

## INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK 9:48

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### ABSTRACT

The interpretation of Jesus' words, "where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched" in Mark 9:48 has been a matter of debate in history since the early church. The clause which is a quote from book 66:24 has been interpreted differently by biblical scholars. Until now they are still debating and there is no agreement. Some argue that this is a description of eternal torture in hell but on the other hand argue that Jesus did not mean it that way. The results of this study approach using the "grammatical and historical" method come to the conclusion that to understand Jesus' words it is not enough to just base it on grammatical and syntactic analysis but must also be studied from a historical perspective. Based on the study of context and history, what Jesus meant in these words was not a description of eternal torture but rather the consequences of the punishment itself. The opinion that states that there is torture of servants in gehenna does not come from the Bible itself but is taken from ideas that come from outside the Bible such as books that appeared in the intertestamental period and Greek philosophy.

**Keywords:** Gehenna, Hell, Torment

### INTRODUCTION

The expression of "their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched" (Gr. ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ, καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται) in Mark 9:48 had been a dispute since early Christian era. The expression which is quoted by Jesus from Isaiah 66:24 has been interpreted diversely by scholars. Modern biblical scholars have wrestled and debated on the phrase and have no consensus. Most of biblical scholars interpret the expression to support the doctrine of immortality of the soul and conscious eternal punishment in hell. Scholars such as Morey,<sup>1</sup> William Hendriksen,<sup>2</sup> Walvoord,<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Edwards,<sup>4</sup> John Jr MacArthur,<sup>5</sup> Allen Black,<sup>6</sup> Robert G. Bratcher<sup>7</sup> and are among of those who favor such kind of interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*, Includes Indexes. (Minneapolis, Minn: Bethany House, 1984), 91.

<sup>2</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 10, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, Accompanying Biblical Text Is Author's Translation., New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 366.

<sup>3</sup> John F. Walvoord, "The Literal View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 11–28.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Edwards, in John Gerster, *Jonathan Edwards on Heaven and Hell* (Grand rapids: Baker, 1980), 56.

<sup>5</sup> John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997, c1997), Mk 9:43.

However a number of scholars refute such interpretation. They assert that the expression does not mean as an eternal punishment in hell. John Stott,<sup>8</sup> Philip Hughes,<sup>9</sup> Edward Fugde,<sup>10</sup> John Wenham,<sup>11</sup> LeRoy Edwin Froom,<sup>12</sup> John Barton,<sup>13</sup> and Clark H. Pinnock<sup>14</sup> propose that the souls of wicked will not be tormented forever in hell but destroyed or annihilated in the final judgment.

### **THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to examine the meaning and background of the expression, “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” in Mark 9:48, since there are some disputes among the scholars. There is a necessity research and study of the biblical exegesis to understand the meaning of the expression.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses exegetical study by employing grammatical historical method to answer the statement of the problem above. The steps of the study are: 1) Discuss the literary context such as authorship, structure and setting, 2) Examine its lexical-grammatical, and 3) investigate the background of *gehenna* intertextually and in extra-biblical sources. Finally summary and conclusion will be made.

### **LITERARY CONTEXT**

The setting of Mark 9:48, where the expression is uttered, can be seen from broader narrative of Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem from Galilee (Mark 8:31-10:52). In Mark 9, it is told that after the transfiguration of Jesus (9:2–8), Jesus and his disciples went to Jerusalem. In the journey, he teaches his disciples privately and repeats his prediction that the Son of man would be betrayed and killed, but will rise again after three days (9:30–31).

However those disciples still do not understand Christ’s mission (v. 32) and they quarrel among themselves of who the greatest is among them. Responding this quarrelling, Christ gives them some radical demands of discipleship (9:42–50). One of the Christ radical demands is to “cut off” part of body if anyone leads a “little one” to astray from the truth or if anyone persists in doing his sin.

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<sup>6</sup>Allen Black, *Mark*, The College Press NIV commentary (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1995), Mk 9:43.

<sup>7</sup>Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, Originally Published: A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark, 1961., UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993], c1961), 304.

<sup>8</sup>David L. Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 312-20.

<sup>9</sup>Philip Hughes, *The True Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 398

<sup>10</sup>Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Fallbrook, CA: Verdict Publications, 1982),

<sup>11</sup>John Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1974), 27-41

<sup>12</sup>LeRoy Edwin Froom *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers, vol.1*, (Washington, DC: The Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1965), 301

<sup>13</sup>John Barton and John Muddiman, *Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Mk 9:42-50.

<sup>14</sup>Clark H. Pinnock, *The Conditional View, in Four Views on Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 135-66.

In a smaller unit Mark 9:48 belongs to the pericope of the discourse on warning the disciples of causes to sin (Mark 9:42-50). First, Jesus warns the disciples of the consequence of leading a “little ones” to sin or to be a *stumbling block* for them will suffer and their fate would be worse than being drowned. Second, Jesus gives warning for those who turn away from him or those who commit sins would go to *gehenna*. Jesus states that it is better to enter life maimed than with two hands to go *gehenna* and it is also better to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into *gehenna*. In addition He states that it is better to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell.”

### LITERARY ANALYSIS

In uncial manuscripts The passage of the immediate context shows some variations. The oldest manuscripts such as *Codex Sinaiticus*( $\aleph$ ), *Codex Ephraemi* (C), *Codex Vaticanus* (B) and *Codex Regius* (L) do not contain verses 44 and 46 but are present in later codex such as *Codex Alexandrinus* (A), *Codex Bezae* (D), *Codex Nanianus* I (U), *Codex Cyprius*, *Latin* and *Syriac Peshita*. Moreover the phrase γέενναν τοῦ πυρὸς in v. 47 have

a slight variation in some manuscripts. In *Textus Receptus* (TR), τοῦ πυρὸς is added.

The comparison texts of Mark 9:42-50 between the earlier manuscripts (*Codex Sinaiticus*, *Codex Vaticanus*, *Codex Ephraemi* and *Codex Regius* and the latter manuscripts (*Codex Alexandrinus*, *Codex Bezae*, *Codex Nanianus* I, *Codex Cyprius* are presented in the table below.

**Table 1. Variation of Texts**

TEXT IN EARLIER MSS <sup>15</sup>	TEXT IN LATER MSS <sup>16</sup>
<sup>47</sup> καὶ ἐὰν ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου σκανδαλίζῃ σε, ἔκβαλε αὐτόν· καλόν σε ἐστὶν μονόφθαλμον εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ δύο ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς <sup>†</sup> γέενναν <sup>48</sup> ὅπου ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται·	<sup>47</sup> καὶ ἐὰν ὁ ὀφθαλμός σου σκανδαλίζῃ σε ἔκβαλε αὐτόν· καλόν σοι ἐστὶν μονόφθαλμον εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ δύο ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντα βληθῆναι εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρὸς, <sup>48</sup> ὅπου ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται

### SYNTACTICAL ANALYSIS

When one analyzing this the expression, it comprises two clauses. The first one is ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ “where their worm does not die” and the second is τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται “the fire is not quenched.” Both of them are relative clauses which are introduced by a relative adverb and connected by conjunction καὶ “and.” However, they can be categorized as independent clause because they have subject-verb.

Another aspect that this expression shows is its article. The first clause has a definite article ὁ to agree with nominative masculine singular noun σκώληξ and the second clause has article τὸ to

<sup>15</sup> The earlier manuscript are *Codex Sinaiticus*( $\aleph$ ), *Codex Vaticanus* (B), *Codex Ephraemi* (C) and *Codex Regius* (L).

<sup>16</sup> The later manuscripts are *Codex Alexandrinus* (A), *Codex Bezae* (D), *Codex Nanianus* I (U), *Codex Cyprius*, *Latin* and *Syriac Peshita*.

agree with nominative neuter singular πῦρ. Meanwhile this expression is also preceded by an adverb ὅπου “where” which functions as conjunctive adverb to the preceding noun γένναν and also as a reference to a position in space<sup>17</sup> but “mark an indefinite and unrestricted position.”<sup>18</sup> The noun σκώληξ “worm,” is in nominative case and functions as a subject to the verb τελευτᾷ “come to an end.” However as Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida state that even though the noun σκώληξ is singular number, it “does not mean a single worm”<sup>19</sup> but it can refer to the plural worms. This argument is supported by the present of pronoun αὐτῶν which depicts that the worm is in plural number.

Thus there are two clauses are equivalent and independent.<sup>20</sup> The second clause τὸ πῦρ οὐ σβέννυται “the fire is not quenched” is an apposition to the first clause ὁ σκώληξ αὐτῶν οὐ τελευτᾷ “where their worm does not die.”

In addition the expression also has two verbs and both of them are present indicative. Robert Morris states that a verb in present tense is “a reference to what is happening at the time of the speaking or recording what is happening.”<sup>21</sup> However, analyzing the syntax of the text shows that they are not a *customary* present but *gnomic* present. A *gnomic* indicative verb describes a general statement.<sup>22</sup>

## STUDY OF THE PERTINENT WORDS

### σκώληξ “worm, maggot”

The Greek word σκώληξ appears in the New Testament only once. It appears only in Mark 9:48 in a nominative masculine singular. In Old Testament the noun σκώληξ “worm” is translated from תולעת which appears 12 times. Most of them describe worms that destroy their prey (Exo 16:20, 24; Deu 28:39; Isa 51:8). In Poetic and Wisdom literature such as Psalm, Wisdom, Job the word תולעת “worm” is used metaphorically and personifically (Psa 22:6; Pro

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<sup>17</sup> The adverb ὅπου has at least four functions. It can function as a reference to a position in space, a relative reference to a set of circumstances, a marker of cause or reason (with special reference to a set of relevant circumstances), and markers of an area of activity which bears some relation to something else. For more discussions, see Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996), 1:712, 777, 781, 816.

<sup>18</sup> Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. (New York: United Bible societies, 1996, c1989), 1:712, 777, 781, 816.

<sup>19</sup> Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, Originally Published: A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark, 1961., UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993], c1961), 304.

<sup>20</sup> An independent clause is a clause that is *not* subordinate to another clause. For more discussion of the clause syntax see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1999; 2002), 657-665.

<sup>21</sup> Robert L. Morris, *Hellenika A Beginning Greek Textbook Based on The Koine Greek of the New Testament* (Indiana: Bethel College, 2005), 30.

<sup>22</sup> For more discussion on this gnomic verb, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 2002), 523.

12:4; 24:20; Job 2:9; 7:5; 25:20). According to *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* the meaning of σκώληξ is "a worm which is specifically a grub or maggot flesh."<sup>23</sup> James Strong states it is "a species kind which preys upon dead bodies."<sup>24</sup> In Mark 9:48, the noun σκώληξ, which refers to the worm in Isaiah 66:24, describes that they are devouring their prey. As Robert G. Bratcher states:

"The rotting corpse certainly does not possess the worms—if anything it is the reverse. Accordingly, one must employ a word which clearly refers to worms feeding on dead flesh and indicate the specific relationship, e.g. 'where the worms feeding on the bodies' or 'worms eating their flesh.'"<sup>25</sup>

In addition Alan Gomes affirms that "the worms are able to live as long as there is food for them to consume. Once their food supply has been consumed, the worms eventually die."<sup>26</sup> Moreover Francis D. Nichol confirms that the undying worm is not the symbol of a soul which cannot die.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore Clark Pinnock asserts that the "worm in this figure are destroying the dead bodies, not tormenting conscious persons."<sup>28</sup>

#### τελευτᾶ "die"

The verb τελευτᾶ occurs eleven times in the New Testament, eight of them are in the gospels, two in Acts and one in Hebrew. Of the eleven times occurrences in the New Testament, most of them show that the meaning of τελευτᾶ is related to the death of people or to the end of their life in this earth, and only in Mark 9:48 which is related to the death of worm.<sup>29</sup> According to Henry George that the meaning of τελευτᾶ is to "accomplish, complete something, to die"<sup>30</sup> and Spiros Zodhiates states it can be a figurative for death.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 352.

<sup>24</sup> James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible : Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order.*, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996), G4663.

<sup>25</sup> Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, Originally Published: A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark, 1961., UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993], c1961), 304.

<sup>26</sup> Alan W. Gomes, *Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell, Part Two*, Christian Research Journal (Summer 1991), 11.

<sup>27</sup> Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 5* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978; 2002), 636.

<sup>28</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *The Conditional View, in Four Views on Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 156.

<sup>29</sup> See Matthew 2:29; 9:18; 15:4; 22:25; Mark 7:10; 9:48; Luke 7:2; John 11:39; Acts 2:29; 7:15; Hebrew 11:22.

<sup>30</sup> Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, "With a Revised Supplement, 1996.", Rev. and augm. throughout (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1996), 1771.

<sup>31</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary : New Testament*, electronic ed. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000, c1992, c1993), G5054.

The mood of the verb  $\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\nu\tau\tilde{\alpha}$  is in indicative and it is a declarative indicative where Christ uses the verb to convey a declaration. The use of negative particle  $\text{o}\tilde{\upsilon}$  with present indicative verb affirms the declaration that the worm would not die. However the use present indicative shows that it will not be occurring in the future.

### $\pi\tilde{\upsilon}\rho$ “fire”

The noun  $\pi\tilde{\upsilon}\rho$  “fire” occurs 73 times in New Testament. It has a various meaning such as literal, symbolical, figurative fire. Literal fire is the fire which burns combustible material (7:19; Luke 3:9, 9:54; 17:29; Acts 28:5). Gerhard Friedrich states that literal fire has three distinctive functions, “burning, lighting and warming”<sup>32</sup> and for man the fire has two characters. It can be a beneficent and civilizing power but also can be a terrifying and destructive force.<sup>33</sup> Symbolically, fire is used to depict the Holy Spirit and the genuineness of faith by refinement of gold that tested by fire such as in 1 Peter 1:7 and Acts 2:3 consecutively. Moreover, the fire is used figuratively to depicts God’s judgment in the future (Matt 3:10; 2 Pet 3:10). The Greek word  $\pi\tilde{\upsilon}\rho$  is equivalent to Hebrew word  $\text{עֵשׂ}$ , and occurs 351 times in Old Testament. the concept and meaning of “fire” in NT are the same as in OT. Of all usages in NT and OT, the meaning of “fire” can be draw as follows: (1) literally; as an earthly phenomenon; (2) symbolically (3) figuratively; (a) in the future, of divine judgment *place of punishment*; (b) as a destructive force; (c) of trials as a purifying force; (d) as a sign of the divine presence.<sup>34</sup>

### $\sigma\beta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\text{v}\tau\alpha\iota$ “quench”

The verb  $\sigma\beta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\text{v}\tau\alpha\iota$  appears seven times in NT; three times in Matthew, once in Mark, once in Ephesians, once in Thessalonians and once in Hebrews. Literally it means to extinguish or to quench something such as fire and lamp. It also has metaphorical meaning to “cause to cease, thwart, block.”<sup>35</sup> In addition it also has figurative meaning such as to “stifle, suppress, restrain.”<sup>36</sup> In Matt. 12:20; Heb. 11:34,  $\sigma\beta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\text{v}\tau\alpha\iota$  is used to extinguish fire. Meanwhile in Matthew 12:20 and Eph. 6:16, it means to cause to cease or to block smoldering wick and flaming arrows consecutively. In the last appears of  $\sigma\beta\acute{\epsilon}\nu\text{v}\tau\alpha\iota$  in 1 Thess. 5:19, Paul asks his readers not to not quench the Spirit.

Gary Papaioannou asserts that the voice of the verb which is in passive voice implies that the object of the verb "cannot be put out," by a third party, rather than "it will never go out

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<sup>32</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 Edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 Compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 6:929.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup>These meaning are adapted from *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* by Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 339.

<sup>35</sup>Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 347.

<sup>36</sup>Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, vol. 4, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament library (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2000), 347.

itself."<sup>37</sup> Moreover Clark Pinnock contends that by “calling fire unquenchable, the bible is saying that the fire is not quenched until the job is finished.”<sup>38</sup>

### **Study of γέννα (Gehenna)**

In the New Testament, the noun γέννα appears 12 times in NT. In Mark the word *gehenna* appears 3 times and only in chapter 9. They are in verse 43, 45 and 47, in the periscope of Jesus’ warning of causing anyone to stumble. In Matthew the word appears seven times (Ch. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33), three times in Mark (Ch. 9:43, 45, 47), once in Luke (Ch. 12:5), and once in the Epistle of James (Ch. 3:6). It does not appear in the writings of John, Paul or Peter, and it is not found in Acts, Hebrews or Jude. Thus, of the twelve occurrences in NT, the term appears eleven times in the Synoptic Gospels, and all of them are Christ’s utterances.

#### **Gehenna in Matthew**

The noun *gehenna* occurs seven times in Matthew and three times of hrem are uttered in beatitude sermon. In Matthew chapter 5: 22, 29 and 30. In v. 22, Jesus exhorts the disciple to have a higher standard of morality than the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus states that failure to have a higher standard would cause them to be guilty enough to go into the *gehenna*.

The passage of Matthew 5: 29-30 and Matthew 18:9 are parallel discourses with Mark 9:43, 45, and 47 where they are employed to describe a figurative and hyperbolic exhortation of Christ’s radical demands to “cut off” part of body as a warning of the seriousness of doing sin. However in Matthew 5, it does not have phrase “if your foot causes you to stumble” and does not quote the expression of “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” from Isaiah as Luke 9 does. In addition, another distinctive feature is, if in Matthew 5: 29-30, the focus of Jesus’ teaching is the seriousness of breaking the marital bond, in Mark 9:43, 45, 47, the focus of Jesus to warn people of being a stumble to anyone. However both of the passage warns his disciples that the unrepentant people would go to *gehenna*. In Matthew 10:28, Jesus depicts *gehenna* as a place of punishment where the body and soul will be perished or destroyed. Third *gehenna* appears in chapter 18: 9, the tone is similar to chapter 5: 29, 30. The fourth appearance of Matthew is in chapter 23: 15, 33 where Jesus condemns the hypocrite Pharisees would not escape from *gehenna*. In Matthew 23:15, 33 Jesus condemns the scribes and Pharisees who convert the gentiles to be “a son of *gehenna*” that deserve to be punished and they themselves would not be able to escape from *gehenna*. In Luke 12:5 Jesus warn his disciples not fear them who can kill their body but fear Him who can kill body and soul in *gehenna*.

#### **Gehenna in Luke**

The Greek word *gehenna* in Luke occurs only once. In Luke 12:4-5 reads, "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who after He has killed has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! The context of the passage is an encouragement for his disciples to be able to cope of their future missionary work. Luke’s use of *gehenna* is similar to Mathew 10:28. The text is Jesus’ depiction of *gehenna* as a place of punishment where the body and soul will be perished or destroyed.

#### **Gehenna in James**

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<sup>37</sup>Kim Gary Papaioannou, *Placement of Punishment in the Synoptic Gospels* (Durham: Durham University, 2004), 59. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3095/>

<sup>38</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *The Conditional View, in Four Views on Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 156.

The last occurrence of *gehenna* is in James. Like in Luke, *gehenna* in Luke occurs only once. James 3:6 reads, “And the tongue is a fire, the *very* world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of *our* life, and is set on fire by hell.” In the passage James reminds his readers the potential danger of tongue and it has destructive power similar to that of fire. He also warns that all evil are worthy for final judgment in *gehenna*.

Analyzing of the 12 *gehenna* occurrences in NT, they can be into three categories. First, warnings addressed to the disciples concerning stumbling blocks (Matt. 5:29-30; 18:8-9; Mark 9:43-48); second, warnings addressed to the disciples in relation to their personal destiny (Matt. 5:22; 10:28; Luke 12:4-5); and third, condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 23:15, 33). All of them shows that *gehenna* is a the place where God will bring retribution upon sinners.

### ***Gehenna* in Old Testament**

The word of *gehenna* is translated from *gê ben hinnôm* “the Valley of Ben Hinnom,” and then is translated into English as “hell.” Geographically, the valley of Ben Hinnom is located in southeast of Jerusalem. In Hebrew Bible the word *בְּנֵי-הִנּוֹם* “the Valley of Hinnom” appears 14 times in eleven verses. It appears four times in Joshua and in two verses; five times in Jeremiah and twice in second Chronicles. It also occurs twice in second Kings once in Nehemiah. Of the 14 times their occurrences in OT, 11 times called as “valley of the son of Hinnom” and three times as “valley of Hinnom” (Josh. 15:8; 18:16; Nehemiah 11:30). The first appearance and oldest historical reference to the valley is found in Joshua 15:8; 18:16 which describe tribal boundaries of Israel. Joshua describes that *בְּנֵי-הִנּוֹם* is part of a long list of names that designate the borders of the tribe of Judah after the conquest (Joshua 15:1-12). It was boundary between Judah and Benjamin.

Later in the history of Israel monarchy, the valley of Hinnom has been a place to sacrifice children to the god Molech by some kings of Israel. King Ahaz was one of them. In 2 Kings 16:3 reads, “But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and even made his son pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had driven out from before the sons of Israel.” In this valley Ahaz offered incense, sacrificed his children in fire, and made idols to Baal, and it “became known as a place of fire.”<sup>39</sup> Manaseh also was one of the Israel’s king who sacrificed his sons in fire in this valley. In 2 Chronicles 33:6 reads, “And he made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery, and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him *to anger*.” Thus, it can be perceived that the valley of Hinnom has been an idolatrous place in the time of some Israel’ kings reign.

Thus all of the appearances of *gehinnmon* describe the destruction of the people of unrepentant Israelites in their future. The prophecy was fulfilled in the massacre by Nebuchadnezzar when he destroyed Jerusalem and captive them into Babylonian. Because of the dead bodies unburied, they would be preyed by the wild animal (Jer. 7:33). It means that the dead bodies in *gehinnmon* does not depicts that they are tormented consciously. William Hendriksen

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<sup>39</sup>William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 10, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, Accompanying Biblical Text Is Author's Translation., New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 365.



concludes *the valley of Hinnom* in OT is simply a location.<sup>40</sup> It was located south of Jerusalem and as Merrill Tenney states that the teaching of eternal torment where the ungodly are punished forever is scarcely mentioned in OT.<sup>41</sup>

### **Gehenna in Septuagint**

In Septuagint (the earliest translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek, allegedly by seventy Jewish translators), the word γέεννα is not found. The Hebrew word גִּי כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם “valley of the son of Hinnom” was translated in various way. There are many ways the Septuagint translates the word of *ge-ben-hinnom* as presented in the table below.

**Table 2. Variant Translation of גִּי כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם in LXX**

Verse	Hebrew	LXX
Jos 15:8	גִּי כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם גִּי כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	φάραγγα Ονομ φάραγγος Ονομ
Jos 18:16	גִּי כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם גִּי כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	νάπης Ονναμ Γαιεννα
2 Ki 23:10	גִּי כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	φάραγγι υἱοῦ Εννομ
2 Ch. 28:3	גִּי כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	Γαιβενενομ
2 Ch 33:6	גִּיא כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	Γαι-βαναι-εννομ
Neh 11:30	גִּיא כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	φάραγγα Ονομ
Jer 7:31	גִּיא כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	φάραγγι υἱοῦ Εννομ
Jer 7:32	גִּיא כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	φάραγξ υἱοῦ Εννομ
Jer 19:2	גִּיא כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	πολύανδριον υἱῶν τῶν τέκνων
Jer 19:6	גִּיא כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	πολύανδριον υἱοῦ Εννομ
Jer 39:35	גִּיא כְּוֹן־הַנֶּחֱם	φάραγγι υἱοῦ Εννομ

The closest translation of *gehinnom* in Septuagint is Γαιεννα in Joshua 18:16. Here, Γαιεννα or *gehinnom* is used to depicts the tribal boundaries of Israel. It is a boundary between Judah and

<sup>40</sup>William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, vol. 10, *New Testament Commentary : Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, Accompanying Biblical Text Is Author's Translation., New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 365.

<sup>41</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 114.

Benjamin and part of a long list of names that designate the borders of the tribe of Judah after the conquest.

### **Gehenna in Inter Testamental Period**

Jewish sources in intertestamental period regarding the punishment in *gehenna*, whether the wicked would eventually be annihilated, continue to be detained or be released, are unanimous. After the Exile in Babylon, the notion of punishment after death has changed incisively.<sup>42</sup> Merrill C. Tenney contends that even though the notion of eternal punishment after death in the life of Jewish is unanimous; it emerged in the intertestamental period after the exile.<sup>43</sup> However according to Gerhard Kittel, the writers of the intertestamental period such as Philo, and Josephus do not have the term of *gehenna*.<sup>44</sup> In addition “the dead sea scroll” is also silent on this topic. According to Robert Henry Charles that “a thought of punishment by worms and fire had taken place in the intervening period developed between the time when Ben-Sira wrote his book and the grandson translated it.”<sup>45</sup>

### **The use of expression in Isa 66:24**

Most scholars<sup>46</sup> believe that the expression of “their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” in Mark 4:48 is a free quotation from Isa. 66.24. The expression was used by Christ to warn his disciples of the seriousness of sin. Those who fail to obey this warning or those unrepentant shall be cast out into *gehenna*. However, it is not like in Mark, in Isaiah 66:24 the word *gehenna* is not mentioned. The passage of Isa 66: 24 reads, “Then they shall go forth and look on the corpses of the men who have transgressed against me. For their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all mankind.”

The background of the expression in Isaiah 66 can be seen from the promise of God for Israelites after their exile. There are two messages of God in these oracles. First the positive side, where there is a declaration from God that He would not abandon His people. He assures that the righteous would be given His protection. John Braun states that in the passage, Isaiah is

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<sup>42</sup>*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vols. 5-9 Edited by Gerhard Friedrich. Vol. 10 Compiled by Ronald Pitkin., ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-c1976), 1:147.

<sup>43</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1977), 114-115.

<sup>44</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translation of: Theologisches Worterbuch Zum Neuen Testament. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995, c1985), 113.

<sup>45</sup> *Commentary on the Apocrypha of the Old Testament*, ed. Robert Henry Charles (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2004), 1:340.

<sup>46</sup>For more discussion, see Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments*, On Spine: Critical and Explanatory Commentary. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Mk 9:48; Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, Originally Published: A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark, 1961., UBS handbook series; Helps for translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993], c1961), 303; Allen Black, *Mark*, The College Press NIV commentary (Joplin, Mo.: College Press Pub. Co., 1995), Mk 9:43.

prophesying the coming of Cyrus to release Israel from Babylon.<sup>47</sup> Israelites will return and worship God in Jerusalem. Nichols affirms that Isaiah describes new heavens and a new earth would be given to Israel and fulfill the divine purpose of the restoration from captivity.<sup>48</sup> The second message is negative side. God depicts the fate of the unrighteous at the end. There would be too many dead people that they would not be buried and they would be a spectacle (v. 16).

Isaiah mentions that “the worm of the dead bodies shall not die and fire shall not be quenched” (v. 24), and the righteous would go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebel against God. Thus the passage tells that the righteous would not be looking people who tormented by the fire or by worms but they would see the dead bodies of the unbelieving people who rebelled against God. Thus contextually, one can see that there is no scene of eternal torment in Isaiah.

Douglas Hare comments on the expression that the dead bodies are punished before the righteous and has an end. He states, “There is no suggestion that these evil persons will suffer eternally; their carcasses will remain indefinitely as a reminder of their rebellion against God.”<sup>49</sup> In addition Frooms contends that both of the clauses “worm does not die and fire is not quenched” are symbol of death and there no indication that they are alive and tormented consciously forever. He states:

So long as the corpse or carcass, which is completely insensible, is gnawed by the worm, it cannot live again. If the worms never dies, there will be no possibility of life revitalizing the corpse. There are no “perpetual torments” or “endless suffering” here.<sup>50</sup>

### **Summary And Conclusion**

The expression of “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” is a direct quotation from Isaiah 66:23 and Jesus uses them to depict the destiny of the wicked people. Meanwhile, traditionally most of the Christians and scholars view the expression as notion of eternal torment in hell consciously and also used to support the doctrine of immortality of the soul. However this study shows that the notion is not supported by the context of the text. Grammatical and syntactical analysis of this research shows that even though that the employing of the indicative present in the passage does not describe an action which is occurring. The verb indicative present is a gnomic present which does not indicate limited time but rather as a general statement. It means that from grammatical of the verbs tense aspect, the expression can be applied to the past, present or future.

Moreover to find a meaning of a text cannot be found merely grammatically or syntactically. Study the context is essential to find the meaning of the meaning of the text and this study shows that the historical background the expression in Isaiah does not depicts a torment forever consciously. In addition, the study in Jeremiah also shows that there is no description of

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<sup>47</sup>John A. Braun, *Isaiah 40-66*, The People's Bible (Milwaukee, Wis.: Northwestern Pub. House, 2001), 403.

<sup>48</sup>Francis D. Nichol, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, Volume 4* (Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978; 2002), 332.

<sup>49</sup>Douglas R. A. Hare, *Mark, Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 117-118.

<sup>50</sup>Leroy Edwin Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers, vol 1*. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1966), 301.

eternal torment for the wicked people. It can be concluded that the “where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched” which is quoted by Jesus from Isaiah 66:23 does not support idea of eternal torment in *gehenna*. Biblically, in *gehenna* there is no indication that people are tormented consciously.

The study shows that the phrase “their worm does not die” means that they will not die until they have totally devoured the corps or carcasses. Meanwhile the phrase “unquenchable fire” means that no one can be put out or quench the fire until it has totally devoured what it was kindle to burn up. It does not mean that the fire will kindle forever because there is nothing in Isaiah 66.24 itself to indicate eternal torment, but the fire it shows that the fire did not kindle anymore after it has devoured the material. It can be concluded that the expression in Mark 9:48 means that it is not the process of punishment which is eternal but the It is the consequences of punishment that will be eternal.

The study shows that the notion of eternal torment in *gehenna* does not come from biblical sources but from non biblical sources such as Platonism, books from intertestamental period and some books of *Pseudepigrapha* as Enoch, Baruch, Sirach, Judith, Assumption of Moses, Sybilline Oracle and Pirkē Aboth. As many people assert that the notion of God who will condemn and torture not millions, but billions years and forever meanwhile one can live only for a short time doing the evil things before the almighty God, truly will contradicts to the character of God that He is love.

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