

Tophet - the Beating of Drums - Part 1 by Robert Wurtz

by Robert Wurtz II

The sermon explores the biblical concept of Gehenna as a place of eternal punishment, emphasizing the importance of understanding God's judgment and the nature of human sinfulness.

Duration: 24:24

Scripture: Revelation 20:12

Topics: "Eternal Punishment", "Repentance Needed"

Description

This sermon delves into the concept of Gehenna, a place of ultimate torment, as described in the Bible. It explores the distinction between Hades and Gehenna, emphasizing the eternal nature of punishment in Gehenna. The sermon highlights the historical and biblical origins of Gehenna, warning about the seriousness of eternal damnation and the need for repentance and acceptance of God's grace. It also discusses the violent and sinful nature of humanity throughout history, contrasting it with God's desire for love and obedience.

Transcript

Well, hello, and welcome to the Girded Mind Video Archive. We're starting a new series that I have titled Tofet, The Beating of Drums. It is an examination of the history of a word or a place that came to be known in our King James Bible as hell.

Gehenna is a Greek term that describes a place that was outside the city of Jerusalem, in which trash burned continually. This place has a tremendous history. But before we look at that, I would like to look at Kittel's definition of this term, Gehenna.

Here we read. Fundamental to an understanding of Gehenna, passages in the New Testament which occur in John and the other Synoptists, there is a sharp distinction made between the words Hades and Gehenna. This distinction is, first, that Hades receives the ungodly only for the intervening period between death and resurrection.

Now, you will know that the rich man that was in the opposite side of Abraham's bosom, in the story relayed by our Lord, was in a place of torment. But we must not confuse this place with hell in the sense of Gehenna that is described by our Lord. Now, he continues.

He says, this distinction is that Hades receives the ungodly only for the intervening period between death and resurrection, whereas Gehenna is the place of punishment in the last judgment. The judgment of the former is thus provisional, but the torment of the latter is eternal. Now, that is very, very sobering.

He continues on when he writes, it is then, second, that the souls of the ungodly are outside the body in Hades. The rich man was in hell, but he was not in his body. He was in Hades.

This is not to be confused, ultimately, with Gehenna, which is another use of the word hell, but is really quite a different place. Whereas in Gehenna, both body and soul are reunited at the resurrection and are destroyed by eternal fire. He continues on.

He said, it is manifested as the fiery abyss. Those who fall victim to divine judgment at the last day will there be destroyed by eternal fire. The ungodly are there, Satan and his demons are there.

This is the place where the ungodly, Satan, the beast, and his false prophet, death and hell, or Hades, are ultimately going to be thrown. He continues on in describing this place from scripture and other sources, whether they be historical, rabbinical, and otherwise. But as good a definition as Kittel has given us, we must understand, in the words of one of my tutors, that the Bible terms do not have so much definitions as they do histories.

In this particular entry, in this particular series of The Girded Mind, I would like to explore Gehenna, the place of ultimate torment, and how this word came to us. Understand that God begins giving us light or revelation in a concept, and He builds upon it throughout the scriptures. And I would like to take some steps back into the Old Testament and trace this particular place to see what we can glean from this place called Gehenna.

Again, we have titled this series, Tophet, the beating of drums. You'll want to stay tuned. Did you know that as you look through rabbinical writings, and even through other types of writings that predate the time of our Lord, you don't really have the concept of Gehenna or hell as it is described by our Lord.

You will search through the entire Septuagint, and you will not find the word Gehenna. You see, our Lord Jesus Christ taught us about this place called hell. Now you will know that a lot of people, you've probably seen them, throw the word hell around as if it were some kind of a joke, as if it were some kind of fun place that someday they and their friends are going to throw some big shindig in a party.

But I think that if you trace back the concept of the word, as we're going to do in this series, you're going to find that there's nothing funny about hell. Genesis was written to tell us how everything started out. The book of Revelation tells us how everything's going to end up.

If that's true, and we know that it is, we ought to take a look at the book of the Revelation chapter 20. Here we read, for I saw the dead, verse 12, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them.

And they were judged, every man, every person, according to their works. Verse 14, and death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. The term lake of fire, the word lake is no different than the lake of Gennesaret, or any other term for lake, it's just a general term. But the word fire has an interesting history.

If we trace that Greek word back into the Septuagint, it is first found during the building of the Tower of Babylon. They were taking brick, and they were burning it, that's the Greek word, burning it in the fire, so that they could build this city, or this structure. And in other words, they were going to live independent of God.

It is interesting how God always has the last word, and how He is able to turn the thoughts of men upon themselves, and utterly give them what they desire. Understand that as you read through the Bible, whether it is God reigning judgment down on Sodom and Gomorrah, the third time the word fire is used in your Bible, in terms of the Greek Old Testament that is, that God is giving the people warning. It is a foretaste of hell itself.

God is reigning fire. He is reigning brimstone down upon the ungodly. Later on, God is going to bring judgment upon judgment upon judgment upon Pharaoh, who is a type of Satan, and upon Egypt, which is a type of this world.

He is going to reign all sorts of terror type things upon them, judgments, that ultimately were designed as a foretaste of hell, to turn them away from their sin. Now understand that there is a sense in which God bringing judgment has a hardening effect on individuals. There is an old saying that says that the same sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay.

It is up to the individual how they respond to the judgments of God. It is up to the person, and it is important we understand that. Now if we fast forward, we already have seen Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed.

They were burned with fire and brimstone. We see the repulsive judgments that were brought upon Pharaoh in Egypt. I mean, just things that if you took them in the aggregate, you can say that it was unquestionably in a sense a foretaste of hell.

But where we really get a picture of the foretaste of hell, again, is in the book of the Revelation. God is reigning judgment upon judgment upon judgment upon people. Yet you read these sad words, and yet they repented not.

But they blasphemed the name of God that had the power over all of these plagues. Very sobering. In Mark chapter 9, verse 42 and following, we read these words.

And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck, and he were cast into the sea. If your right hand offends you, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed than having two hands to cut off your right hand.

And if your foot offend you, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life halt than having two feet and be cast into hell, where the fire shall never be quenched. Where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched.

If your eye offend you, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye than having two eyes and be cast into hell fire, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. In

verse 42, and whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off. It is better for thee to enter into life maimed than having two hands to go into hell into the fire that never shall be quenched. I want you to notice in these passages that there is a recurring theme.

There is a sense in which there is an offender and then there is a retribution. All the way back from the beginning of man, starting with Adam's son Cain, man has been murderous in a sense by nature. You will remember that the devil is said to be a murderer from the beginning.

And this murderous nature entered into the human race. And starting with Cain, who slew his own brother, whom the scripture says was of that wicked one, there was a violent tendency in man. Not just a little bit violent, but utterly violent.

By the time we get to Genesis 6, the Bible said that the whole earth had corrupted its way. And the whole earth was filled with violence. They were doing violence to one another in various ways.

This is the opposite of moving in the love that God desires for His creation to be moving in. It's the opposite. You will know also that later on, as time went on, God had to ultimately destroy the world that then was.

So, we see then this pattern of behavior in human beings going all the way back to Cain. And it is a violent, murderous nature. Now, you probably have seen that throughout history, maybe you've watched it on television, maybe you've read it when you were in high school or maybe even in college, about all of the various types of atrocities that human beings have put each other through.

The killing, the grotesque behavior that we see all throughout history. We've seen it all the way back, as far back in recorded history as we can possibly go. But even in modern times, we see this killing, hateful nature being manifest in man.

And it's important to know that. We here in America are not by any means absolved from any of this type of behavior. Because the reality is, right here in North America, in Central America, in South America, some of the most savage and demonic atrocities against humanity have been done.

And it was well before the days that the Europeans and others visited this land. So, even though they were bringing tremendous violence themselves, there was a pattern of wickedness and evil that is almost unconscionable when we think about it. Now, I want you to think about this for a minute.

Jesus Christ came into the world with a simple message. That we are to love the Lord our God with all of our heart, all of our soul, all of our mind, and all of our strength. And our neighbor is ourselves.

These are the two great commandments. But you will know that man has not been moving in these commandments. They haven't been emulating this type of behavior at all, in many cases.

Now, I want you to also recognize in this passage that God is setting the bar much higher than what we would maybe even expect. There are other passages in the book of Matthew that deal with this type of retribution as well. The Bible said, if you were to say unto your neighbor or unto your brother, thou fool, you shall be in danger of hellfire.

Again, we need to be very, very cautious. We need to be paying close attention to what our Lord talked about when he talked about hell. Now, Jesus is the one that is bringing this subject up.

Jesus is the one that has expounded greatly the concept of hell and eternal damnation. Not temporal damnation. Not some sort of purgatory.

Not some sort of place that's just sort of temporary and maybe if you get better you can get out. This place does not have an exit. The scripture is clear on the fact.

Now, you will also recognize in the passage as I continue, watch this, verse 44, where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched. Now, this is a reference to the book of Isaiah chapter 66. The last two verses.

The Bible talks about a time when God is going to bring judgment and there is going to be this worm dying not concept and also this fire that is not quenched. This two-fold eating, if you will, that takes place in those that are suffering from an eternal damnation. A terrible thing.

But I want you to also notice something from the first verse and the second verse of Isaiah 66. Keep in mind, this is the last chapter of Isaiah. The first two verses talk about this.

The scripture says, to this one, and I'm just paraphrasing, to this one will I look, even to him that is of a broken and contrite spirit and that trembles at my word. See, this is a passage, the first two verses, that Stephen quoted when he talked about God's desire to live in man. Not among men, although that was sort of one step in the process and what God ultimately wanted to do.

But see, God wanted to live in man. But man has consistently rejected God. God wanted to take men and women, individuals, and make them living stones into a temple.

In other words, a place where God could dwell. A place where God could live. But when we rewind back into Genesis chapter 11, we find God essentially restarting the human race.

Noah and his family has exited the ark, and now we begin to see God rebuilding things. But what is the first thing, almost, that's worth mentioning in scripture that happens? They desire to build a temple, or a dwelling place, or a city, as it were, that will reach unto heaven. And it's made out of bricks, out of individual stones.

Now I want you to think about this for a minute. They wanted to build a place of habitation independent of God. The exact opposite of what God wanted to build.

See, God wanted to build a habitation of God by the Spirit, but they were trying to build a habitation or a place independent of God. In other words, in the absence of God, without God. God being evicted, not liking to be retained among them in their knowledge, in their thinking, in their hearts, in their lives.

He had been driven out, if you will, from them. And this was what they were building. Now, ultimately, Isaiah 66 tells us that the finality of those that desire to live independent of God is going to be eternal damnation.

It'll be eternal separation from God, for sure, but there will also be this element of divine retribution as well. This is the issue. This is where the rubber meets the road.

Does an individual, or do they not, want God? It's what we have to answer. I didn't say, do you want religion? I didn't say, do you want to escape eternal damnation? I'm asking, do you want God? Do you want Christ? The Bible said, as many as received Him, to them He gave the authority to become the sons of God. See, He came to His own, but His own received Him not.

But as many as did receive Him, to them gave He the right to become the habitation of God. Let me say it that way, by the Spirit. You see, ultimately, this is what the issue boils down to.

An individual doesn't want God, God is going to oblige them in their desire. We continue on, verse 45. If your foot offends you, cut it off.

It would be better for you to enter halt into life than having two feet and be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched. This is a terrible consideration. This is a fire that will never be quenched.

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