to a real condition of never-ending punishment by fire, it seems that the identity of the group being judged (the nations) and identity those representing Jesus (the least of these) would be clear---but they are not. I have suggested that the identities ambiguous by design, forcing us to wrestle with its meaning.

Forgiveness

Lastly, I have tried to make the point that punishment by fire for all of eternity is incompatible with Jesus' teachings about forgiveness and love. If forgiving others is a prerequisite of being forgiven, then it is irrational to believe that our perfect Lord would require fallen creatures to forgive, while Himself punishing for all eternity. There are "*knowers*" on both sides of the issue of "hell". Some know that there are millions upon millions of souls that will be separated from God forever, burning in a place that is called "hell", with no chance of reconciling with God after death. Others "*know*" that after a period of purification, eventually everyone will be "saved". Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing if either is true.

If we read the Gospels without a preconceived notion that suffering in the afterlife for sin is never-ending in a place referred to in English as "hell", it seems reasonable to assert that Jesus never spoke about such a place. Jesus used different words to describe the results of the things people do, and do not do during their lives (Hades, Gehenna, "wailing and grinding of teeth"). However, the word "hell", as defined by both Catholics and Protestants, is the result of very questionable interpretations of things Jesus said, and therefore an inappropriate word to use in any translation of the Bible.

APPENDIX 1.

LESSON 14

- 90 - *Resurrection and Life Everlasting*

183. What are the rewards or punishments appointed for men after the particular judgment?

The rewards or punishments appointed for men after the particular judgment are heaven, purgatory, or hell.



184. Who are punished in purgatory?

Those are punished for a time in purgatory who die in the state of grace but are guilty of venial sin, or have not fully satisfied for the temporal punishment due to their sins.

PURGATORY IS GOD'S HOSPITAL

Purgatory is God's hospital for souls, where those who do not love God enough to enter heaven are cured by fire.

Only those who love God perfectly can enter heaven. But even many good people die with only a weak love of God. They had more interest in the people and the things of this earth than they did in God. They did not love Him with their whole heart and soul. They wasted many opportunities to please Him.



PURGATORY

Love is purified, increased and perfected by suffering. This means not only bodily pain, but crosses of all kinds. (See Q. 425.) God sends everyone all the sufferings they need on earth to cleanse, strengthen, and perfect their love. But most people waste their sufferings. They do not want them, complain about them, and try to escape them in every manner possible, even by committing sin. Because of this attitude, the fires of their sufferings are unable to burn away the selfishness from their love, so that it will be perfect.

APPENDIX 2.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH PART ONE, SECTION TWO, CHAPTER THREE, Article 12

IV. Hell

1033 We cannot be united with God unless we freely choose to love him. But we cannot love God if we sin gravely against him, against our neighbor or against ourselves: "He who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."⁶¹⁰ Our Lord warns us that we shall be separated from him if we fail to meet the serious needs of the poor and the little ones who are his brethren.⁶¹¹ To die in mortal sin without repenting and accepting God's merciful love means remaining separated from him for ever by our own free choice. This state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed is called "hell."

1034 Jesus often speaks of "Gehenna" of "the unquenchable fire" reserved for those who to the end of their lives refuse to believe and be converted, where both soul and body can be lost.⁶¹² Jesus solemnly proclaims that he "will send his angels, and they will gather . . . all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire,"⁶¹³ and that he will pronounce the condemnation: "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire!"⁶¹⁴

1035 The teaching of the Church affirms the existence of hell and its eternity. Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, "eternal fire."⁶¹⁵ The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs.

1036 The affirmations of Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church on the subject of hell are a call to the responsibility incumbent upon man to make use of his freedom in view of his eternal destiny. They are at the same time an urgent call to conversion: "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."⁶¹⁶

Since we know neither the day nor the hour, we should follow the advice of the Lord and watch constantly so that, when the single course of our earthly life is completed, we may merit to enter with him into the marriage feast and be numbered among the blessed, and not, like the wicked and slothful servants, be ordered to depart into the eternal fire, into the outer darkness where "men will weep and gnash their teeth."⁶¹⁷

1037 God predestines no one to go to hell;⁶¹⁸ for this, a willful turning away from God (a mortal sin) is necessary, and persistence in it until the end. In the Eucharistic liturgy and in the daily prayers of her faithful, the Church implores the mercy of God, who does not want "any to perish, but all to come to repentance":⁶¹⁹

Father, accept this offering
from your whole family.
Grant us your peace in this life,
save us from final damnation,
and count us among those you have chosen.⁶²⁰

APPENDIX 3.

New Testament--Translations of ᾗδου (Greek Abode of the Dead) to Latin and English

Book	NRSVCE	Subject	Latin Vulgate	Duey Reims Version	King James Version	RSVCE	NRSCE	NABRE	NIV	N.T, Wright's NT	David Bentley Hart's NT
			382-404	1582	1611	1965-1966	1989, 1993	1991, 2010	2011	2011	2017
Matthew	And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades . For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day (Mt 11:23).	Capernaum	infernum	Hell	Hell	Hades	Hades	Netherworld	Hades	Hades	Hades
Luke	And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be brought down to Hades (Lk 10:15).		infernum	Hell	Hell	Hades	Hades	Netherworld	Hades	Hades	Hades
Matthew	18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it (Mt16:18).	The Church	inferi	Hell	Hell	powers of death	Hades	Netherworld	Hades	Hell	Hades
Luke	In Hades , where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side (Lk 16:23).	Rich Man & Lazarus	inferno	Hell	Hell	Hades	Hades	Netherworld	Hades	Hades	Hades
Acts	27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades , or let your Holy One experience corruption (Acts 2:27).	Jesus & Psalm 16:10	inferno	Hell	Hell	Hades	Hades	Netherworld	Realm of the Dead	Hades	Hades
Acts	Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades , nor did his flesh experience corruption' (Acts 2:31).		inferno	Hell	Hell	Hades	Hades	Netherworld	Realm of the Dead	Hades	Hades
Revelation	17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, 18 and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades (Rev. 1:17-18).	Death & Hades	inferni	Hell	Hell	Hades	Hades	Netherworld	Hades	Hades	Hades
Revelation	I looked and there was a pale green horse! Its rider's name was Death , and Hades followed with him; they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and pestilence, and by the wild animals of the earth (Rev. 6:8).	Death & Hades	inferus	Hell	Hell	Hades	Hades	Hades	Hades	Hades	Hades
Revelation	And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done (Rev. 20:13).	Death & Hades	inferus	Hell	Hell	Hades	Hades	Hades	Hades	Hades	Hades
Revelation	14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; 15 and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14-15).	Death & Hades	inferus	Hell	Hell	Hades	Hades	Hades	Hades	Hades	Hades

APPENDIX 4.

The New Saint Joseph Baltimore Catechism No. 2

Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)

185. Who are punished in hell?

Those are punished in hell who die in mortal sin; they are deprived of the vision of God and suffer dreadful torments, especially that of fire, for all eternity.

HELL IS THE LOSS OF GOD

In committing mortal sin, sinners turn their wills away from God to love themselves more than Him. After death they cannot change their wills. In hell they see their hatred of God that sin had put into their souls.

There is no love in hell and those there hate and torment one another. The fire imprisons them and prevents them from ever satisfying any of their torturing desires, while they know that those in heaven have every desire satisfied. After the final resurrection, their bodies will also be tormented.



Lazarus with Abraham, and the rich man in hell. (See Luke 16, 19-31.)

APPENDIX 5.

New Testament--Translations the Greek Word γέεννα/Gehenna											
Book	NABRE	Cause	Latin Vulgate	Duey Reims	KJV	RSVCE	NRSVCE	NABRE	NIV	N.T, Wright's NT	David Bentley Hart's NT
			383-404	1582	1611	1965-1966	1989, 1993	1991, 2010	2011	2011	2017
Matthew (7 x's)	22 But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna (Mt. 5:22).	Anger "You Fool"	gehennae	Hell	Hell	Hell	Hell	Gehenna	Hell	Gehenna	Hinnom's Vale of Fire
	29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into Gehenna . 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into Gehenna (Mt. 5:29-30).	Adultery	gehennam	Hell	Hell	Hell	Hell	Gehenna	Hell	Gehenna	the Vale of Hinnom
	And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna (Mt. 10:28).	Who to Fear	gehennam	Hell	Hell	Hell	Hell	Gehenna	Hell	Gehenna	the Vale of Hinnom
	And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into fiery Gehenna (Mt. 18:9).	Temptations to Sin	gehennam	Hell	Hell	Hell	Hell	Gehenna	Hell	Hell	Hinnom's Vale of Fire
	"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves (Mt. 23:15).	Child of Gehenna	gehennae	Hell	Hell	Hell	Hell	Gehenna	Hell	Gehenna	Hinnom's Vale
	You serpents, you brood of vipers, how can you flee from the judgment of Gehenna (Mt. 23:33)?	Brood of Vipers	gehennae	Hell	Hell	Hell	Hell	Gehenna	Hell	Gehenna	Hinnom's Vale
Mark (3 x's)	43 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than with two hands to go into Gehenna , into the unquenchable fire . [44] 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life crippled than with two feet to be thrown into Gehenna . [46] 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. Better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into Gehenna , 48 where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched' (Mk. 9:43-48).	Temptations to Sin	gehennam	Hell	Hell	Hell	Hell	Gehenna	Hell	Gehenna	the Vale of Hinnom
Luke	I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one who after killing has the power to cast into Gehenna ; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one (Lk. 12:5).	Who to Fear	gehennam	Hell	Hell	Hell	Hell	Gehenna	Hell	Gehenna	the Vale of Hinnom
James	6 The tongue is also a fire . It exists among our members as a world of malice, defiling the whole body and setting the entire course of our lives on fire , itself set on fire by Gehenna (James 3:6).	Sets the Tongue on Fire	gehenna	Hell	Hell	Hell	Hell	Gehenna	Hell	Hell	Hinnom's Vale

APPENDIX 6.

Wailing and Grinding/Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth							
Book	Ch. & Verse	Verse	Pericope	Duration Mentioned?	Belief System Mentioned?	Who?	Where?
Matthew	Mt. 8:11-13	11 I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven, 12 but the children of the kingdom will be driven out into the outer darkness , where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth ." 13 And Jesus said to the centurion, "You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you." And at that very hour [his] servant was healed.	Healing the Centurion's Servant	No Duration Mentioned	NO	Jews--Lack of Faith--This is like Luke 13:22-28 (Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob)	The Darkness Outside
Matthew	Mt. 13:40-43	40 Just as weeds are collected and burned [up] with fire, so will it be at the end of the age . 41 The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace , where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth . 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear.	Parable of the Weeds (Explained)	No Duration Mentioned	No	Those Who Cause Others to Sin & All Evil Doers	Fiery Furnace
Matthew	Mt. 13:49-50	49 Thus it will be at the end of the age . The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous 50 and throw them into the fiery furnace , where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth .	Parable of The Net	No Duration Mentioned	No	Wicked Who Have Been Separated from the Righteous	Fiery Furnace
Matthew	Mt. 22:12-14	12 He said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was reduced to silence. 13 Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside , where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth .' 14 Many are invited, but few are chosen."	Parable of the Wedding Feast	No Duration Mentioned	NO	Lack of Evidence of a New Life in Christ	The Darkness Outside
Matthew	Mt. 24:50-51	50 the servant's master will come on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour 51 and will punish him severely and assign him a place with the hypocrites , where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth .	The Faithful / Unfaithful Servant--See Luke 12:35-48 (Beaten Severely / Lightly)	No Duration Mentioned	Believers who fall	Beating Fellow Servants and Eating and Drinking With Drunkards-Because the Master's Return is Delayed	A Place w/ the Hypocrites
Matthew	Mt. 25:29-30	29 For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30 And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside , where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth .'	Parable of the Talents See Luke 19:11-27 Parable of the 10 Gold Coins	No Duration Mentioned	NO	Laziness	The Darkness Outside
Luke	Lk. 13:27-29	27 Then he will say to you, 'I do not know where [you] are from. Depart from me, all you evildoers!' 28 And there will be wailing and grinding of teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and you yourselves cast out . 29 And people will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south and will recline at table in the kingdom of God.	The Narrow Door	No Duration Mentioned--- Seems to indicate eventual entry into the Kingdom for those "Cast Out"	NO	Jews/Evildoers-I Never Knew You---This is like Mt 8:11-13 Abraham, Isaac, & Jacob	Cast Out
Revelation	Rev. 21:3-5	3 I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will always be with them [as their God] 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain , [for] the old order has passed away." 5 The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true."	The New Heaven and the New Earth	No More Death, Wailing or Pain			

APPENDIX 7.

Eternal Life-Eternal Fire-Eternal Punishment-Eternal Ruin				
Book	Verse	NABRE	DBH NT	N.T. Wright NT
John	16 For God so loved the world that he gave[g] his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life . 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn[h] the world, but that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him will not be condemned, but whoever does not believe has already been condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (Jn 3:16-18)	"eternal life"	"life of the age"	"share in the life of God's new age"
		aiōnion		
Luke	18 An official asked him this question, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life ?" (Lk 18:18)	"eternal life"	"life in the age"	"the life of the age to come"
		aiōnion		
Matthew	6 "Whoever causes one of these little ones[e] who believe in me to sin , it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. 7 [f]Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things must come, but woe to the one through whom they come! 8 If your hand or foot causes you to sin,[g] cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life maimed or crippled than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into eternal fire . 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into fiery Gehenna . (Mt 18:6-9)	eternal Fire	"fire of the age"	eternal Fire
		aiōnion		
Matthew	41 [q]Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, 43 a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me.' 44 [r]Then they will answer and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?' 45 He will answer them, 'Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.' 46 And these will go off to eternal punishment , but the righteous to eternal life .'" (Mt 25:41-46)	"eternal fire" "eternal punishment" "eternal life"	"fire of the age" "chastening of that age" "life of that age"	"everlasting fire" "everlasting punishment" "everlasting life"
		aiōnion fire aiōnion punishment aiōnion life		
Jude	Likewise, Sodom, Gomorrah, and the surrounding towns, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual promiscuity and practiced unnatural vice, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire . (Jude 1:7)	"eternal fire"	"from the age"	"endless fire"
		aiōniou		
2 Thes	5 This is evidence of the just judgment of God, so that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God for which you are suffering. 6 For it is surely just on God's part to repay with afflictions those who are afflicting you, 7 and to grant rest along with us to you who are undergoing afflictions, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 in blazing fire , inflicting punishment on those who do not acknowledge God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 These will pay the penalty of eternal ruin , separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, 10 when he comes to be glorified among his holy ones[c] and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, for our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thess. 1:5-10)	"eternal ruin"	"the just reparation in the ruin of the age"	"eternal destruction"
		aiōnion- ruin - not fire		
Revelation	The smoke of the fire that torments them will rise forever and ever , and there will be no relief day or night for those who worship the beast or its image or accept the mark of its name." (Rev. 14:11)	"forever and ever"	"for ages and ages"	"forever and ever"
		aionas aionon		
Revelation	The Devil who had led them astray was thrown into the pool of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were. There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever . (Rev. 20:10)	"forever and ever"	"the ages of the ages"	"forever and ever"
		tous aionas ton aionon		

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