



Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

::::: The Official Newsletter of Renewed Heart Ministries :::::: Volume 8 :::::: Issue 2 ::::::



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Enemy Love or Gehenna

by Herb Montgomery

Quotable Quotes

“The choice is not between violence and nonviolence but between nonviolence and nonexistence.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

“But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the Gehenna of fire.” (Matthew 5:22)

This week I want to address a question I received recently in response to something I shared in one of my weekend presentations. I had shared that nowhere did the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John ever teach the modern, western, evangelical construct of postmortem, eternal torture of immortal souls in literal fire, today referred to by many (not all) as “hell.” The question was how I interpreted the passages we are about to look at.

What Jesus actually warned about was not the modern Christian version of hell, but rather the deeply Jewish concept of Gehenna, which has a rich Jewish history.

Here is every passage where Jesus speaks of Gehenna (except for the two that we will look at in just a moment). Keep in mind that most modern translations translate these passages using the English word *hell*, which I feel, given the history of the term *Gehenna*, is deeply misleading. I have taken the time to “un-translate” each occurrence of the Greek word to read simply Gehenna once again rather than the modern *hell*.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into Gehenna.

(Matthew 5:29–30)

And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the Gehenna of fire. (Matthew 18:9)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cross sea and land to make a single convert, and you make the new convert twice as much a child of Gehenna as yourselves. (Matthew 23:15)

You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to Gehenna? (Matthew 23:33)

If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to Gehenna, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into Gehenna. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into Gehenna, (Mark 9:43–47)

In order to understand exactly what Jesus is referring to in each of these passages, we must look at three things.

1. The Jewish history surrounding Gehenna
2. The political climate of Jesus' own day
3. How Jesus uses Gehenna in the context of both

Let's dive in!

First, Gehenna was a literal place in the history of the Jews.

“Then the boundary goes up by **THE**

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Testimony

You owe me \$5.90, I bought Jesus lunch today.

(I received this on a note after a series I gave last summer.)

You owe me \$5.90 for the dinner I bought John Jones. You see I walked into Taco Bell on the way home from camp meeting. I was thinking about making the world a better place while I am here and how that related to the poor.

As I walked into Taco Bell John and my eyes met and I somehow knew that I would be buying John's dinner. He was sitting there with a glass of water with this look in his eyes. I ordered our meal and went into the rest room. Sure enough the smell of the homeless was there to meet me as I came out.

John explained that if Taco Bell knew what he was doing they would throw him out. But in a whisper, he said, "but I'm really hungry." I asked him what he wanted and he said to surprise him. So I figured I would order him a meal like I might like.

Done, the cup delivered and now to get back to my family, but the preacher (*Herb Montgomery*) said, "Stop to find out their story." Really?

I learned that he graduated the same year as my wife, probably from the same school. I learned that he served

in the military and was very proud of the fact. My number was called. With tears in his eyes he described the Harley Davidson motorcycle and two large toolboxes he had once owned. I suspected some sort of business. He described his 17 year association with the Hell's Angels. (My wife came to retrieve the rest of the family's order.) He also mentioned a daughter.

I then went back to sit with my family. He sat there a long time looking at the food I had purchased him. We finished up and wished him God's blessing on our way out. I could tell by the way he was eating that he was indeed very hungry.

So you see, it not only cost me \$5.90, but also some of my time to stop and listen. I wonder what happened to this man? Why did I not offer before he asked? Why didn't I ask him to sit with us while we ate? And now I'm asking the preacher for a refund? Really?

So on the way home my wife said, "I'm proud of you." She reminded me of what Jesus said about the least of these. So you see, I really bought Jesus lunch today. I did not ask him to sit with me, but it was a first step. So you see, Preacher, I really don't want your \$5.90. Today I fed Jesus, and it wasn't that hungry gentleman that was helped. It was me.

I bought Jesus lunch today, because of the words you spoke to me. Thank you.

Enemy Love... cont'd from page 2

VALLEY OF THE SON OF HINNOM (Gehenna) at the southern slope of the Jebusites (that is, Jerusalem); and the boundary goes up to the top of the mountain that lies over against **THE VALLEY OF HINNOM**, on the west, at the northern end of the valley of Rephaim." (Joshua 15:8)

This place became home to Judah's terrible history of participating in child sacrifice.

"And [Ahaz, King of Judah] made offerings in **THE VALLEY OF THE SON OF HINNOM**, and made his *sons pass through fire*, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel." (2 Chronicles 28:3)

"He made *his son pass through fire* in **THE VALLEY OF THE SON OF HINNOM**, practiced soothsaying and augury and sorcery, and dealt with mediums and with wizards. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger." (2 Chronicles 33:6)

Gehenna (the valley of the son of Hinnom) was the cultic location where children were offered to the god Molech. At some point it came to be referred to as Topheth. *Topheth* is thought to signify the hearth where the child was placed. The Hebrew term has parallel terms in both Ugaritic and Aramaic with the meaning "furnace, fireplace." Scholars have thought that Topheth was at the *edge* of the valley of the son of Hinnom before connecting

with the Kidron Valley. The valley of the son of Hinnom has been identified as likely being located southwest of Jerusalem. An eighth-century BC Phoenician inscription speaks of sacrifices made to Molech before battle by the Cilicians and their enemies.

But its history does not end here.

Next we see it resurface in the message of the prophet Jeremiah:

"And they go on building the high place of **Topheth**, which is in **THE VALLEY OF THE SON OF HINNOM**, to *burn their sons and their daughters in the fire*—which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, *when it will*

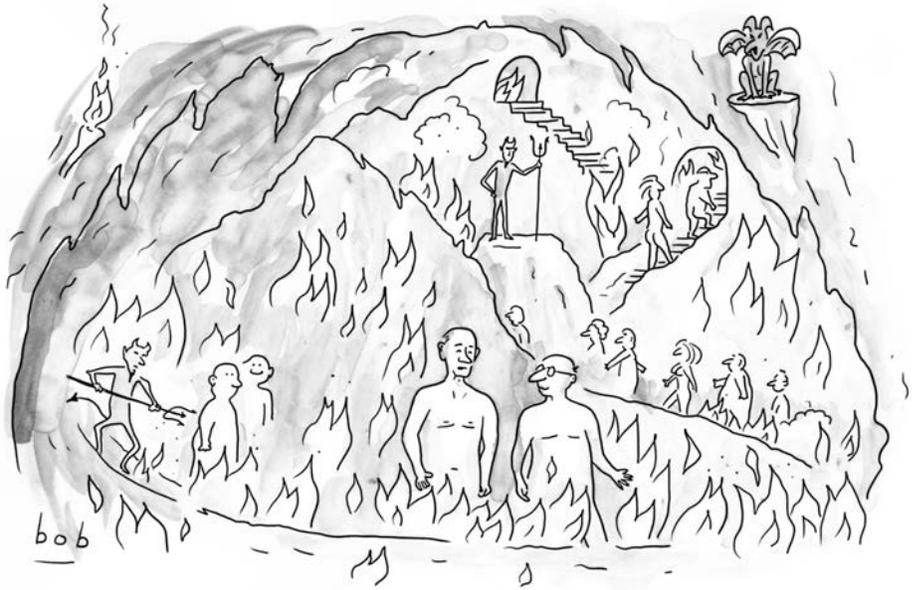
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no more be called **Topheth**, or **THE VALLEY OF THE SON OF HINNOM**, but **THE VALLEY OF SLAUGHTER**: for they will bury in **Topheth** until there is no more room." (Jeremiah 7:31-32)

What Jeremiah is saying is that Babylon is coming, and the result will be such devastation on Jerusalem that the valley of the son of Hinnom (Gehenna) will be used as a burying place that will become full and overflowing with corpses, not of children this time, but of those who followed after gods which would require such nightmare atrocities. What I want you to notice at this stage is that Jeremiah is warning, not about a postmortem experience, but a distinctly this-life, this-world experience that could rightly be termed "hell" but which points to the literal destruction of Jerusalem by a Gentile kingdom—*Babylon*.

What is also very interesting to note is that this passage in Jeremiah 7 is the identical passage Jesus quoted in his demonstration in the temple:

"The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah, you that enter these gates to worship the LORD. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your doings, and let me dwell with you in this place. Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.' For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to



"At least it's a dry heat."

your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever. Here you are, trusting in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are safe!'—only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become **a den of robbers** in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the LORD." (Jeremiah 7:1-11)

The same things (oppressing the alien, the orphan, and the widow) were taking place around Jesus in his day as well. Jesus, standing in the prophetic lineage of Jeremiah, not only used Jeremiah's imagery of Gehenna but also quoted Jeremiah directly.

"And he said, 'It is written, "My house shall be a house of prayer"; but you have made it **a den of robbers**.'" (Luke 19:46)

Now back to Jeremiah's use of Gehenna:

"And go out to the **VALLEY OF THE SON OF HINNOM** (Gehenna) at the entry of the Potsherd Gate, and proclaim there the words that I tell you. You shall say: Hear the word of the LORD, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. Because the people have forsaken me, and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent, and gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind. Therefore the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when this place shall no more be called **Topheth, OR THE VALLEY OF THE SON OF HINNOM**, but **THE VALLEY OF SLAUGHTER**." (Jeremiah 19:2-6)

It must be noted that for Jeremiah

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HeartGroups Testimonies from 100+ Years Ago

“We have not settled our ministers over churches as pastors to any large extent. In some of the very large churches we have elected pastors, but as a rule we have held ourselves ready for field service, evangelistic work and our brethren and sisters have held themselves ready to maintain their church services and carry forward their church work without settled pastors. [i.e. HeartGroups] And I hope this will never cease to be the order of affairs in this denomination; for when we cease our forward movement work and begin to settle over our churches, to stay by them, and do their thinking, and their praying and their work that is to be done, then our churches will begin to weaken, and to lose their life and spirit, and become *paralyzed and fossilized* and our work will be on a retreat.” (A.G. Daniels; General Conference President; 1912; Address to the Ministerial Institute in Los Angeles. Emphasis Added.)

“If fewer words of human wisdom, and more of the words of Christ were spoken, if there were fewer sermons, and more social meetings* [HeartGroups], we would find a different atmosphere pervade our churches and our camp meetings. Seasons of prayer should be help for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.” (E.G. White; *Manuscript Releases*, Vol. 2, p. 21

* The social meeting was not a service where the members passively sat listening to a sermon. On the contrary, it was a meeting where people simply shared what was happening in their personal and spiritual lives. Its purpose was to help members to share community; its function was edification through open, mutual participation with each person sharing. Uriah Smith, longtime editor of the *Review and Herald*, defined the social meeting in this way:

“...A meeting characterized by spirited and soul cheering testimonies, the beaming eye, the voice of praise, the earnest and stirring exhortation, and

often the falling tear-scenes in which faith and love flame up anew.” (Uriah Smith; *Review and Herald*, 1865)

“The church at Battle Creek needs these preachers less than any church in the state, from the fact that it has more active members than any other church in the state, many of them of long experience and sound judgment. We sometimes preach to them, but often feel when done that a social meeting* [HeartGroups] would have been better ...Now what is the use for us preachers to get in the way of these experienced, living members?” (*Review and Herald*; Vol. 20, No. 8; July 22, 1862)

“All Seventh-day Adventist clergymen are missionaries—not located pastors—and are busy preaching, teaching and organizing churches the world over.” (*Seventh-day Baptist Sabbath Recorder*; December 28, 1909; Reprinted in the *Review and Herald*, January 14, 1909; describes the work of the ministers was more characterized by that of the New Testament itinerant Apostles.)

“What is the object of assembling together? Is it to inform God, to instruct him by telling Him all we know in prayer? We meet together to edify one another by an interchange of thoughts and feelings, to gather strength, and light, and courage by becoming acquainted with one another’s hopes and aspirations; and by our earnest, heartfelt prayers, offered up in faith, we receive refreshment and vigor from the source of our strength. These meetings should be most precious seasons and should be made interesting to all who have any relish for religious things.” (*Testimonies for the church*; Vol. 2, p. 578)

even Gehenna had a terminus. This was not the equivalent of being eternally forsaken by God. Even Gehenna, in Jeremiah's thinking, was temporary. It possessed a restorative hope rather than a retributive one.

"The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. *The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes (Gehenna), and all the fields as far as the Wadi Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD.* It shall never again be uprooted or overthrown." (Jeremiah 31:38–40)

"See, I am going to gather them from all the lands to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation; I will bring them back to this place, and I will settle them in safety. They shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me for all time, for their own good and the good of their children after them. I will make an everlasting covenant with them,

never to draw back from doing good to them; and I will put the fear of me in their hearts, so that they may not turn from me." (Jeremiah 32:37)

"For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart. I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile." (Jeremiah 29:10–14)

Now let's address Number 2 (the political climate of Jesus' own day) very briefly. The religious leaders of Jesus day were looking, remember, for a militaristic messiah, who would lead Israel to a victorious defeat of the Roman Empire, liberating Jerusalem from pagan oppression and enabling the Jews to exact eye-for-an-eye retribution on their enemies. Jesus

came offering the way of enemy-love, enemy-embracing, enemy-forgiveness through the methods of nonviolent noncooperation, not as way of destroying Rome but of winning Rome and all the nations to the worship of Israel's Messiah (Psalm 2:8; Daniel 7:13–14; Isaiah 11:6–9; 60:3; 66:18; Zechariah 2:11; 8:20–23; 9:9–10; 14:9)

This offer of healing for the world through nonviolent enemy-love was rejected by the religious leaders of Jesus' day in favor of a militaristic messiah who looked more like Judah Maccabeus (the hammer), hoping that Judah's history in defeating the Greeks would be repeated in their day but now against the Romans. Jesus repeatedly warned that this would not go the way they were hoping but would instead end in Rome obliterating Jerusalem. We actually see this taking place in history, beginning in AD 66 and climaxing in Jerusalem's violent destruction by Rome in AD 70. (For more on this, see the eSight series *The Final Eight Prophecies of Jesus.*)

What we see is that Jesus picked up Jeremiah's warning about Jerusalem being overthrown by a foreign oppressor. Jesus quoted from Jeremiah after overthrowing the tables that day in the Temple, symbolizing what would be done by Rome just forty years later. (Jeremiah shattered a vessel on the Temple floor, symbolizing how Babylon would shatter Jerusalem and saying they had turned the Temple into a "den of robbers"; Jesus overturned tables and scattered livestock in the Temple, symbolizing what Rome would do to Jerusalem and saying they had turned the temple also into a "den of robbers.") Yet the point of all this is the fact that Jesus adopted

Quotable Quotes

"If only I had realized that the Christian theologians were already on the case—had been for centuries.... As it turns out, the view of hell with which I grew up—infernalism—is only one of several options handed down to us through our forefathers in the faith . . . The stubborn fact is that Scripture is richly polyphonic on the topic of hell and judgment—as if by design."

—Brad Jersak

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Schedule

FEBRUARY 7-8, 2014

Eastgate Adventist Church
Walla Walla, WA
509.529.9933

FEBRUARY 21-23, 2014

Battleford Adventist Church
Battleford, Saskewatchen,
CANADA
306.445.9096

MARCH 7-16, 2014

Pullman Adventist Church
Pullman, WA
509.332.8782

APRIL 11-13, 2014

Apison Adventist Church
Apison, TN
423.236.4214

APRIL 25-27, 2014

Arden Adventist Church
Arden, NC
828.684.6700

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Jeremiah's Gehenna language as well. Jesus was not warning about some postmortem experience described by Dante or Jonathan Edwards. He, like Jeremiah before Him, was speaking of Gehenna referring to a horrific devastation that would be wrought on Jerusalem by a foreign power, not Babylon this time but *Rome*.

In wrapping this up, Jesus quoted a battle cry of the militaristic efforts of the Maccabean revolt, which the religious leaders of Jesus' day romanticized, but Jesus subversively turned it on its head. Here is the

original passage Jesus used as recorded in the Apocrypha, which—though disputed between Catholics and Protestants—was one of those documents included in this historical library of the Jews:

“Each of them and all of them together looking at one another, cheerful and undaunted, said, ‘Let us with all our hearts consecrate ourselves to God, who gave us our lives, and let us use our bodies as a bulwark for the law. Let us not fear him who thinks he is killing us, for great is the struggle of the soul and the danger of eternal torment lying before those who transgress the commandment of God.’” (4 Maccabees 13:14–15)

Two things we must note. The Hellenistic idea of postmortem, eternal torment had already crept into Jewish thinking at this stage. Scholars agree this was a product of the diaspora and not a part of the pre-diaspora Jewish worldview. And secondly, the point is not to fear those who might kill us in our militaristic, violent revolt, but to fear a God who threatens us with eternal torment if we are not faithful to the law of our ancestors.

Jesus, in a rhetorical play on words, quoted the passage from 4 Maccabees, but then threw in a twist, transitioning into the words of Jeremiah instead:

“But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into Gehenna. Yes, I tell you, fear him!” (Luke 12:5)

The him here is a militaristic messiah rather than Jesus, the nonviolent, enemy-embracing Messiah. If the religious leaders of Jesus' day endeavored to follow the course of the Maccabean revolt, the militaristic messiah would not lead them to victoriously defeat Rome, but rather would hurl them into a

Jeremiah “like” Gehenna.

Matthew's version is even more telling:

“Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul [Jesus began with the words of 4 Maccabees, which were very familiar to the Jewish leaders of his day, and then transitioned into Jeremiah]; rather fear him [a militaristic messiah] who can [through an attempt to overthrow Rome through violence] destroy both soul and body [not eternal torment, but eternal annihilation of Jerusalem] in Gehenna [Jeremiah's term referring to Jerusalem's destruction by a foreign power].” (Matthew 10:28)

What Jesus was actually warning about is really an even worse fate than what Jeremiah warned about. For Jeremiah, the destruction by Babylon would be temporary. For Jesus, the destruction that would come from Rome would be permanent.

HeartGroup Application

1. This week I'd like you to contemplate what all of this might mean to us today. Are we, the human family, on a trajectory toward our own Gehenna? Violence always escalates. The path of “eye for an eye” (Matthew 5:38–39) is a broad path that ends in destruction (Matthew 7:12–14). In America, today is a day that will be spent memorializing the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This same Dr. King warned shortly before his assassination that we were no longer faced with the options of violence versus nonviolence. The options, based on the technological

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Enemy Love... cont'd from page 7

advancements by which death was being so massively and efficiently exercised, were between nonviolence and nonexistence.

2. Prayerfully consider the options that lie before us today. Are we, too, faced with the choice between nonviolence or a "Gehenna?" Are our options the same today as they were in the days of Jesus—enemy-

love and learning the way of enemy-forgiveness versus total annihilation?

3. Be prepared to share you what you discover with your HeartGroup this upcoming week.

In the shadow of the cross, following in the footsteps of Jesus, may we learn the way of enemy-love. Grace for our enemies, rather than retribution, is our only hope of healing. God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn

the world but that the world through him might be healed (John 3:17). Jesus also said to the Father, "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 20:21). This means that Jesus has not sent us into the world to condemn this world, but that through us, the world might be healed. May we fulfill this calling through learning to live like Christ, think like Christ, feel like Christ, and love like Christ. Till the only world that remains is a world where Love once again reigns. ■



Featured Presentation

In light of this month's special edition newsletter on Jesus' use of Gehenna, we'd like to feature a presentation from our The Jesus Dialogue series, entitled "Do I Have to Believe in Hell?" If the traditional view of hell proposed by western, American Christianity has troubled you, if you have been challenged with how to reconcile an eternally burning hell where souls are eternally tormented with the picture of an enemy loving God that Jesus gives us in the Sermon on the Mount, if you have wanted to be a Jesus follower but can't quite seem to embrace the above, we'd like to offer you this presentation. Herb demonstrates not only has there always been a mixture of interpretations among Jesus followers on this subject (three to be exact), Herb exegetically and clearly shows us that someone does not have to embrace eternal torment to be a Jesus follower and in all actuality, you most likely won't.



Do I Have to Believe in Hell? by Herb Montgomery, as our gift to you this month.

Renewed Heart Ministries provides its resources free of charge. Jesus commanded, "Freely you have received, freely give." We at RHM take this command very seriously. Philosophically we have a difficult time charging money to people for things God has given us for free.

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