

JESUS' WORD FOR ETERNAL DAMNATION WAS GEHENNA

The whole point of Jesus being saviour was to save us from sin and how it results in eternal damnation. The doctrine that you go to Hell forever at death unless you repented and got God's mercy in time is implied in the Bible and is also explicit. In the gospel of John, 15:6, Jesus says that if anybody does not abide in Jesus and live in his love and presence that man will be a branch that will be cut off such as those branches that men gather and burn in the fire. Jesus does not say the man casts himself off. Jesus himself who is the the vine and his people who are the branches is the one who does the amputating.

Jesus told a lot of parables that warn against judgment so much and a lot of gospel space is taken up with them that it is clear that some temporary punishment for sin is NOT meant. Nobody would warn you against jail that much unless you would end up there for sins that don't seem that bad and if you end up there for longer than you can imagine. If jail was a conveyor belt of horrors there would be more fear and more focus on jail and keeping out of it.

Read the parables and see how they imply severe judgment and the existence of Hell. The parable of the rich fool is in Luke 12:16 to 21. The parable of the wise and stupid builders in Matthew 7 and Luke 6. The sower in Mark 4, Matthew 13 and Luke 8. The parable of the wheat and the tares is in Matthew 13. The barren fig tree parable can be read in Luke 13. The fig tree that is unfruitful will be cut down. Unfruitfulness must be understood not in light of the fact that most people always do reasonable good but in the light of the fact that the true disciple of Jesus will be holier and better than the normal person. The dragnet in Matthew 13. Jesus warns that following him his very costly and the warfare against spiritual enemies is very serious and very real in Luke 14:28-33. The unforgiving servant meets a terrible fate in Matthew 18. The dishonest servant in Luke 16. The rich man and Lazarus the poor man in Luke 16 reads more as a story than a parable but it deserves inclusion. The wicked vineyard workers in Matthew 21. The great feast in Matthew 22 and also Luke 14:15-24. Matthew has the parable of the wise and stupid virgins in chapter 25. The terrible parable of the sheep and the goats is clear that eternal punishment awaits the goats in Matthew 25. Jesus sternly warns that we must be ready for his return in Mark 13 and Matthew 24. Even the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 has a threat for it says the son was welcomed back for repenting and there was great joy for he saved himself from being as good as dead. None of these make sense unless you understand that if death comes for the sinner or unfruitful person that person will be damned for all eternity. They make no sense if it is extremely hard to go to Hell. The amount of space they get indicates that damnation is very common.

WHAT DOES GEHENNA IN MARK 9 MEAN?

In Mark 9, Jesus called the apostles around him and he told them that it was better for them to cut off body parts that led them into sin for sin merited Gehenna. He informed them that it is better to enter life without them than to be flung into Gehenna with the parts all intact and that the worm of the condemned there will never die (Mark 9:48). Life means life with God after death. He added that they would be cast into flames that would never go out. Contrary to many cults he never actually said that the body would be destroyed there. He believed in the story of the three young men in Daniel who were in the furnace and never burned so fire did not necessarily mean destruction to him.

Gehenna refers to the Hinnom Valley - the cursed Valley outside Jerusalem which was considered an abomination because there were tombs there and it was a place of pagan worship where children were burned as sacrifices. The main thing about Gehenna is that it was shunned and feared and seen as a place of suffering and the presence of evil spirits. That main thing is what Jesus was getting at.

Four meanings have been proposed for Gehenna in the gospel.

1 A symbol for the place of everlasting punishing after death where you are hated and shunned and cursed for all eternity.

2 A symbol for the dump God will make at the end of the world where he will kill sinners and discard them there. He will put sinners out of existence. Is Gehenna a dump for the bodies of criminals? Does Gehenna refer to a dump or graveyard that God will make at the end of time to cast all those who wouldn't obey him and where they will be permanently destroyed?

The dump interpretation appeared centuries after Jesus and there is no evidence that it was a dump in the time of Jesus. Jesus gives no hint that he is using it as an image because it is a dump but because it is a place of suffering and horror.

3 Gehenna is alleged by some believers to be a metaphor for a garbage dump which could mean it stands for where you will be dumped alive forever if you are a sinner.

But it was no more a dump than anywhere else!

“Archeology shows no evidence of garbage ever being burned at the site” see Blaming Jesus by Robert Price. If that is true, then Jesus was not referring to the cursed valley at all but using its name to describe something horrible that takes place in the afterlife. For him it was a metaphor of a horrible place.

If Price is wrong, then Gehenna is a garbage dump in the afterlife where sinners go. It would mean just a garbage dump for corpses and not a graveyard or a place of human sacrifice.

4 Nothing more than the grave. This interpretation does not fit the images of horror and suffering. Why not just say the grave? Gehenna means something more!

The Jehovah’s Witnesses and the Christadelphians reckon that Gehenna is death or the grave. They think Gehenna was the dump, the resting place of the wicked. Jesus would not have used the image of Gehenna for the grave for it is not a good image because Gehenna is a horror and burns. People aren’t dumped into death for God takes life and dumps nobody as if they were rubbish. It is he that lets the murderer’s knife kill for he could turn it into paper. Death doesn’t burn. Death isn’t always horrible as in Gehenna. Death is never a punishment in Gehenna for it is a resting place for dead bodies not a place of execution. If it is then the grave is a bigger punishment than death and that is stupid. Gehenna is a good image if it is a place where half-dead people are thrown into the flames showing that they are completely rejected and degraded. Not even once does the Bible hint that Gehenna is physical death alone.

5 The real Gehenna - it is not a symbol. Prophecy in the Old Testament speaks of God's enemies being destroyed there in war. Some feel that Jesus is not talking about something that happens after death. They notice how he talks as if you lose an eye you are better off entering life or salvation without it than going into Gehenna with two eyes. It must be admitted that this interpretation could be right. If it refers to the afterlife then Jesus thinks the way your body is when you die is the way it will rise again to live with God. That is an extremely crude view of resurrection but Jesus was not the only one to absorb that silly belief.

Some think that the best understanding is that Jesus was expecting the end of the world any second and if you were not ready then you would be judged and condemned there so it is better to live and lose one eye or limb than to end up there maimed. It must be remembered that Jesus never speaks of Gehenna as death but emphasizes how it is disgusting and tormenting. It is so bad that there is no time to waste. You have to get ready for God right away and repent.

IN DEPTH STUDY

Gehenna appears as Tophet in Jeremiah 7:31-32 and in 2 Kings 23:10. Whatever it means it means something unclean and to be shunned.

Does Gehenna refer to the cursed Valley outside Jerusalem which was considered an abomination because there were tombs there and it was a place of pagan worship where children were burned as sacrifices? To a lesser extent it might have been a place where the carcasses of criminals were thrown into. But it is better to forget about that - it seems a minor detail and it is possible that no such dumping took place. Its being a place of graves and evil worship were what it was infamous for.

The first clue is that it is said to the apostles. There was no point in Jesus telling the apostles to avoid being cast into the cursed valley. They were unlikely to deserve it.

Jesus had accused the Jewish leaders whose decision it was if a person should be put to death of hypocrisy and cruelty beyond belief. If he meant Gehenna the Valley then he was speaking to the apostles as if that could happen to them and was warning them which would be telling them to stay on their right side at all costs. But the Jewish leaders hated them all anyway and Jesus openly wanted the people to look upon the leaders with disdain. He wanted the apostles on his side. The leaders thirsted for their blood. So his meaning was that it is better not to sin than to be thrown into Gehenna. This proves that God does the throwing in because only God knows if you have really sinned or not. Women and men cannot perceive the motives of others.

Worm is a symbol of revolting punishment for Jesus did not say their worms but their worm – liberal Bibles often omit this their out of prejudice and duplicity and substitute worms. He is suggesting that they are being tormented by one big worm – perhaps it eats them whole and they come out the other end alive and whole. This worm will never die, he says, so it may represent everlasting punishment symbolically or it may really be a monster from Hell which is more likely for there is no evidence that it is a symbol. He doesn’t mean that the worm dies not because it has plenty of meat for he would have said that if he did. The worm must be immortal. It is a monster in Hell. It is like it eats and excretes the people as wholes to grant them extra torment.

The worm image comes from Isaiah. Isaiah meant real worms. So did Jesus.

Jesus said everybody in Gehenna would be salted by fire and that is why the fire would not be quenched (v48, 49). When you salt something you put it all over it. Also salt implies that they are food for monsters. If everybody there burns then the worm must symbolise a gruesome and revolting punishment. It must be a monster for ordinary worms would die in the blaze.

Moreover, salt is preservative. If everyone in Hell is salted with fire then the fire preserves them. This means preserving the person. The Valley of Gehenna is for the living and not the dead unlike that of the Jerusalemites, the end of the world dump and the grave. Jesus then told us to have salt in ourselves. That is, we must preserve ourselves in the painful fires of goodness. There was no need for Jesus to stress the everlasting if it does not torment forever.

Jesus said it was better to lose a limb or an eye than to sin so as to be thrown into Gehenna. This would only be true if it were a place of far greater horror than the grave or the literal Valley of Gehenna.

That Jesus used Gehenna for the real Valley elsewhere does not mean that he had it in mind here in Mark. It was a place of horror and evil and that is why he called the state of eternal torment Gehenna.

Gehenna was not the cursed valley on this earth. The cursed valley for sinners made by God in Hell was called Gehenna for it was like it in many respects.

Jesus said that the flames of Gehenna are unquenchable. This means eternal. The view that the fires would burn themselves out is not in the Bible. Unquenchable stands for eternal because why even mention the unquenchable aspect otherwise? Jesus said that it was unquenchable to warn people about how invincible the fire was. The force of the warning would be destroyed if you assume it was unquenchable but would burn itself out. Jesus didn't seriously think somebody throwing water on the fires was a possibility.

Nowhere, does the Bible say that there will be such a dump except a place of conscious eternal torment. The picture of the worm proves that the heap the wicked will end up on is not one of corpses but of living suffering beings.

Jesus was speaking of the punishment by worm and unquenchable fire (that will probably burn itself out which does not mean it is necessarily quenchable) and the prophet predicted this for the dead bodies of evildoers (Isaiah 66:24). The prophet said it would happen after the end of the world when everybody on earth would love God. The fact that Jesus said that the person who have this fate would live on there is reconcilable with Isaiah's doctrine that they would be corpses for God can make them alive yet bound to a body that is a corpse to condemn them to a kind of living death. If body and soul are separate or if God can change the human constitution to make this possible then it is possible for God to unite a corpse and a soul in a macabre and nightmarish marriage of life and death. A living person can have dead arms and legs so God can make it happen to the whole body. And since Jesus said that it is better to have a miserable life on earth than to suffer in Gehenna it is clear that the people there can't escape or change God's mind. The prophet and Jesus then spoke of the same thing.

If they did not then how did Jesus come to so be influenced by the language of Isaiah if they did not mean the exact same thing? But Jesus was merely borrowing phrases from Isaiah and did hint that this was for aesthetic literary reasons when he differed from and added to it. But no such hint was made.

We must remember that the resurrection of the wicked does not imply that the wicked will have immortal bodies. Perhaps they will wage war against God when they arise and are destroyed on the earth and then raised again and again and again to suffer another worse dose of a permanent Gehenna.

The fires can be quenched in the Gehennas except the eternal punishing one where they are always needed. The city dump had no fires burning on the Sabbath when nobody worked. Jesus is speaking of a condition where people will never get out of the fire.

Gehenna could not have meant the cursed valley that existed then or that will exist in the future. It is the dreaded Hell of Christian dogma that has put many a poor soul in the mental ward.

It is significant that the earliest Gospel, Mark, makes it so clear albeit indirectly, that Jesus preached eternal torment. It means that it is likely that he really did so if he existed.

We must finish by recognising that Gehenna stands for evil worship and idolatry and horror. Jesus was suggesting that people can and do go there and suffer unquenchable fire and are devoured alive by worms that do not die. His teaching

supports the Christian teaching that Hell is idolatry - people not wanting to adore God as he is. The fires of Gehenna refer not to the fire for burning rubbish but to the fire of the holocaust. Gehenna is a place of endless human sacrifice and decay.

Those who die in sin will physically suffer somehow forever under false idolatrous religion and be tormented by monsters for all eternity.

THE WEB

The Bible Vs the Traditional View of Hell by Babu Ranganathan www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/5862/hell2.html This page argues that the wicked will suffer agony for a while in punishment for their sins for a while after their death and then be put out of existence. It says that Matthew 10:28 promises that the wicked will be destroyed body and soul in Gehenna meaning be destroyed entirely. Then it points to Isaiah 34 where Edom is said to be destroyed by unquenchable fire that has smoke that ascends forever and ever. But you would know from the context that this is only poetry and that it does not entitle us to question if Jesus meant his references to eternal fire literally. Isaiah however says the fire will not be quenched but that does not mean it won't burn itself out and the smoke could literally ascend forever and ever. The page is full of bad logic. Then it argues that when God said a slave under some conditions is his master's property forever that when he said the punished of the wicked will be forever he did not mean it literally. But we know that the slave cannot be enslaved forever for he will die one day but no hint in any context is given that forever in relation to eternal punishing is not forever.

Then it indicates that when Jesus in the parable about Lazarus said that the rich man was in Hades that he meant the mythical Greek Hell indicating that the story was a myth or parable. But Hades was believed to be a real place among the Greeks and Jesus using this word and not Gehenna actually supports the thesis that it was not a parable. The fact that the Jews were unfamiliar with Hades supports this even more for you cannot say he just used the word Hades to hint that it was a myth. And as for making out that the Book of Revelation is being symbolic when it discusses eternal fire and the eternal punishment it is ridiculous for the whole volume is not symbolism and can't afford to be. Also, when all Christians believed in eternal torment the book could not risk misleading them with a symbolic eternal hell. And even when a symbolic book says suffering lasts forever it must mean it literally for what else could it be? You can get across the horror of eternal loss without going that far. The Book of Revelation never uses exaggeration.