

Bible Study Notes:

The Lake of Fire



in History and Prophecy

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Version 1.9

“The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness, and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge; **the fear of the LORD is Zion's treasure.**” (Is 33:5-6)

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Abstract

The destruction of the wicked by flood, meteorites, fire and brimstone etc is found throughout the scriptures. Punishment is something that God does not want to execute but He has to: either to bring people and nations to realize Who He is; or to put them out of their misery. The lake of fire that is referred to in the book of Revelation is not the only reference to it. Christ Himself mentions it as do the New Testament writers and reference to it is also contained in the Old Testament. Studying the topic not merely in its prophetic aspect but also historical and spiritual facets helps one to more fully realise its meaning as well as its portend.

NB: this is a Bible study with notes and not an article or paper as such.

Introductory Comments

It is a terrible and terrifying subject, I know. It is something we shy away from because it is almost depressing and invokes fear.

But fear is good – fear is one way that helps us respect the Creator and urges us on toward salvation - the free gift of eternal life.

“By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD [men] depart from evil.” (Prov 16:6)

“The fear of the LORD [is] the beginning of knowledge: [but] fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Prov 1:7)

“The fear of the LORD [is] to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.” (Prov 8:13)

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: **but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**” (Matt 10:28)

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this [is] the whole [duty] of man.” (Eccl 12:13)

“Let all the earth fear the LORD: let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him.” (Ps 33:8)

One purpose of this study is to remind us that He has our life in His hands, and He can obliterate us for eternity. We all need a ‘wake-up call’ to urge us onwards to eternal life – not eternal death. There are other means he uses, of course, to do so, but this Bible study concentrates on the stick, not the carrot and that should not be diminished or ignored. We do ourselves a great disservice and put our eternity in jeopardy if we ignore the stick.

To enable us to grasp the lake of fire concept, we need to study it historically, spiritually and prophetically.

During the study various questions arise such as: “does the lake of fire continue through the Millennium into the Judgment period? Is there more than one lake of fire? When the earth is finally cleansed by fire, will this be a new fire or the continuation and expansion of the lake of fire? What is the purpose of the resurrection to condemnation – why not just let the wicked remain dead?

To formulate a good Bible study on the subject I have invoked articles by others and have included them in the appendices in lieu of writing on the components of this subject which have already been developed by others.

To find oneself being judged and thrown into the lake of fire will be a terrifying thing, but the execution apparently will be extremely quick and extinction permanent.

There are enough warnings in the Scriptures about this terrifying eternal death:

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, **it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.**

“Woe to the world for temptations to sin. For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

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

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be **thrown into the hell of fire.**” (Matt 18:5-9 ESV. Cp Rev 20:14)

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, ‘If we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets.’

“So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.

“Fill up, then, the measure *of the guilt* of your fathers.

“You serpents, you brood of vipers, **how will you escape the sentence of hell?**” (Matt 23:29-33 ESV)

“Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.” (Rev 2:10-11)

Others who believe in the extinction of the wicked

In addition to the various beliefs of immortality of the soul, dwelling in heaven, roasting in hell or universalism (ie the ultimate salvation for all that have ever lived), some do believe in the mortality of the soul such as the Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah Witnesses, Christadelphians etc.

The latter believe that all those that never heard the Gospel (including the unborn, babies, Third World people) etc will never be resurrected to have a chance of salvation. Many or most of them hold to the belief that even Christians that knew the need to be baptised and did not, will lose out of salvation and never be raised.

However, those that were baptised but rebelled against God will be raised to the judgment of condemnation and be extinguished.

On the other hand, the Jehovah Witnesses (Watchtower Society) teach the following:

“Does this mean that every human who ever lived will be resurrected? No. The Bible says that some of the dead are in “Gehenna.” (Luke 12:5) Gehenna got its name from a garbage dump located outside of ancient Jerusalem. Dead bodies and garbage were burned there.¹ The dead whose bodies were thrown there were considered by the Jews to be unworthy of a burial and a resurrection. So Gehenna is a fitting symbol of everlasting destruction. Although Jesus will have a role in judging the living and the dead, Jehovah is the final Judge. (Acts 10:42) He will never resurrect those whom he judges to be wicked and unwilling to change.

Judgment Day will give billions of people their first opportunity to learn about God’s will and to conform to it. This means that a large-scale educational work will take place. Indeed, ‘the inhabitants of the land will learn about righteousness.’ (Isaiah 26:9) However, not all will be willing to conform to God’s will. Isaiah 26:10 says: “Even if the wicked is shown favor, he will not learn righteousness. Even in the land of uprightness he will act wickedly, and he will not see the majesty of Jehovah.” These wicked ones will be put to death permanently during Judgment Day.—Isaiah 65:20.”² [note that they believe that those never called to salvation now will instead be called during the Millennium rather than during the Great White Throne Judgment]

“Who are “the unrighteous,” and what opportunity does Jehovah kindly give them? What about all the people who did not serve or obey Jehovah because they never knew about him? These billions of “unrighteous” ones will not be forgotten. They too will be resurrected and given time to learn about the true God and to serve him. During a period of a thousand years, the dead will be resurrected and given an opportunity to join faithful humans on earth in serving Jehovah. It will be a wonderful time. This period is what the Bible refers to as Judgment Day.”³

As we shall see, a resurrection to judgment of apostates is required and as such the above groups do err. This is addressed in **Appendix One: The Second Death. Why Bother?**

¹ However, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and others are incorrect on this issue. According to researcher Hans Scharen (1998:328): “The traditional explanation that a burning rubbish heap in the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem gave rise to the idea of a fiery Gehenna of judgment is attributed to Rabbi David Kimhi’s commentary on Psalm 27:13 (ca. A.D. 1200). He maintained that in this loathsome valley fires were kept burning perpetually to consume the filth and cadavers thrown into it. However, Strack and Billerbeck state that there is neither archeological nor literary evidence in support of this claim, in either the earlier intertestamental or the later rabbinic sources (Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud and Midrasch*, 5 vols. [Munich: Beck, 1922-56], 4:2:1030). Also a more recent author holds a similar view (Lloyd R. Bailey, “Gehenna: The Topography of Hell,” *Biblical Archaeologist*, vol 49 [1986]: 189.”

² <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/bible-teach/what-is-judgment-day-1000-year-reign/>

³ <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/bible-teach/hope-resurrection-of-dead-loved-ones/>

At this juncture it should be noted that more and more conservative Protestant scholars are discovering the mortality of man and the extinction of the wicked including Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment*; Nicholas Wright's *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*; and Christopher Date's (ed) *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism*.

More about God's presence and His indignation portrayed as fire may be found in **Appendix Two: Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology**.

Appendix Three. Shedding light on the outer darkness: A Fresh look at the Language of Hell provides further information on the concept of outer darkness mentioned in Matt 22:13.

Finally, this study is about the Lake of Fire concept in history and its future restoration. It is not about disproving the immortal soul, burning forever in hell or going to heaven. These issues have been addressed by many competent authors over time.

Historical Information

Fire as an instrument of God's wrath and judgment is found throughout both Old and New Testaments. Fire is used both metaphorically as well as literally. Both as a cleansing agent and God destroying the wicked for good.

The Lake of Fire in ancient times

Fire is associated with this wrath in Gen 19:24; Lev 10:2; Num 16:35; Is 34:5-10; 66:15; 66:24; Ezek 38:22 for instance.⁴

Isaiah prophesied that topheth (or burning place) has been prepared for the King of Assyria. Topheth is the same as the Valley of Ben Hinnon. This hell was located to the south of Jerusalem and in the Greek is known as Gehenna.⁵

“And the LORD will cause his majestic voice to be heard and the descending blow of his arm to be seen, in furious anger and **a flame of devouring fire**, with a cloudburst and storm and hailstones.

The Assyrians will be terror-stricken at the voice of the LORD, when he strikes with his rod.

And every stroke of the appointed staff that the LORD lays on them will be to the sound of tambourines and lyres. Battling with brandished arm, he will fight with them.

For **a burning place [tophet] has long been prepared**; indeed, for the king it is made ready, its pyre made deep and wide, with fire and wood in abundance; **the breath of the LORD, like a stream of sulfur, kindles it.**” (Is 30:30-33)

Then *Pulpit Commentary* advises:

⁴ This theme can also be found in I Enoch 90:24-6; 103:8; 4 Macc 12:12; IV Edras 7:38 during the intertestamental period

⁵ “Although the actual word Gehenna is not used in Revelation, this is what John **refers to as the fiery lake of burning sulfur**. Gehenna (an abbreviation for “valley of the son of Hinnom”) was the name given to the valley lying to the south and west of Jerusalem (the modern *Wadi er Rababi*).” (R Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, New International Commentary on the New Testament* (revised), p. 359) [emphasis mine]

"Fire, being the most destructive of all the elements, is chosen by the sacred writers to symbolize the agency by which God punishes or destroys the wicked. We are not to assume from prophetic figures that material fire is the precise agent to be used. It was not the agency employed in the destruction of Sennacherib, who is the *king* mentioned in the text. He was killed by his two sons, whilst worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god (Isa 37:38). Tophet properly begins just where the Valley of Hinnom bends round to the east, having the cliffs of Zion on the north, the Hill of Evil Counsel on the south. It terminates at Beer Ayub, where it joins the Valley of Jehoshaphat. The cliffs on the south side especially abound in ancient tombs. Here the dead carcasses of beasts, and every offal and abomination, were cast, and left to be either devoured by that worm that never died, or consumed by that fire that was never quenched. Hinnom was condemned to this infamous service, perhaps, because in it, when Israel fell into idolatry, they offered their children in sacrifice to Baal." Tophet came to represent the place of punishment, especially that kind of punishment which is destructive rather than remedial."⁶ [The background information provided above is useful, however the *Commentary* does not understand that Sennacherib was a type of the end-time King of Assyria.]

Shockingly, this was the place where humans were sacrificed by evil kings of Judah to the god Molech as described in II Kings 23:10; II Chron 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31-32; 19:4-6; Ezek 16:20-21.

Later it was where the homeless dead were thrown in the fire that was kept burning.

During the New Testament Christ Himself and the various authors utilise this imagery – which is based on a real fire. For example Matt 5:22; 7:19; 13:40-42, 50; 18:8-9 ; 25:41; Mark 9:43, 48-49; Luke 16:24; 17:29; John 15:6; Jude 7.

Fire is also used in various aspects of judgment or of God's presence in Gen 15:17; Ex 19:18; Lev 10:2; Num 16:35; Ps 97: 1, 3.⁷

A hell or lake of fire in one form or another is found in various religions. *Wikipedia* for example reveals the following:

“Richard H. Wilkinson has written:

According to the Coffin Texts and other works, the underworld contained fiery rivers and lakes as well as fire demons (identified by fire signs on their heads) which threatened the wicked. Representations of the fiery lakes of the fifth "hour" or "house" of the Amduat depict them in the form of the standard pool or lake hieroglyph, but with flame-red "water" lines, and surrounded on all four sides by fire signs which not only identify the blazing nature of the lakes, but also feed them through the graphic "dripping" of their flames. Some temple texts and modern books have said that the Lake of Fire in the Egyptian Religion is the lake that Ra would pass through in his daily journey in the Duat. He goes in the west gate and exit through the east gate and after that, it would say that the boat was renewed.^[1]

An image^[2] in the Papyrus of Ani (ca. 1250 BC), a version of the Book of the Dead, has been described as follows:

⁶ *Pulpit Commentary*, Isaiah, 1889.

⁷ ""From the first of redemptive history, fire signals Yahweh's presence (Gen 15:17; Exod 3:2; 13:21; 19:18), even his presence in judgment (Lev 10:1-2; Num 11:1-3; 16:35)" D Davis, *The Message of Daniel, The Bible Speaks Today*, p. 99. Fire represents "the fierce heat of his judgment on sin and on all those opposed to his supreme authority." (G Archer, *Daniel, Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 89)

The scene shows four cynocephalous baboons sitting at the corners of a rectangular pool. On each side of this pool is a flaming brazier. The pool's red colour indicates that it is filled with a fiery liquid, reminding one of the "Lake of Fire" frequently mentioned in the Book of the Dead.^[3]

1. p.161. "Brazier." Richard H. Wilkinson. *Reading Egyptian Art, A Hieroglyphic Guide to Ancient Painting and Sculpture*.1992. Thames & Hudson, London, quoted in Hell's Pre-Christian Origins
2. Jump up Pool or Lake of Fiery Water, painted red, with burning braziers and baboons, from the Book of the Dead. (plate 32, p.168 for accompanying text. Raymond Faulkner, et al, from Hell's Pre-Christian Origins
3. Jump up p. 168, commentary to plate 32, Raymond Faulkner and Ogden Goelet. *The Egyptian Book of the Dead, The Book of Going Forth by Day*. San Francisco. Chronicle Books. 1994. ISBN 0-8118-0767-3."⁸

The above demonstrates that some of the ancients still had a recollection of this ancient truth, though distorted.

Location of the Lake of Fire

Where will it be when Christ reignites it? One speculation is that it will include the current Dead Sea (the quote is lengthy but necessary). The author is on to something – the Dead Sea will be made alive during the Millennium (Ezek 47:7-12) so it seems that the lake of fire will be close by or compose part of the Dead Sea?:

"It can be shown from the Bible and history that the Lake of Fire is presently in existence on this earth. At the present the Lake is within one of its "quiet" cycles and fire is not observed within it at this time, but it is destined to erupt again before the second advent of Christ. Interestingly, this Lake was long ago known as a Lake of Fire and in history it has spewed forth its sulfuric and fiery eruptions in times when God chose to judge sinners for their ways. It will again be used to judge the wicked (Revelation 19:20), and Death and Hades are destined to be thrown into it (Revelation 20:14).

John tells us that the lake will be in existence and active with fire prior to the Millennium before Christ comes again (Revelation 19:20). This means it will be fully in evidence before the second advent of Christ to this earth.

"For it is the day of the Lord's vengeance, and the year of recompense for the controversy of Zion. And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulfur; and the land [of Edom] shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night or day; the smoke shall go up forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste". (Isaiah 34:8-10) This burning of Edom (an area that borders the southern and southeastern portions of the Dead Sea) occurs when "the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll" (Isaiah 34:4)

Just like the Book of Revelation says will happen at the second coming of Christ (Revelation 6:14), this region of Edom will have its stream beds flowing with rivers of fire. This pitch and brimstone will flow into the Dead Sea located just east and south of Jerusalem. **Since this judgment takes place so near to Jerusalem, it could be reasoned that "The Lake of the Fire" was certainly in the vicinity.**

Read the prophecy concerning Edom for yourself:

⁸ "Lake of Fire," *Wikipedia*

“For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion.
And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulfur; her land shall become burning pitch.
Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it forever and ever.” (Is 34:8-10)

This certainly seems like a volcano and would ‘fit the bill’ for both Day of the Lord outpouring of God’s wrath and the volcano continuing through the Millennium.

The author continues:

“The lake cannot be Gehenna (another name of “hell” in the King James Version). The area of Gehenna (sometimes called Tophet) is a valley located on the southern edges of Jerusalem. In no way can the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) be considered “a lake.” [the author explains later that this Valley is connected to the Dead Sea] It is also not the “bottomless pit” (Greek: abyss) because that is a pit in the earth with a door that a key can open (Revelation 9:1–2).

There is a prime New Testament reference which goes a long way in solving the identification of “The Lake of the Fire.” It is found in the Book of Jude. This New Testament writer was the brother of James, and the half-brother of our Lord. He said that there was, in his time, an example of eternal fire (age-lasting fire) that was an active and present witness to what the judgment of God would be like in the future. That example was the geographical area where the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah once existed. Jude called attention to the ruined condition of that region as well as the fire that was still burning in the locale. That’s right, the area around the ancient cities of Sodom and Gomorrah was still having fires and smoke in the time of Jude. Notice carefully what he said on the matter.

“Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication [promiscuity] and going over to strange flesh, are set forth [are presently set forth] for an example, suffering [are presently suffering] the vengeance of age-lasting fire” (Jude verse 7, not “eternal” fire because the fires have long gone out).

When one looks at that verse closely, it tells us very much about the environment around the Dead Sea as it existed in the time of Jude. There were then active fires and smoke in the area. Strabo, the first century geographer, described the neighborhood as “a land of fires” (XVI, 764). Some of the fires were fed by the seepage of naphtha (an old name for petroleum), bitumen, and other gaseous fumes.

This fire and smoke was also seen coming from the midst of the Dead Sea as well. The geographer Strabo called the Dead Sea a lake (as did Josephus, the early Jewish historian--*War* IV,8,4), and described the fiery characteristics which came from its center: “In the midst of the lake is a source of the fire and also there are great quantities of asphalt in the middle. The eruption is uncertain, because the movements of fire have no order known to us, as it is of many other basis.”

The Dead Sea is the prophesied "Lake of the Fire." **Let us recall that Jude said that the area of Sodom and Gomorrah was a present example (in Jude's time) for the eternal (age-lasting) fire that God has designed for the punishment of the wicked (Jude verse 7).** The Bible tells us that those cities of which Jude spoke are now under the Dead Sea. The former Valley of Siddim in which Sodom and Gomorrah were situated "is the salt sea" (Genesis 14:3).

The Dead Sea is a part of what is called the Jordan rift—a great depression (or fault line) in the earth that starts north of Mount Hermon and continues southerly with the Jordan River, the Sea of Galilee, and the Dead Sea in its nether regions. The rift continues south to the Gulf of Aqaba, the Red Sea, into Africa, and ends up near the source of the Nile River. It is the longest known fault line on earth. From satellite pictures, it is a very prominent feature on the surface of the earth and well distinguished from other land formations.

The Bible tells us that fire and brimstone fell on Sodom, Gomorrah, and the Valley of Siddim. So thorough was the devastation that the fire within the Jordan Valley appeared as though it were a complete destruction of the earth by the burning of fire. That opinion was expressed by Lot's daughters. "There is not a man [left] in the earth," was their appraisal (Genesis 19:31). They thought that the world had come to an end by the fire and brimstone and that there was not a man left in all the earth but their father Lot. What a surprise to the girls when they discovered that only the Jordan rift valley was destroyed. It was a great enough devastation, however, that it became the example of the future judgment when God will rain down a fiery rebuke on rebellious men at the end of the age.

We should briefly remind ourselves of the parable given by Christ about Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31). The locale of that story is precisely in the area of the Jordan rift and the northern region of the Dead Sea. Here was the Rich Man after death in the place of fire. He looked and saw Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham. Between Abraham and the Rich Man was a "great gulf fixed" (Luke 16:26). The great gulf of Christ's parable was clearly the Jordan rift valley. The Rich Man was east of the Jordan River, and Lazarus and Abraham were west of it. The latter two were inheriting the promises of the land of Palestine given to Abraham, but the Rich Man (Judah) was not allowed to enter. He had to remain in the region of the fires near the northern edge of the Dead Sea but east of the Jordan River. This was an area where there once were continual and unrelenting flames and they existed in the time of Christ.

The significance of the parable was to show that the region of the "great gulf" was a place of punishment. It was directly in the same location that Jude placed the example of eternal [age-lasting] fire to try the wicked (Jude verse 7).

The Jordan Rift Valley, also known as the Great Rift Valley is a unique topographical feature along which the ground has sunk between parallel faults. It extends north and south along the Jordan Valley, the Red Sea, and through Africa to the Zambezi River, in the south-east.⁹

Zechariah wrote of "the day of the Lord", when He will come in power and majesty, "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives ... and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof ... and there shall be a very great valley" (ZECHARIAH 14:4).

⁹ In fact it extends from the Golan Heights to the Dead Sea and on to the Gulf of Aqaba.

With the information that the great chasm (or gulf) of the Jordan rift (with the smoking Dead Sea in its midst) is the place of punishment for the wicked, we can now understand much better the position of Gehenna (the Valley of Hinnom) in this scheme of future punishment. Christ frequently referred to Gehenna as a place of fiery judgment (Matthew 5:22,29,30; 10:28; Mark 9:47; Luke 12:5, etc.) This particular valley was situated outside the southern walls of Jerusalem. It was a place where the fires to the pagan god Moloch were sanctified (Jeremiah 32:35; Ezekiel 20:31). It was also called Tophet.

“For Tophet is ordained of old, yea, for the king [the evil king] it is prepared; he has made it deep and large; the pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone, does kindle it” (Isaiah 30:33).

It is the prison where some “high ones” [angels] and kings on earth will be incarcerated. Within the stretch of its confines is a very deep pit (a bottomless pit) and it is the place of containment for evil angels and finally for Satan during the Millennium (Revelation 20:1–3). **The Valley of Hinnom commenced at Jerusalem and journeyed eastwards at a precipitous rate until it emptied into the northern parts of the Dead Sea. The watercourse is known to this very day as the Wady en-Nar (Arabic: The Streambed of Fire). This Valley of Hinnom (that is, the Gehenna mentioned by Christ) was about fifteen miles long. It plummeted into the Dead Sea (the Lake of the Fire). This means that Gehenna and the Lake of the Fire were typically connected.**

The ceremony of the Scapegoat (Azazel) on the Day of Atonement was a part of this typical story (Leviticus chapter 16). Two goats were selected. One was to be sacrificed in Jerusalem, while the other was to be taken by an able bodied man into the wilderness east of Jerusalem. Indeed, the Scapegoat was to be taken down the Valley of Hinnom to a place about three miles east and south of Jerusalem called Beth Chaduda where the goat was allowed to go over a very deep cliff (like an abyss) so that he would never come in contact with civilization again (Yoma 67b; Targum Jerusalem Leviticus 14:10). This part of the wilderness was where the demons were supposed to be. It was near this region where Christ was tempted of the Devil (Matthew 4:1–11). The place was a part of the drainage system of the Wady en-Nar—the extension of Gehenna, the Streambed of Fire. From this area, the Streambed of Fire ran directly eastwards into the Dead Sea (the Lake of the Fire). This region between Beth Chaduda and the Dead Sea contained the abyss mentioned in the Book of Revelation. It will be a place of temporary confinement of Satan and his angelic powers for the Millennium.

“And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit [the abyss] and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon [just like the “fit man” of Leviticus 16:21 led the Scapegoat], that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut him up [away from mankind and civilization], and set a seal on him that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be fulfilled: after that he must be loosed a little season” (Revelation 20:1–3).

The place that the Azazel Goat (the Scapegoat) was taken in the ritual of the Day of Atonement, is where Satan will be kept for the Millennium. Again, it is also the place in the wilderness where Christ defeated Satan during his forty days of temptation.”¹⁰ [emphasis mine]

¹⁰ <https://thecenacle.weebly.com/where-is-hell.html>

Since writing this article, it was brought to my attention that Ernest Martin wrote something similar, and I wonder if his ideas were influential for the writer of the article at The Cenacle? Martin’s article may be viewed at <http://www.askelm.com/prophecy/p100201.htm>

The above seems awfully like a volcano.

At this juncture it is important to point out that volcanoes are probably implied more often in the Scriptures than we think.

Some time ago I ran across an article in a theological journal describing Psalm 97 in this way which I refer to in the section 'The Millennial Lake of Fire and Volcanic Activity.' Over time I thought that this warranted further research and examination and additional information has been uncovered to support this view.

In fact, there is much evidence for volcanic area of the Dead Sea right into the Sinai. Note the following articles (you can find more detailed information in the 'References & Further Reading' section

- "Beneath the Dead Sea, Scientists Are Drilling for Natural History," *New York Times* (17 December 2010) by Isabel Kershner
- "The Physical History of the Dead Sea Valley," by E W Masterman (1905) *The Biblical World*, vol 25, no 4: 249-57
- "Petrogenesis of the Largest Intraplate Volcanic Field on the Arabian Plate (Jordan): a Mixed Lithosphere–Asthenosphere Source Activated by Lithospheric Extension" by J E Shaw (et alk), *Journal of Petrology*, Volume 44, Issue 9, 1 September 2003: 1657–79
- "Sodom, Gomorrah, and the Seismic History of the Dead Sea: Support for Biblical History – Yes! Support for a Young Earth – No! The Origins of the Dead Sea, Part VI," by Natural Historian in *TheNaturalHistorian* website, 24 September 2014
- *Dead Sea Transform Fault Systems* (chapter: "The Dead Sea transform and the volcanism in northwestern Arabia") Editors: Y Weinstein, Yishai & Z Garfunkel (2014).

The abstract states:

"Abstract

Volcanism is common along the northern segments of the Dead Sea Transform (DST). In this paper we review its distribution and composition and conclude that this tectono-magmatic association has mainly to do with the magma migration toward the surface and less with magma generation, namely: some volcanic activity concentrated along the DST due to better magma channeling and not due to an enhanced mantle partial melting along this lineament. The volcanism along the DST is clearly part of the western Arabia magmatism, and the early phases of this volcanism probably have to do with Red Sea-related extension during the Early to Middle Miocene. Nevertheless, the DST does play a role in the emplacement of lithospheric mantle domains with different compositions next to each other, which is reflected in the derived lavas."

Although it is called the Dead Sea, it is also known as the Salt Sea as nothing can live there. To the Arabs it is the "Sea of Death" (*al-Bahr al-Mayyitt* or *Buhayrat Lut* - the "Sea of Lot").¹¹

¹¹ "In our passage the fiery lake is said to burn with sulfur, a yellow substance that burns readily in the air. **It is found in a natural state in volcanic areas such as the valley of the Dead Sea** (cf. Gen 19:24; Ezek 38:23). A lake of burning sulfur would not only be intensely hot, but malodorous and fetid as well. It is an appropriate place for all that is sinful and wicked

For this is where the five cities of the plain were once located - Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zoboim and Zoar (Gen 14:2). Was this due to God later activating volcanic activity to reign down fire and brimstone during the time of Lot (Gen 19:24) as a type of the Day of the Lord and Lake of Fire?

The Lake of Fire in the Last Days

It is self-evident that this fire is re-ignited (possibly due to the volcanic activity during the Day of the Lord) at the commencement of the Millennial reign of the Messiah for that is where the Beast and False Prophet are cast:

“And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into **the lake of fire that burns with sulfur**.

And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.” (Rev 19:20-21. See 20:10, 14-15; 21:8)

“As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was **fiery flames**; its wheels were burning fire.

A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.

“I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and **given over to be burned with fire.**” (Dan 7:9-11)¹²

This stream of fire issuing forth may be what ignites or re-ignites the lake of fire mentioned in Revelation. It may also be the same fire mentioned in Rev 18:2, 8

As we have seen, the King of Assyria suffers a similar fate, indicating that he, as an end-time type, may be the Beast or one of his senior henchmen.

For some reason the rest of the armies of the Beast are slain but, it seems, not cremated in the lake of fire. Presumably this is because they will be resurrected in the Second Resurrection to learn God’s way given their blindness. It seems that may not be the case for the Beast and False Prophet who are deemed ‘too far gone’ – too evil – to be able to be worked with.

Isaiah 14:20 (where the King of Babylon is a type of the Beast) is said to be slain but not buried, indicating that cremation is carried out. Indeed, throughout Scripture the wicked are normally cremated and the righteous buried.¹³

Similarly, the King of Tyre pictures the Beast (as well as Satan) and is cremated – but only after his corpse is displayed to gentile leaders as a warning (Ezek 28:17-18)

in the world.” (R Mounce, *The Book of Revelation, New International Commentary on the New Testament* (revised), p. 359) [emphasis mine]

¹² D L Smith-Christopher, *Daniel, New Interpreter’s Bible*, p. 103.

¹³ See Geisler, NL & Potter, DE (1998) “From Ashes to Ashes: Is Burial the only Christian option?” *Christian Research Journal*, volume 21, number 1; Decker, RJ (2005) “Is it Better to Bury or to Burn? Is Cremation a Christian Option?” paper presented to the Faculty Forum, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA.

Notice what happens with rebellious rulers

"Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth.
Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, **and you perish in the way**, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." (Ps 2:10-12)

"But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and **slaughter them before me.**" (Luke 19:27)

Presumably rebels and the unrepentant are slain quickly after their judgment and their dead bodies cremated soon thereafter in the fire. Apparently, they are not thrown into it alive - such is the mercy of God.

Notice what Commentaries reveal:

"bring hither, &c.—(Compare 1Sa 15:32, 33). Referring to the awful destruction of Jerusalem, but pointing to the final destruction of all that are found in open rebellion against Christ."¹⁴

"19:27 Those my enemies. This portrays the fate, not of church members, but of those who would not have the Lord reign over them. It embraces all the impenitent. Compare Mt 13:49; 21:44; 25:30; 2Th 1:8-10."¹⁵

"Verse 27. - But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me. An obvious reference to the Lord's dealings with the chosen people, and an unmistakable reference to the awful ruin and disaster which was so soon to overwhelm the city and temple and the whole nationality.

But those mine enemies,.... Meaning particularly the Jews, who were enemies to the person of Christ, and hated and rejected him, as the King Messiah; and rebelled against him, and would not submit to his government; and were enemies to his people, and were exceeding mad against them, and persecuted them; and to his Gospel, and the distinguishing truths of it, and to his ordinances, which they rejected against themselves:

which would not that I should reign over them; see Luke 19:14

bring hither, and slay them before me; which had its accomplishment in the destruction of Jerusalem, when multitudes of them were slain with the sword, both with their own, and with their enemies"¹⁶ [as a type of the dealings with rebels at and during His future reign, one might add]

The Millennial Lake of Fire and Volcanic Activity

But the lake of fire burns continuously through the Millennium because it is where Satan is cast after that period:

"and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the **lake of fire and sulfur** where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." (Rev 20:10)

¹⁴ Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary

¹⁵ People's New Testament

¹⁶ Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into **the eternal fire** prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41)

Note how sulfur is mentioned again due to its association with judgment which is found in a number of Scriptures such as: Gen 19:24; Luke 17:29; Rev 9:17; 14:10.

Sulfur (also known as brimstone) is a yellow stone that, when burnt, gives off a toxic odour. The stone melts and becomes a sort of liquid fire. This type of rock often accumulates in areas of high volcanic activity.

The chief aspects of this day, as we can see from the above, is that it entails the fierce wrath of God Almighty upon the nations and the earth itself.

But let us take a closer look for Psalm 97 portrays volcanic activity as does the book of Revelation:

"The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad *thereof*."

This describes that the Messiah now reigns during the Millennium, however

"Clouds and darkness *are* round about him: righteousness and judgment *are* the habitation of his throne."

This portrays the clouds that are exuded by volcanoes which shuts out the sunlight.

"A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about."

Clearly the above has reference to volcanic explosions that rain down fire, rocks and ash for miles around.

"His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled."

If you view documentaries on volcanoes you will see how they generate awesome lightnings. The land trembling – earthquakes – are also associated with volcanoes.

"The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth." (Ps 97:1-5) [cp Mic 1:4; Ex 19:16; Deut 4:11]¹⁷

Then we have enormous lava flows that destroy all in their paths – as if they were melting the land and vegetation as it rolls on relentlessly. Other Scriptures that seemingly also portray volcanoes are Ex 19:16-19; Deut 5:22. Compare Ex 19:16-19 with IThess 4:16.¹⁸

The Day of the Lord is clearly characterized by a pouring out of divine wrath on God's enemies and sinners. In some prophecies the Day of the Lord is poured upon individual nations (eg Edom – Is 34:8; Philistines – Jer 47:4; Egypt – Jer 46:8-10; Ezek 30:3; or even upon the entire world – Is 13:10-13; Ob 15).¹⁹

¹⁷ The above may be metaphorical, but many metaphors are based on real events or places.

¹⁸ In reference to Dan 7:10 Gleason noted that "There is something almost lavalike in the way a "river of fire" (v. 10) flows from his throne – a river of vast destructive power ..." (*Daniel, Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 89)

¹⁹ Note also the following references in Isaiah which may also refer to God's wrath in the form of volcanoes: 1:7, 9; 4:2; 5:25; 6:4; 8:6; 10:26, 34; 15:2-3 5-9; 21:1; 23:1-11; 23:13-14; 24:18-20; 41:1, 5.

Perhaps we could speculate that the lake of fire may be a volcano given all that we have read thus far?

In any case, because the fire will burn brightly during the Millennium it may be assumed that is to be a warning to would be rebels – many of them would be cremated therein. Evidently the fire will be burning during the Millennium both as a warning and as a place that the corpses of rebels will be cast.

Then a few years later, sometime during the early part of the Millennium, the Almighty unleashes terror upon certain unsubmitive nations:

“I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Lord GOD. Every man's sword will be against his brother.

With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him, and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples who are with him torrential rains and hailstones, **fire and sulfur**.

So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.” (Ezek 38:21-23)

“On that day I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel, the Valley of the Travelers, east of the sea. It will block the travelers, for there Gog and all his multitude will be buried. It will be called the Valley of Hamon-gog.

For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land.

All the people of the land will bury them, and it will bring them renown on the day that I show my glory, declares the Lord GOD.

They will set apart men to travel through the land regularly and bury those travelers remaining on the face of the land, so as to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make their search.

And when these travel through the land and anyone sees a human bone, then he shall set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon-gog.

(Hamonah is also the name of the city.) Thus shall they cleanse the land.

“As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: Speak to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field, 'Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood.

You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth— of rams, of lambs, and of he-goats, of bulls, all of them fat beasts of Bashan.

And you shall eat fat till you are filled, and drink blood till you are drunk, at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you.

And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors,' declares the Lord GOD.” (Ezek 39:11-20)



What is interesting is that these dead bodies are not thrown into the fiery lake – instead many are buried and others are gorged upon by wildlife.

This could indicate that due to their spiritual blindness and also because it is God Himself Whom had a hand in drawing their attack upon the land of Israel (Ezek 38:4), their fate is not the fire but instead temporary death followed by resurrection in the Great White Throne Judgment.

Who will be cast into the fire?

Following are a number of Scriptures which provide some details about who will not be judged worthy of the Kingdom of God:

“The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom [His spiritual Kingdom today is the Church and after His return will be those under His Millennial reign] **all causes of sin and all law-breakers**, and **throw them into the fiery furnace**. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matt 13:41-43)

“Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but **woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!**

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

And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to **be thrown into the hell of fire.**” (Matt 18:7-9)

“But as for the **cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars [cp Prov 21:6]**, their portion will be in **the lake that burns with fire and sulfur**, which is the second death.

But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.” (Rev 21:26-27)

“Outside [ie left out of the Kingdom and now ashes or atoms] are **the dogs [homosexuals] and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.**” (Rev 22:15)

When we die we end up either in the grave (Ps 55:15; 139:8; Prov 9:18) or cremated. But the grave is not the eternal death – it is temporary (Hos 13:14); it is a place of bodily corruption, void of works and is rest for the body (Job 17:13-16); there is no thanks in the grave (Ps 6:5) and no praise (Is 38:18) because there is utter silence there (Ps 31:17); and there is no wisdom, knowledge or work there (Eccl 9:10).

Yet the grave itself will be destroyed (Hos 13:14; Rev 20:14) as will the unrepentant wicked (Rev 20:15).

“God shall arise, his enemies shall be scattered; and those who hate him shall flee before him!

As smoke is driven away, so you shall drive them away; **as wax melts before fire, so the wicked shall perish** before God!

But the righteous shall be glad; they shall exult before.” (Ps 68:1-3)

Concluding Remarks

After the return of Christ, the Messiah, to restore God's Government on earth, the lake of fire or lake of burning sulfur will be ignited which is probably due to Dead Sea volcanic activity. The Dead Sea – or most of it – will however be made alive during that period (Ezek 47:7-12). So, it seems that the lake of fire will be close to or adjacent to the sea with life in it – this will demonstrate great symbolism with its joint warning and hope side-by-side. Or the Dead Sea will be partitioned between the two.

As we have seen, the first to be thrown into it are the Beast and False Prophet – leaders of the powers that had enslaved the House of Israel (Rev 19:20).

Evidently the fire will be burning during the Millennium both as a warning and as a place that the corpses of rebels will be cast.

After the Millennium, Satan will also be cast into this fire (Rev 20:10) as will the demons who will join him in that fate (Matt 25:41).

Now, for the really sad part: the wicked, unrepentant – the rebels – they will be judged, executed and cast into the fire. This will be their eternal end from which there will be no revival. It is eternal annihilation (Mark 9:43, 48).

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" (Matt 25:41)

The Biblical concept is this: those thrown into this fire are separated from their loving Father for eternity.

The use of fire historically and symbolically denotes holy revenge and cleansing from His presence all uncleanness (Heb 10:30-31. Cp Rev 14:9-12). For his wrath is unquenchable.



Let us all fear the fate of the Lake of Fire and do what is right, with the assistance of God's spirit, to enter into eternal life.

"For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,

and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.

But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its **end is to be burned.**" (Heb 6:8)²⁰

²⁰ We must believe and act on our belief (John 3:18; Heb 2:2). Bruce explains: "The man who deprecates Christ, or thinks him unworthy of his allegiance, passes judgment on himself, not on Christ. He does not need to wait until the day of judgment; the verdict on him has been pronounced already. There will indeed be a final day of judgment (John 5:26-29), but that day will serve only to confirm the judgment already passed ... there is no alternative but self-incurred judgment" (*The Gospel & Epistles of John*, p. 91)

Appendix One

The Second Death. Why Bother?

Why a second death when the dead are already dead?

By David Sandland

5 September 2005, *United News*

Many have wondered why God would go to all the bother to resurrect those who have knowingly rejected Him—those who willingly turned their back on the opportunity for salvation—simply to then cast them into the lake of fire, effectively putting them to what the Bible calls “a second death.”

To some that brief, and often misunderstood, part in the overall plan of God borders on the absurd and morbid—and totally unnecessary. They are dead. Why not simply leave them dead and buried?

After the Millennium and the second resurrection, a third resurrection takes place, otherwise known as the “second death.” This will be a resurrection for all those who knowingly and willingly reject the calling of God, who turn their backs on salvation and the opportunity of sonship in the very family of God. Relevant scriptures are Revelation 2:11; 20:14-15; 21:8; and Hebrews 10:26-27.

The stubbornly, knowingly rebellious will then face the final lake of fire and total, final and complete death.

But, again, why bother? Those being raised in this third and final resurrection are already dead. Why bring them back to life to almost immediately consign them to death?

Actually there are many reasons.

Consider the *dramatic impact of example*. Not on those being resurrected to face their final death, but on those now resurrected into God's family. The Millennium is now passed. The Last Great Day is now history. The melting of all things physical is close to reality (2 Peter 3:10-12). The final closure on human life now approaches.

And the final lesson from human existence is now etched on the spiritual minds of God's children. It is the lesson that sin and rejection of God and His way of life and laws simply will not be tolerated. We will witness that final act—the second death—being sentenced on the incorrigibly wicked. It is a lesson that will last us for all eternity.

It is comparable to the lesson of capital punishment in the Old Testament. How many such sentences would be needed, if people knew that swift, severe and just punishment would be administered? Ecclesiastes 8:11 is an excellent scripture to consider. When judgment is known and witnessed, then obedience is reinforced.

As those in God's family leave behind all things physical, we will have burnt into our consciousness and memory the lesson that sin simply does not pay. It is truly an example that will never leave us.

A second principle is *responsibility and accountability*. Those being brought back to life in this third resurrection need to face the consequences of their choices to reject the God of creation and His offer of eternal life as a very son in His family.

Consider that many of the knowingly wicked prospered during their former physical lives. Compare Ecclesiastes 7:15; 8:14; Psalms 73:12; Job 21:7-15; and Jeremiah 12:1-2. Many prophets and saints of old wondered why the wicked prospered in spite of their rejection of God. Some blatantly, and knowingly, scorned and mocked God. And yet they still prospered.

A day *must* come when they learn that a penalty for rejection of God is very real—that a judgment awaits their choice.

There will be a final accounting of their decision to knowingly reject God.

An interesting comparison is the story, or parable, of Lazarus and the rich man found in Luke 16:19-26. We can assume that the rich man knowingly rejected God, in comparison to Lazarus' faith and trust in spite of his poverty and suffering.

In this story, the rich man now faces his final fate, when it will be too late for repentance.

Moving on to other considerations, Matthew 10:28 is indeed interesting. In that verse, we have a warning that God can destroy *both* “soul and body.” In other words, all that is man.

Compare Psalms 109:14-15 and Isaiah 26:14. God will, one day, *cut off the very memory* of the incorrigibly wicked at the third resurrection, or in the second death. The Hebrew word translated as memory is *zeker*, which alludes to the scent, or record of a person.

This is almost comparable to the double delete facility on many computer systems. This will be a final, total and complete wiping out of the very record, or scent, of a person. It is a final "blotting out" of that record from the very Book of Life. Compare Revelation 3:5; Exodus 32:33; and Deuteronomy 9:14. And the word *blot* comes from the Hebrew *machah*, to rub out, to erase, to utterly wipe out (see *Strong's Concordance* Hebrew #4229).

A fearful event takes place at the second death—the final erasure of a person's existence.

In closing, consider Galatians 6:4-8. God will not be mocked. An accounting will come for knowing and willing rebellion. "For whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."

That final reaping for the wicked will take place in this final resurrection to condemnation and punishment, as explained in John 5:27-29 and even John 3:16.

In summary, this second death is a necessary, logical and sound end to the plan of God for mankind. It is:

A time to leave a vivid example of the result of rebellion and sin.

A time for accountability and responsibility.

A time for final judgment and condemnation.

A time for final erasure—blotting out—of the unrepentant.

A time for closure on all things physical.

A time, then, when the spiritual family of God can move forward, without any record, or "scent," of human existence, sin and rebellion.

The first time this concept is introduced is found in Deuteronomy 4:24: "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God." Here, the idea of "consuming fire" stands alongside God's jealousy. The context of the chapter deals with God's command not to worship other gods. Only the Lord was to be worshiped. He would not tolerate worship of others; He was a "consuming fire" in the sense that He desired all of the worship of the Israelites.

Deuteronomy 9:3 also refers to the Lord as a "consuming fire." In this context, God would serve as a consuming fire to destroy Israel's enemies. The idea is that of a wildfire that would destroy those who opposed God's people.

Isaiah 33:14 would later refer to the "consuming fire" of God's wrath in judgment. In this case, the term was not mentioned with God as a consuming fire, but rather spoke of His actions to judge sin. Isaiah 30:27 adds, "his tongue is like a devouring fire," another reference to judgment.

In the New Testament, Hebrews 12:28-29 provides a perspective on this issue as well: "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire." This passage refers to God's "consuming fire" as a reason for reverent worship. Believers will receive an eternal kingdom and are to offer devoted worship.

Throughout Scripture, fire also often holds the general idea of purifying or of judgment at various times. Jesus even used the idea of "eternal fire" on two occasions in stories related to judgment upon unbelievers (Matthew 18:8; Matthew 25:41). The Lord also rained down fire from the sky in judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24). Fire served as part of offering the sacrifices of the Old Testament. Moses encountered God in a burning bush consumed by fire (Exodus 3). Fire came as a judgment upon the Egyptians (Exodus 9:23-24), yet the Lord also led the people of Israel by fire at night in the wilderness (Exodus 13:22).

[emphasis mine]

Appendix Two

Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology

Fire

One of the most arresting and suggestive metaphors in the Bible is that of fire, a phenomenon common to all cultures ancient and modern and one that lends itself to a variety of imagery. The most prevalent term for fire in the Hebrew Bible is *es* [vea]. The Greek word *phos* [fw''], also normally rendered "light, " occurs a couple times in the New Testament as "fire" (Mark 14:54 ; Luke 22:56). The usual word for fire in the New Testament is *pur* [pu'r], the regular Greek translation of Hebrew *es* [vea] in the Septuagint.

As a commonplace in ancient Israel, fire obviously is to be taken literally in most of the several hundred references to it in the Bible. Its figurative or theological attestations are also numerous, however, generally relating to some manifestation of God's being or action.

Fire, as theophany of existence, communicates, first of all, the very presence of God. This is especially evident in the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses (Exod 3:2-6). Here fire is a manifestation of God himself, for Moses turned away from the sight "because he was afraid to look at God" (v. 6). Similar to this is Yahweh's descent upon Mount Sinai "in fire" (Exod 19:18 ; cf. Deuteronomy 4:11-12 Deuteronomy 4:15 Deuteronomy 4:33 Deuteronomy 4:36). In the New Testament Paul describes the second coming of Christ as "in blazing fire" (2 Th 1:7), an appearance that carries overtones of judgment as well as mere presence. Also akin to Old Testament imagery is John's vision of Jesus with eyes "like blazing fire" (Rev 1:14 ; 2:18 ; 19:12), again in judgment contexts.

It is not always possible to distinguish the presence of God from his glory for, indeed, glory is frequently a figure itself for divine presence. However, a number of passages focus on fire as synonymous with or in association with God's glory. For example, to the Israelites at Sinai "the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire" (Exod 24:17 ; cf. Leviticus 9:23 Leviticus 9:24 ; Deut 5:24). In visions of God in his glory in both Old and New Testaments, fire is a regular phenomenon.

A special use of fire imagery in the New Testament is that connected with baptism with fire. John the Baptist predicted that Jesus would baptize "with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Matt 3:11 ; cf. Luke 3:16), a promise that was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Then "tongues of fire" rested upon those gathered in the upper room with the result that they "were filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:3-4). The fire here is a manifestation of God, in the case of the Third Person of the Godhead, a theological conception unknown to the Old Testament.

Fire as theophany of action reveals God at work in a number of ways. One of the earliest and clearest of these ways is his appearance in a pillar of fire that led the people of Israel out of Egypt and through the Sinai deserts. Another instance of God's use of fire as an active manifestation of his presence is his sending fire from heaven to consume sacrifices offered up to him on special and unusual occasions. The first of these inaugurated Aaron's ministry as priest. Having blessed the people, Moses and Aaron witnessed the appearance of the glory of the Lord, a striking manifestation of which was fire that "came out from the presence of the Lord" to consume the sacrifices already placed on the altar (Lev 9:23-24). Other examples of fire as the expression of God's acceptance of offerings are those of Gideon (Judges 6:19-24) and of the father and mother of Samson (Judges 13:15-20). **In both cases Yahweh is present in the person of the angel who touches the altar, causing the sacrifices to erupt in flame.**

Because of fire's heat and destructive capacity, it frequently appears in the Bible as a symbol of God's anger and of the judgment and destruction that sometimes are extensions of that anger. The psalmist employs fire as a simile for divine displeasure when he asks the Lord, "How long will your wrath burn like fire?" (Psalm 89:46) Isaiah, referring to God's coming in judgment, sees him "coming with fire" and bringing down his rebuke "with flames of fire" (66:15). Jeremiah says in reference to the destruction of Jerusalem that Yahweh "poured out his wrath like fire" (Lam 2:4). Ezekiel uses the term "fiery anger" to speak of God's outpoured judgment, especially when speaking of the impending

Babylonian conquest (21:31 ; 22:31). This is also the language by which he describes the overthrow of Gog in the end times. In his "zeal and fiery wrath" he will bring about massive calamity (38:19).

In other passages, the anger of God is not only metaphorically represented by fire, but fire becomes a literal vehicle of his wrath. At Taberah in the Sinai desert Yahweh's "anger was aroused" and "fire from the Lord burned among" the people (Num 11:1). And the rebellion of Korah and his followers also resulted in many of them perishing by fire, a manifestation of God's hot anger (Num 16:35 ; 26:10 ; Lev 10:2). A most impressive display of fire as an instrument of judgment is the destruction of the messengers of Ahaziah of Israel who attempted to seize Elijah the prophet only to be struck with fire "from heaven" (2 Kings 1:10 2 Kings 1:12 2 Kings 1:14). This is probably an example of lightning, which otherwise is clearly a means of inflicting divine judgment and destruction (cf. Exod 9:23-24 ; Job 1:16 ; Psalm 18:13-14).

The same imagery of fire as a sign of God's anger and judgment continues in the New Testament. James and John asked Jesus whether or not they should invoke fire from heaven in order to destroy the Samaritans (Luke 9:54). Paul speaks of fire as a purifying agent capable of testing the quality of one's life and works (1 Cor 3:13). Most commonly, fire is associated with the judgment of hell (Matt 3:12 ; 5:22 ; 18:8-9 ; Mark 9:43 Mark 9:48 ; Luke 3:17 ; 16:24 ; James 3:6 ; Jude 7 ; Rev 20:14-15), or with the destruction of the old heavens and earth in preparation for the new (2 Peter 3:10 2 Peter 3:12).

[emphasis mine]

Appendix Three

Shedding Light on the Outer Darkness: A Fresh Look at The Language of Hell

By Kim Papaioannou
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“Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ ” (Matt. 22:13).¹

The topic of hell has held a strange fascination for Christians through the centuries. And while one hears less about it today, all ecclesial bodies attempt to give some answer to the tantalizing question of what will happen to the wicked on the day of judgment. The majority view has been that hell consists of everlasting, excruciating torment.² Contrary to this, a small but vocal minority has held that such a teaching is incompatible with the loving and just character of God.³ Instead, they hold that judgment will result in the destruction of sin and sinners and prepare the way for the new heaven and new earth, where there will be no more pain, suffering, or death of any kind.

There are various judgment motifs and each is important in its own respect. One that has played a key role has been the “ ‘outer darkness’ ” where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The outer darkness appears three times (Matt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30) and is assumed twice more (Matt. 24:51; Luke 13:28). The “ ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth’ ” appears in the above five outer darkness texts and twice on its own (Matt. 13:42, 50). These phrases have often been understood as reflecting the horrors of hell; the outer darkness—its dark and gloomy nature—with the sorrow and pain of its torments.⁴ But are such views correct?

This short study will explore these terms in their context. Properly understood, they point away from the supposed torments of hell into other more reasonable, but equally sobering, realities.

The outer darkness

We will first look at the outer darkness. In Matthew 22:13, the phrase concludes the parable of the wedding garment. A king prepares a banquet for his son's wedding. When the invitees fail to appear, the king sends his servants to the " 'highways' " (v. 9) to gather people from all walks of life. Once the hall is filled, the king enters to inspect the guests and finds one not properly attired with a wedding garment. The king questions him and the man can offer no explanation. Offended, the king orders the man be tied and thrown to the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In Matthew 25:30, the phrase concludes the parable of the talents. A rich man goes on a long journey and entrusts three of his servants with five, two, and one talents respectively, admonishing them to use them wisely until he returns. The first two work diligently and double their talents. But the third hides his talent and remains inactive. Upon his return, the rich man calls the three to account. The first two give their report, are congratulated, and told to " 'enter into the joy' " of the master (vv. 21, 23). The third offers excuses and attempts to blame the master for his inaction. However, he traps himself by his words and is finally declared unworthy. The master then orders him thrown to the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In Matthew 8:12, the phrase appears in the context of the healing of a centurion's servant. Jesus commends the faith of the centurion and asserts that many Gentiles will come into the kingdom and dine with the patriarchs, while those who were originally called, which have not responded, will be thrown to the outer darkness.

In Matthew 24:51, the outer darkness is not specifically mentioned but implied through the use of the Greek locative adverb *ekai* ("there").⁵ Matthew 24:51 concludes the parable of the evil servant. A master goes away and appoints a servant to oversee his household. A wise servant will look well after the master's household. If he does evil, the master will return at a moment the servant does not expect. The master will then " 'cut him in two' " (v. 51) and throw him where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Lastly, Luke 13:28 is part of the parable of the narrow gate through which all true disciples should seek to enter the kingdom and feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those who choose not to enter will be left outside where *ekai* ("there") is weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So what is this mysterious outer darkness? A place of torment? A description of hell?

All five texts discussed above appear in the context of a banquet, and this is important to note. In Matthew 8:11, 12 and Luke 13:28, the banquet consists of the heavenly feast where Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are present. That a feast is in view is evidenced by the word *anaklithesontai* (lit. "recline"—banqueting meals in the ancient world were taken while reclining)⁶ in Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:29, and by the mention of the *oikodespotés* in Luke 13:25, the master of the house who closes the door so that no more guests may enter.⁷ In Matthew 22:13, a banquet is clearly stated because the whole parable of the wedding garment takes place in the context of a wedding feast. In Matthew 25:30, in the parable of the talents, a banquet is not mentioned specifically but is assumed. The rich man returns from his lengthy travels, calls his servants to account, and invites the faithful two to "enter into the joy" of the master, clearly a celebration for his return.⁸ And in Matthew 24:46–51, in the parable of the evil servant, again we have a master returning from a long trip, whereby a joyous celebration for his return would be the norm.

Banquets in ancient times, just like today, usually took place in the evening. At a time when there were few lights to lighten a dark night, there was an obvious contrast between a lighted banqueting hall and the darkness outside. The term *outer darkness*, therefore, is descriptive; in other words, "the darkness that is outside (the banqueting hall)." This outer darkness does not describe hell but the conditions outside the banqueting hall and is not language of torment but language of exclusion.

Weeping and gnashing of teeth

Those who find themselves outside the banqueting hall will experience weeping and gnashing of teeth. Is this a description of torment? Or is something else in view?

The Greek for “weeping,” *klauthmos*, can refer to a range of emotions like joy (LXX Gen. 45:2; 46:29), eager anticipation (LXX Jer. 31:9), but mostly sorrow (LXX Judg. 21:2; 2 Sam. 13:36; Ezra 3:13; Isa. 65:19). Nowhere is it used in relation to torments of any kind. The Greek for “gnashing of teeth,” *brugmos t n odont n*, consistently denotes anger (Acts 7:54; LXX Job 16:9; Pss. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10; Prov. 19:12), never the pain of torment.

That the people excluded from a banquet could experience both of these emotions is understandable. Sorrow is a natural reaction when a person realizes that something good has been lost. Anger is also understandable. The context of the five passages discussed above evidences a pattern, namely, disaffection with the master. In the parable of the talents, the servant who refused to make use of his talent was already negatively predisposed towards his master. When questioned why he did not use his talent, he replied, “ “I knew you to be a hard man” ” (Matt. 25:24). Not surprisingly, such negative feelings turn to anger when he sees the two worthy servants welcomed into the banquet while he is thrown out.

In the heavenly banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the ones who are welcomed are the Gentiles from the far corners of the earth (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:29). The ones excluded are Jews who have failed to believe in Jesus. They were the natural heirs of the kingdom, the “ ‘sons of the kingdom’ ” (Matt. 8:12); but much to their chagrin, they find themselves excluded. Indeed, in Luke 13:24, they seek to enter the banquet, consciously, maybe forcefully.⁹ Clearly, they are not happy with the master’s decision to exclude them.

In Matthew 22:13 (the parable of the wedding garment), the anger of the man excluded is again easy to understand. Some scholars suggest it was customary for a wedding host to oversee that guests had adequate attire.¹⁰ That the man chooses not to avail himself of such service indicates that he considers his own clothes of better quality. When the king confronts him and orders him to be thrown outside, the man naturally feels angry that the king has failed to appreciate the quality and beauty of his garments.

And in Matthew 24:45–51, the parable of the evil servant, the servant is clearly unhappy because the master has arrived unannounced and caught him mistreating his fellow servants and wasting possessions. Indeed, the rationale behind the servant’s prodigal lifestyle was that the “ ‘master is delaying his coming’ ” (v. 48). The sudden arrival of the master, therefore, causes intense anxiety and anger in the evil servant.

In all of the above instances, the anger is directed at the master, a symbol of God. Those who are left outside feel they should be inside and therefore are not happy with the verdict. They are angry.

The picture appears coherent enough: a heavenly banquet, unworthy individuals left outside experiencing weeping (sorrow) and gnashing of teeth (anger) because of their exclusion. Nothing is said about hell or torments.

Two final texts

There are two final texts that mention weeping and gnashing of teeth but no suggestion of a banquet or an outer darkness. The first is Matthew 13:42 at the conclusion of the parable of the wheat and the tares. A field is planted with good seed, but, during the night, an enemy plants tares. The owner allows the two to grow side by side, but at the harvest he commands his servants to gather the wheat into storerooms and burn the tares. Jesus explains that this parable is about the kingdom of God, whereby the good seed represents the saints to be gathered into the kingdom, while the tares represent the wicked. They, together with everything that offends (v. 41), will be cast into the furnace of fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (v. 42).

Could these two references be descriptions of the torments of hell? Four facts suggest no. First, the phrase “ ‘cast them into the furnace of fire’ ” (Matt. 13:50) is a quotation from Daniel 3:6 and the story of the three Hebrew young men. The purpose of the furnace there was not to torment, but rather, to destroy. Second, in the parables of the net and the wheat and tares, the wicked are compared to bad fish and tares, which are burned not out of vengeance or for torment, but because they are no good. Third, in the parable of the wheat and tares, “ ‘all things that offend’ ” (v. 41), animate and inanimate, are thrown into the fire.¹¹ Will the fire torment these forever? No, it will destroy them. Fourth, as a general rule of exegesis, words and motifs should be understood in line with their primary meaning unless strong evidence suggests otherwise. As such, since weeping and gnashing of teeth nowhere else refer to torment, they should likewise not be understood as referring to torment here. The other is Matthew 13:50, at the conclusion of the parable of the net. Just like fishermen separate the good fish from the bad, likewise on the day of judgment the angels will remove the wicked from the midst of the saints and cast them into the furnace of fire where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Exegetical interrelation suggests that the weeping and gnashing of teeth in Matthew 13:42 and 50 should be understood in the same way as in Matthew 8:12, 22:13, 24:51, 25:30, and Luke 13:28 as referring respectively to the feelings of sadness and anger that the wicked experience when they discover they are excluded from the kingdom.

Synthesis

The picture is very consistent. The term *outer darkness* always appears in the context of a banquet, mostly in parables, and describes the literal evening darkness outside the banqueting hall. Those who are not in the banquet hall are outside in the dark night. The word *weeping* defines the feelings of sorrow and loss experienced by those who are excluded from the banquet. The *gnashing of teeth* represents their anger. They believe they should be in but find themselves outside.

The day of judgment will not be pleasant. For God, it will be a day when He will do a “strange” work (Isa. 28:21, KJV) in the destruction of sin and sinners. For sinners, it will be a fearsome day, for it is indeed a “fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31). But whatever temporary physical suffering that day brings, in using the language of the outer darkness and the weeping and gnashing of teeth, Jesus opts to focus on other realities—not on the physical pain, but the immensity and sadness of the loss. The different banquets in question are all symbolic of the kingdom of God. To be left in the darkness outside means to be left outside the kingdom.

There is a sense of tragedy in all of these stories. All who find themselves excluded could and should have been in the kingdom. The man without the wedding garment was already there, all he had to do was dress appropriately. The servant with the single talent was not even required to work. All he had to do was put the talent in the bank to gain interest. The reason he is left outside does not represent a lack of ability but pure disinterest; he simply could not bother to do good. And the listeners of Jesus, who should be in the banquet with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but find themselves excluded, really were the ones who should have been there. They received the invitation first and are called “sons of the kingdom.” All they had to do was exemplify simple faith in Jesus, like the faith of the centurion. But instead, they rejected Him.

A certain sense of tragedy exists because nobody needed to be left outside. Everybody could have been in if only they had bothered to enter.

Jesus died for all and wants all to be in His kingdom. He has sent multiple summons and continues to do so. But in a sad repetition of the story, people often cannot be bothered. When the door closes, those who find themselves outside may weep and gnash their teeth, but it will be too late.

So is the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth a description of the supposed torments of hell? No. The emphasis is rather on the sadness of unnecessary loss. The greatest tragedy in the history of this world is that people who should be in the kingdom will find themselves outside. As such, the phrase is, above all, a summons to heed the call of salvation—today.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.

² E.g., Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 1995); Paul Helm, *The Last Things: Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989); John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Edinburgh, UK: Evangelical Press, 1993); Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994); Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984).

³ E.g., LeRoy E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1965); Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes: The Biblical Case for Conditional Immortality* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1994); Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Immortality or Resurrection? A Biblical Study on Human Nature and Destiny* (Berrien Springs, MI: Biblical Perspectives, 1997); John W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974).

⁴ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, Hermeneia Series (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 11.

⁵ See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33b (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 725.

⁶ Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 11; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 28a (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 1020, 1026.

⁷ Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 1021.

⁸ See David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 601.

⁹ See Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV*, 1025; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Wartburg Press, 1946), 747, 748; W. Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., s.v. *λοχμα*.

¹⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 328, 329. See also Ellen G. White, "For every guest at the feast there had been provided a wedding garment. This garment was a gift from the king. By wearing it the guests showed their respect for the giver of the feast. But one man was clothed in his common citizen dress. He had refused to make the preparation required by the king. The garment provided for him at great cost he disdained to wear. Thus he insulted his lord. To the king's demand, 'How camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?' he could answer nothing. He was self-condemned. Then the king said, 'Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness.'" *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1941), 309.

¹¹ Luz, *Matthew 8–20*, 269

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