

UNDYING WORMS AND QUENCHLESS FIRES

And they shall go forth and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.—Isa. 66:24

It is good for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell [*Gehenna*]; where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched.—Mark 9:48. Verses 44 and 46 are omitted by old MSS. See Rev. Version.

The figure here used by the Prophet and by our Lord, represents the utter destruction of the *second death*. We say figure, because it must be evident to the surface reader even, that there are no *immortal* worms and that a fire which would burn ceaselessly is not conceivable.

The basis of fact upon which the figure rests is alluded to in our Lord's reference to Gehenna (translated *hell* in the common English versions). Gehenna was the Greek name for a valley outside Jerusalem called in Hebrew, „The valley of Hinnom.” It was the place for depositing the offal, garbage, carcasses and filth in general of the City, and in it fires of sulphur were kept burning to destroy the carcasses and thus prevent infection and pestilence.

Sometimes a carcase would lodge upon a ledge of rock and not fall into the fires and then the maggots would surely destroy it. None were permitted to quench or extinguish those fires and hence they burned until the substance was consumed.

It became customary to cast the „carcasses” [dead bodies] of criminals of certain classes into that Valley of Hinnom or Gehenna, instead of giving them decent burial. [Nothing was ever cast alive into Gehenna; the Jews were not permitted to *torture* any creature.] Thus Gehenna came to be noted and detested and dreaded as an *extreme* of punishment. It thus became a synonym for utter and hopeless *destruction*, the opinion prevailing that those decently buried would be resurrected, but that those destroyed in Gehenna were blotted out of existence forever.

With this idea already in the minds of his hearers, how appropriate that our Lord should use

Gehenna as a symbol or figure for the *second death*, the utter and final destruction of all the incorrigible; a destruction sure and detestable among the filth and offscourings of the new order of things.

Jerusalem itself was a figure or symbol of the kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem; and even its Gehenna or valley of destruction was an appropriate figure of the second death, the utter extermination of all things abominable and filthy in the close of the Millennial age.—Rev. 22:14,15.

The prophet's remarks, point us down into the future to a time when the new heavens and new earth are fully established (verse 22) under the Prince of Glory, when full knowledge and ability having come, *all transgressors* will be consigned to the second death, the antitype of Gehenna, and when only the righteous shall live to serve and obey and enjoy God's blessings. Then all such shall see the justice as well as the wisdom of the utter destruction of the incorrigible, willful enemies of right. As it is written: „They shall be an abhorrence unto all flesh.”

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— October, 1886 —