The Bible and Bread

Context, Themes, and Word Study

The Gospel of Mark
Weeks 5, 6, & 8

Mark's gospel is a relentless story about Jesus' announcement of God's righteous kingdom and the acts that accompany this proclamation. Throughout his ministry, Jesus encounters resistance. Evil is manifested in the demonic and in the actions of human beings. Human characters in Mark are often fearful and stubborn, and at times extremely violent. Self-seeking and the desire for honor work at cross-purposes with God's will. Evil, however, is being defeated: Jesus banishes demons, teaches about God's kingdom, and challenges religious and political structures that are harmful to human well-being. At times, people respond in faith, trusting in Jesus' compassion and divine authority. Though Jesus dies on the cross, once again evil is overcome as God raises him from the dead.

~ *The Wesley Study Bible Introduction to Mark*

Peterson's Introduction to the Gospel of Mark

Mark wastes no time in getting down to business—a single-sentence introduction, and not a digression to be found from beginning to end. An event has taken place that radically changes the way we look at and experience the world, and he can't wait to tell us about it. There's an air of breathless excitement in nearly every sentence he writes. The sooner we get the message, the better off we'll be, for the message is good, incredibly good: God is here, and he's on our side. The bare announcement that God exists doesn't particularly qualify as news. Most people in most centuries have believed in the existence of God or gods. It may well be, in fact, that human beings in aggregate and through the centuries have given more attention and concern to divinity than to all their other concerns put together—food, housing, clothing, pleasure, work, family, whatever.

But that God is here right now, and on our side, actively seeking to help us in the way we most need help—this qualifies as news. For, common as belief in God is, there is also an enormous amount of guesswork and gossip surrounding the subject, which results in runaway superstition, anxiety, and exploitation. So Mark, understandably, is in a hurry to tell us what happened in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—the Event that reveals the truth of God to us, so that we can live in reality and not illusion. He doesn't want us to waste a minute of these precious lives of ours ignorant of this most practical of all matters—that God is passionate to save us.

~ *Eugene Peterson*

The Gospel of Mark Chapter 1:

- no genealogy (Matthew 1)
- no birth narrative (Matthew 1)
- no visit of the magi (Matthew 2)
- no escape to Egypt (Matthew 2)
- no massacre of the infants (Matthew 2)
- no return from Egypt… (Matthew 2)

The Proclamation of John the Baptist
(Mark 1:1…, Matthew 3:1…)

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

Mark 1:1-8

J.B. aka "the hinge"
https://orthochristian.com/73542.html see paragraph 4

J.B. aka "the bridge"
https://michaelckw.blogspot.com/2019/12/the-bridge-between-old-and-new.html see 2nd paragraph

Mark 1:1-8 1 The beginning of the good news[a] of Jesus Christ.[b]
2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,[c]
"See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,[d]
who will prepare your way,
3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
make his paths straight,' "
4 so John the baptizer appeared[e] in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with[f] water, but he will baptize you with[g] the Holy Spirit."

a.1.1 Or *gospel* b.1.1 Other ancient authorities add *Son of God*
c.1.2 Other ancient authorities read *in the prophets* d.1.2 Gk *before your face* e.1.4 Other ancient authorities read *John was baptizing*
f.1.8 Or *in* g.1.8 Or *in*

see **Matthew 3:11-17**

The Baptism of Jesus

Mark 1:9-11 9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was
baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 And just as he was coming up out of
the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a
dove upon him. 11 And a voice came from the heavens, “You are my Son,
the Beloved;[h] with you I am well pleased.”

h.1.11 Or *my beloved Son*

see Matthew 3:11-17

The Testing of Jesus

Mark 1:12-13 [12] And the Spirit *immediately drove him out into the wilderness. [13] He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

see Matthew 4:1-11

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the
good news[i] of[j] God 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the
kingdom of God has come near;[k] repent, and believe in the good
news.”[l]

1.14 Or *gospel*
1.14 Other ancient authorities add *of the kingdom of*
1.15 Or *is at hand*
1.15 Or *gospel*

see Matthew 4:12-17

**immediately* ~ 87 occurrences in New Testament:

Matthew 18x

Mark 41x ~ 11x in Chapter 1 ~ Mark, using the shorter form εὐθύς, strings events together so the reader feels the urgent march of Messianic ministry (Mark 1:10-43; 2:8-12; 4:15-29; 5:2-42). The word appears some forty-one times, creating Mark's signature "breathless" style. see https://biblehub.com/greek/2112.htm

Luke 7x

John 6x

The Bible for Normal People | Episode 309: Elizabeth Shively – The Gospel of Mark Explained

Mark has an abrupt beginning and abrupt ending.

Mark distinctively connects Jesus' path of suffering and death and resurrection to the path of his followers.

…a story that shapes what it means to follow Jesus.

…tells the truth about human frailty and divine faithfulness.

Mark leaves things kind of messy … we have to wrestle with what it means to follow a suffering Messiah.

Mark's apocalyptic imagination is less about timelines and more about perspective. It's about, how do we see the world? It's about showing that God has broken into the world and is doing things in the world now, and the world is going towards a certain end that God's in charge of.

…revealing a deeper reality that's not always visible to the naked eye.

…there is this sense [from the people] of the Messiah coming to vanquish the enemies of God's people. But Mark, [at the very beginning, turns this conquering-of-human-enemies notion around]. Yes, Jesus is coming in fulfillment of what Isaiah promises. But this is going to look like Jesus being filled with the Spirit …Jesus doing battle with Satan… we can't see that with the human eye…

Mark is showing from the beginning… Jesus being filled with the Spirit, the Spirit throwing [Jesus] out in the wilderness to do battle with Satan …giving us eyes to see from the get-go this reality that's taking place …behind the scenes …what's playing out on the ground.

…how can the suffering Messiah be ushering God's kingdom, how can Jesus' followers who are suffering be part of that kingdom?

…apocalyptic imagination gives us eyes to see a… future that is blossoming that we can't see through… our human perception.

Mark [narrates an unsettledness of humanity that shifts] between fear and faith

Mark is inviting us to see the world more clearly, to… pull back the curtain and say, "this is what's really going on when the Messiah is suffering, when God's people are suffering… it's not [about] comfort… it's not suffering that's strange.

Suffering is the way that if God's people are gonna follow in the footsteps of Jesus, then it's to be a servant, it's to be last. It's to… give your life… for others… and that doesn't mean that God isn't in control or that the kingdom isn't here or that it's not coming fully."

But we can see that God is at work… that God is at work now and in the future in these very things. And I think this is so important because… it prevents us from seeing… this kind of apocalyptic vision as an escape.

…we're not supposed to.. predict the time [of Jesus' return]… Jesus said he couldn't predict the time… [I'm not to] …get all these cans of soup and hide in my bunker. No… we're supposed to continue in this suffering faithful witness… that Jesus showed us in his followers… it's not escape… that is a solution.

Mark's vision [gives us a lens to focus on what God is doing]. I think neither Jesus nor the New Testament ever suggests that… government or the state is the solution to our personal anxieties or our church anxieties. The kingdom doesn't come by winning elections or securing influence. It comes by taking up the cross.

…I think Christians should be involved in politics. …I think that's important and in movements of justice and however you would see that.

But… the way of Jesus isn't about conquering the world.

It's about bearing witness in the world, even when it's costly. And I think that's what an apocalyptic imagination supports and helps us to see that when it's difficult, when we have no thanks when we're suffering, this is the mustard seed… that is being planted, that Jesus has already planted, that Jesus is working through…

https://thebiblefornormalpeople.com/episode-309-elizabeth-shively-the-gospel-of-mark-explained/

The Bible and Bread: Interpreting Scripture

Week 6 Fall 2025

Mark 9:42-50

Temptations to Sin

We light this candle as a sign of
God's presence with us.

God of light and love,
give us, we pray,
the grace and gifts that are your will for us today.

Help us to hear and understand your holy word;
to be aware of our own reactions and emotions;
to be sensitive to one another's stories,
and receptive to one another's insights.

May our study of your word lead us into ever deeper
gratitude for all your gifts,
awareness of the communion of saints,
and relationship with your Word, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Context for Mark 9: 42-50

- Jesus and his disciples were in Capernaum. Just before their arrival, the disciples were arguing about which disciple was the greatest. Jesus then taught the twelve, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” ‘Then took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them,’ “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.” (Mark 9:33-37)
- The disciples have not learned the lesson just taught them, as they continue in a discussion about an exorcist, who was not one of the twelve, casting out demons in the name of Jesus. They tried to stop the exorcist because he was not one of the twelve. The disciples are concerned that people follow *them*. Jesus commends the people who do good in *Jesus’* name. (Mark 9:38-41)

Mark 9:42-50 Contemporary English Version *CEV* (**see also** Matthew 18.6-9; Luke 17.1,2)

42 It will be terrible for people who cause even one of my little followers to sin. Those people would be better off
thrown into the ocean with a heavy stone tied around their necks. 43-44 So if your hand causes you to sin, cut it
off! You would be better off to go into life paralyzed than to have two hands and be thrown into the fires of hell
that never go out.[a] 45-46 If your foot causes you to sin, chop it off. You would be better off to go into life lame than
to have two feet and be thrown into hell.[b] 47 If your eye causes you to sin, get rid of it. You would be better off to
go into God's kingdom with only one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell. 48 The worms there never
die, and the fire never stops burning.
49 Everyone must be salted with fire.[c]
50 Salt is good. But if it no longer tastes like salt, how can it be made salty again? Have salt among you and live at
peace with each other.[d]

Footnotes

a.9.43,44 *never go out:* Some manuscripts add, "The worms there never die, and the fire never stops burning."
b.9.45,46 *thrown into hell:* Some manuscripts add, "The worms there never die, and the fire never stops burning."
c.9.49 *salted with fire:* Some manuscripts add "and every sacrifice will be seasoned with salt." The verse may mean that Christ's followers must suffer because of their faith.
d.9.50 *Have salt among you and live at peace with each other:* This may mean that when Christ's followers have to suffer because of their faith, they must still try to live at peace with each other.

Rhetoric is the art of using words to evoke responses in your listeners and persuading them by using figures of speech.

i.e. hyperbole.

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

The valley of Ben Hinnom was a rubbish heap south of ancient Jerusalem that was constantly on fire. It was also a site for child sacrifice in Old Testament times — hence one of Josiah's reforms in 2 Kings 23:10 was to stop people from doing this. [10 And he defiled Topheth, which *is* in the Valley of the [7]Son of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter pass through the fire to Molech.]

In the Greek, this valley gets called "Gehenna" and this is the word Jesus uses when he says it's better to lose a hand or an eye than for our whole bodies to be sent there. "Gehenna" is often translated into English as "hell."

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

In verse 48 Jesus is quoting Isaiah 66:24, which is itself prophetic poetry. It is rarely wise to take a very scientific or literal approach to either poetry or prophecy, because that's not how they work as genres. They are open to interpretation in lots of different ways and I suspect we never truly understand their meaning until the events they describe are upon us.

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

In fact whenever **Isaiah 66** was read in a synagogue, Jews would read verse 24, which is the last verse of that chapter and indeed the entire book, and then go back and read verse 23, "so as to close with words of consolation." For context, the last few verses of Isaiah 66 are as follows:

22 "As surely as my new heavens and earth will remain,
so will you always be my people,
with a name that will never disappear,"
says the Lord.
23 "All humanity will come to worship me
from week to week
and from month to month.
24 And as they go out, they will see
the dead bodies of those who have rebelled against me.
For the worms that devour them will never die,
and the fire that burns them will never go out.
All who pass by
will view them with utter horror." (NLT)

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

But the reader would go back and read again:

23 “All humanity will come to worship me
from week to week
and from month to month.

So, maybe when we quote Jesus’s words, we should also remember to end with consolation.

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

We really shouldn't underestimate the consequences of remaining attached to our sin and the things that cause us to sin. Whether that's because of what we might lose, or what we might *lose out on*, I'm not sure. But the stakes are high — I think that's the only reason why Jesus would use this kind of language.
That means the *message* of such hyperbole is to tell us that sin is serious, but this rhetoric is not trying to tell us about a solution. After all, cutting off parts of our bodies ***does not*** separate us from our sin or prevent us from sinning.

And of all people, Jesus knew that.

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

Oh, one last thing before I close: the undying worm and never-quenching fire at the end of Isaiah contrasts with another image in verse 14 of the same chapter. There, Isaiah says the righteous will spring up from the earth like grass.

When you take these two verses as a pair, it seems then that the time will come when evil itself will die *and stay dead*. There will be no dark rising or zombie sin to haunt us or take from our peace.
Instead, **all that is good** will spring up with new life — like fresh grass, as Isaiah puts it. It's a life out of death, a resurrection life, and an everlasting hope.

That's why we call the gospel "good news".

~Christine Woolgar
https://www.workthegreymatter.com/handle-with-care-mark-9-hell/

Most of us in the modern world stumble over the image of "hell." For so long we have been taught literal ideas about some awful place people go after they die. This tends to cloud the everyday interpretation of the term "hell." A full metaphorical translation of the Gospel of Mark for our time requires us to raise this question: "What state of being that we all experience might be pointed to with this word 'hell'?" "Despair" is a fruitful answer to that question, but what is despair? Despair is finding yourself trapped in a life that you hate, and from which you wish only to escape, but from which there is no escape. With that understanding of "hell" in mind, let us listen again to the tough sayings in these verses. If we do not honor those who trust the Eternal Mystery of the All, then we are living in despair ourselves, and we are leading others into despair. Despair is the worst of all possible outcomes for a human life. Losing a hand, a foot, or an eye would be preferable to being in despair. So if you or I ever need to make a choice between being one-eyed and being in despair, this passage advises us to choose the former. How are you been tempted to allow your trust in the Eternal Mystery of it All to be sidetracked? How do you feel challenged by the strong images of this passage?

~ Gene W. Marshall, *The Creator of Christianity: A commentary on the Gospel of Mark* | Realistic Living | Bonham, TX | 2018

The Bible and Bread: Interpreting Scripture

Week 8 Fall 2025

Mark 9:42-50

Hell

Mark 9:42-50
AI Mode

The interpretation of Mark 9:42-50 through the United Methodist quadrilateral (Scripture, Tradition, Reason, and Experience) emphasizes radical discipleship, the seriousness of sin, and the call to peace and purity in the Christian community.

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral:
A Framework

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a tool for theological reflection, with Scripture as the primary authority, "illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason". It helps United Methodists understand and apply Christian faith to their lives.

Scripture

The biblical text itself is the starting point.

Mark 9:42-50 contains graphic, dramatic language:
Warnings against causing others to sin (v. 42): It would be better to have a millstone hung around one's neck and be cast into the sea than to cause a "little one" who believes in Jesus to stumble.

Warnings against personal sin (v. 43-48): It is better to enter the Kingdom of God maimed (without a hand, foot, or eye) than to go to hell with a whole body. This is a call for a radical lifestyle of purity, not literal self-mutilation.

The metaphor of salt and peace (v. 49-50): Believers are to be "salted with fire" and have "salt in yourselves," maintaining peace with one another. Salt is a symbol of preservation and purity.

Tradition

Tradition provides historical insights into how the church has understood this difficult passage.

The broader Christian tradition has generally interpreted the commands metaphorically, focusing on the need for radical separation from sin and temptations, not physical harm.

The emphasis is on the gravity of sin and its eternal consequences - a truth consistently taught throughout church history.

The call for community purity and receiving all believers warmly has also been a traditional theme, warning against cliques or exclusion within the church.

Reason

Reason applies logical thought and common sense to the interpretation, ensuring it is coherent with the rest of Christian teaching and human understanding.

Reason helps discern that Jesus is not advocating for physical violence or self-mutilation, which would contradict the Christian ethic of valuing the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Instead, reason confirms the metaphorical interpretation, suggesting we must be willing to sacrifice whatever is leading us to sin.

Reason also highlights the extreme cost of discipleship and the importance of protecting the faith of new or vulnerable believers, which makes sense from a community-building perspective.

The passage's logical structure leads to the conclusion that the eternal consequences of unaddressed sin far outweigh any temporary personal sacrifice.

Experience

Experience relates the scripture to personal life and the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life.

Personal experience often confirms the struggle against habitual sin and the need for decisive action to break free from its power. Believers can experience the "fire" as a purifying force in their lives.

The "experience" of a changed heart or sanctification bears witness to the power of God to help individuals live a life of purity and peace, as the passage commands.

United Methodists experience a call to be a welcoming church, a "hospital where broken, humble, dependent people" can find grace and healing, which is an application of the passage's call to receive "little ones". The effectiveness of a church is often measured by its real-life impact on people's lives.

AI Summary

By using this balanced approach, United Methodists find a rich and challenging message in Mark 9:42-50 that calls for radical commitment to Christ, personal holiness, and community harmony.

https://www.google.com/search?sca_esv=04011e8abf4afce9&q=mark+9%3A42-50+interpreted+through+the+United+Methodist+quadrilateral&spell=1&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjBqP2mr_yQAxUzlYkEHQyIOmAQ0NsOegQIAxAB&biw=1536&bih=730&dpr=1.25&udm=50&fbs=AIIjpHxU7SXXniUZfeShr2fp4giZ1Y6MJ25_tmWITc7uy4KIeiAkWG4OlBE2zyCTMjPbGmMU8EWskMk2JSE__efdUJ3xRFvZoM2vJLBohUMk5HOE2LIholYoQhkqi8VHGoz9929jVmtFQ7ktivkBytrPl89EzjvEpTWsDRoN162q3FY5rMfOGvP-aQ8xa_WGLQJn96vUiPujpyZ5FJfr_klrcrVALaCG8A&aep=10&ntc=1&mstk=AUtExfAZcBeP6OfqkSuTIZBM2-oX_RbjroPryqGZnwhIurin_looXO1qvLfvVQfwSTnb__8uMttlnuf_aZSegGzd1MLPuKNHScZLqqEmssPW6x184NGQllxLS8DFMmgQGgMAjqCXXl5Rpaq4hBI7DWXrAJM6As10Atm_JgQ&csuir=1

John Wesley's Notes Mark 9:34-41
https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes.i.iii.x.html

34. Who should be greatest - Prime minister in his kingdom.

35. Let him be the least of all - Let him abase himself the most.

36. Matt. xviii, 2; Luke ix, 47.

37. One such little child - Either in years or in heart.

38. And John answered him - As if he had said, But ought we to receive those who follow not us? Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name - Probably this was one of John the Baptist's disciples, who believed in Jesus, though he did not yet associate with our Lord's disciples. And we forbad him, because he followeth not us - How often is the same temper found in us? How readily do we also lust to envy? But how does that spirit become a disciple, much more a minister of the benevolent Jesus! St. Paul had learnt a better temper, when he rejoiced that Christ was preached, even by those who were his personal enemies. But to confine religion to them that follow us, is a narrowness of spirit which we should avoid and abhor. Luke ix, 49.

39. Jesus said - Christ here gives us a lovely example of candour and moderation. He was willing to put the best construction on doubtful cases, and to treat as friends those who were not avowed enemies. Perhaps in this instance it was a means of conquering the remainder of prejudice, and perfecting what was wanting in the faith and obedience of these persons. Forbid him not - Neither directly nor indirectly discourage or hinder any man who brings sinners from the power of Satan to God, because he followeth not us, in opinions, modes of worship, or any thing else which does not affect the essence of religion.

40. For he that is not against you, is for you - Our Lord had formerly said, he that is not with me, is against me: thereby admonishing his hearers, that the war between him and Satan admitted of no neutrality, and that those who were indifferent to him now, would finally be treated as enemies. But here in another view, he uses a very different proverb; directing his followers to judge of men's characters in the most candid manner; and charitably to hope that those who did not oppose his cause wished well to it. Upon the whole, we are to be rigorous in judging ourselves, and candid in judging each other.

41. For whosoever shall give you a cup - Having answered St. John, our Lord here resumes the discourse which was broken off at the 37th verse. Mark ix, 37. Matt. x, 42.

John Wesley's Notes Mark 9:42-50

https://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes.i.iii.x.html

42. On the contrary, whosoever shall offend the very least Christian. Matt. xviii, 6; Luke xvii, 1.

43. And if a person cause thee to offend - (The discourse passes from the case of offending, to that of being offended) if one who is as useful or dear to thee as a hand or eye, hinder or slacken thee in the ways of God, renounce all intercourse with him. This primarily relates to persons, secondarily to things. Matt. v, 29; Matt. xviii, 8.

44. Where their worm - That gnaweth the soul, (pride, self will, desire, malice, envy, shame, sorrow, despair) dieth not - No more than the soul itself: and the fire (either material, or infinitely worse!) that tormenteth the body, is not quenched forever. Isaiah lxvi, 24.

49. Everyone - Who does not cut off the offending member, and consequently is cast into hell, shall be, as it were, salted with fire, preserved, not consumed thereby whereas every acceptable sacrifice shall be salted with another kind of salt, even that of Divine grace, which purifies the soul, (though frequently with pain) and preserves it from corruption.

50. Such salt is good indeed; highly beneficial to the world, in respect of which I have termed you the salt of the earth. But if the salt which should season others, have lost its own saltness, wherewith will ye season it? - Beware of this; see that ye retain your savour; and as a proof of it, have peace one with another. More largely this obscure text might be paraphrased thus:- As every burnt offering was salted with salt, in order to its being cast into the fire of the altar, so every one who will not part with his hand or eye, shall fall a sacrifice to Divine justice, and be cast into hell fire, which will not consume, but preserve him from a cessation of being. And on the other hand, every one, who, denying himself and taking up his cross, offers up himself as a living sacrifice to God, shall be seasoned with grace, which like salt will make him savoury, and preserve him from destruction forever. As salt is good for preserving meats, and making them savoury, so it is good that ye be seasoned with grace, for the purifying your hearts and lives, and for spreading the savour of my knowledge, both in your own souls, and wherever ye go. But as salt if it loses its saltness is fit for nothing, so ye, if ye lose your faith and love, are fit for nothing but to be utterly destroyed. See therefore that grace abide in you, and that ye no more contend, Who shall be greatest. Matt. v, 13; Luke xiv, 34.

Lexical Summary
geenna: Gehenna, hell
Original Word: γέεννα
Part of Speech: Noun, Feminine
Transliteration: geenna
Pronunciation: gheh'-en-nah
Phonetic Spelling: (gheh'-en-nah)
KJV: hell
NASB: hell
Word Origin: [of Hebrew origin (H1516 (- גֵּיא גַּיvalley) and H2011 (- הִנֹּם Hinnom))]

1. valley of (the son of) Hinnom
2. ge-henna (or Ge-Hinnom), a valley of Jerusalem,
{used (figuratively) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment}

Strong's Exhaustive Concordance
gehenna, hell.
Of Hebrew origin (gay' and Hinnom); valley of (the son of) Hinnom; ge-henna (or Ge-Hinnom), a valley of Jerusalem, used (figuratively) as a name for the place (or state) of everlasting punishment -- hell.

see HEBREW gay’
1. a gorge (from its lofty sides
2. (hence) narrow, but not a gully or winter-torrent)

see HEBREW Hinnom: Proper Name Location | of foreign origin
Hinnom designates the deep ravine that skirts the western and southern flanks of ancient Jerusalem before joining the Kidron Valley to the east. Because it received refuse, corpses, and the ashes of pagan rites, its name ultimately became synonymous with judgment. The northern end, near the juncture with the Tyropoeon, is called the Valley of Ben Hinnom (literally “son of Hinnom”), and its southern extremity is known as Topheth. The natural contours created both a defensive barrier for the city and an arena where covenant faithfulness or apostasy was made visible.

Topical Lexicon

Historical Background

Gehenna draws its name from the Valley of Hinnom (Hebrew ge ben-Hinnom) south-west of Jerusalem. In the Old Testament the ravine became infamous for child sacrifices to Molech (2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31–32; 19:6). After King Josiah defiled the site, Jewish tradition remembered it as a cursed place.

By Second Temple times it had become a refuse dump where fires continually smoldered, and so it served as a vivid image for eschatological judgment. When Jesus and James employ the term, their listeners already associated it with divine retribution and uncleanness.

Relation to Other Biblical Terms

Unlike Sheol (Hebrew) and Hades (Greek), which describe the realm of the dead in general, Gehenna always points to final punishment. Revelation later depicts the same reality as “the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14–15). Gehenna therefore stands at the terminus of moral history, not the temporary intermediate state.

Usage in the New Testament

Gehenna appears twelve times in the Greek New Testament—eleven times on the lips of Jesus and once by James. The distribution highlights three major themes:

1. Personal moral accountability (Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 18:9). Even "every careless word" and "looking with lust" can lead to being "thrown into hell."
2. Ultimate divine judgment (Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5). Jesus contrasts human power to kill the body with God's authority "to destroy both soul and body in hell."
3. Condemnation of hypocritical religion (Matthew 23:15, 33). Religious leaders who corrupt others become "sons of hell" and face the judgment they deny.

Mark 9:43–47 gathers these strands into a solemn warning: "It is better for you to enter life crippled than, having two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire."

James 3:6 applies the image to the tongue's destructive power: "The tongue is set on fire by hell." The constant factor is divine, not merely natural, retribution.

Theological Significance

1. Reality of eternal punishment: Jesus treats Gehenna as an objective destiny, not a metaphorical state.

2. Holistic judgment: Both body and soul are subject to destruction (Matthew 10:28), countering notions that only the immaterial part of humanity is accountable.

3. Justice and mercy: The repeated warnings serve a pastoral purpose—divine justice motivates repentance and underscores the costliness of God's mercy in Christ.

Old Testament Roots and Prophetic Echoes

Isaiah 66:24 speaks of corpses where “their worm will not die, and their fire will not be quenched,” language Jesus cites in Mark 9. Jeremiah 7 and 19 anticipate a future when the Valley of Hinnom becomes “the Valley of Slaughter,” foreshadowing the eschatological application found in the New Testament.

Pastoral and Ministry Implications

• Evangelism: Clear preaching about Gehenna gives urgency to the gospel invitation (cf. John 3:16–18).

• Discipleship: Believers are exhorted to radical self-denial—"if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out"—because eternal realities outweigh temporal comfort.

• Ethics of speech: James reminds the church that unbridled tongues can spread corruption born of hell itself, calling for Spirit-controlled communication.

• Shepherding: Assurance and warning belong together; knowing the fate from which Christ saves steadies believers amid persecution (Matthew 10:28).

Warnings and Exhortations

Matthew 23:33 challenges complacency: “You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape the sentence of hell?” The rhetorical force is remedial; Christ’s rebuke invites repentance before final judgment is sealed.

Summary

Gehenna functions in Scripture as the definitive symbol and reality of God’s retributive justice. Rooted in a historical valley of idolatry and fire, it becomes in Jesus’ teaching the ultimate destiny of unrepentant sin and hypocrisy. Its twelve New Testament occurrences offer sober warnings, undergird gospel proclamation, and shape holy living. The doctrine of Gehenna therefore magnifies the holiness of God, the seriousness of sin, and the gracious deliverance provided through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman writes of what he describes as "three hounds of Hell": fear, hypocrisy, and hatred. These three hounds of Hell have motivated destructive behavior over the course of time to self and others. Jesus, he argued, saw little change possible to individuals and communities without overcoming these "hounds."

For a secular article on this concept see:
https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-secular-shepherd/201706/the-three-hounds-of-hell

Wesley Study Bible see
Revelation 20 Wesley Core Term: Hell

Most notions of hell are influenced by John Milton‘s Paradise Lost. Wesley‘s were too. In his notes, Rev. Wesley comments, “How far these expressions are to be taken literally, how far figuratively only, who can tell?” (Notes, 20:3). Wesley did believe in a literal “lake of fire“ as a place where the damned are eternally tormented. But in Sermon 73: “Of Hell,“ Wesley also describes hell as the experience of loss. Hell is the loss of beauty, music, pleasant memory, kindness, loved ones, friendship, love, and a sense of having been created by God, knowing that rest will never be found, except in God. Hell is also felt experience; a place of hate, horror, greed, rage, lust, unsatisfied desires, envy, jealousy, malice, and revenge, characterized by fear, guilt, and shame. While all of this will “incessantly gnaw the soul“ like a vulture through all eternity, most hells begin here on earth.