

THE THROW-AWAY PEOPLE

By

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There are over 300,000 young people in this country called “throw-away children” because they have been cast out, with no place to go. There are millions of people who feel worthless, cast-off, and rejected by society. They live in fear of the world, of the future and of eternity.

Jesus said, “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body and soul in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

The word Jesus used was “Gehenna,” which the translators have called “hell.” The same word is used by Jesus in other places where He wanted to describe the final destiny of the unredeemed (Matt. 5:22, 29, 20, 23:33, 18:9, 23:15, Mark 9:43, 45, 47 and Luke 12:5).

At one time Gehenna was the “Valley of Hinnom,” a place of intense religious devotion, a sacred place to all the Ammonites. There they met for their most meaningful rites in which they sacrificed their children to the fire-gods. The original throw-away children!

Solomon, influenced by his pagan wives, erected an altar to Molech in the same place (I Kings 11:7), and the horrible rites of the Ammonites were revived from time to time (Jer. 7:32). It was in the Valley of Hinnom that Ahaz and Manasseh made their children “pass through the fire” (I Kings 11:7), II Kings 16:32, II Chron. 28:3, 33:6).

King Josiah was so revolted by these practices that he ground up the altars and burned them on the spot, then strewed the valley with human bones, to make it off-limits to all citizens (II Kings 23:10–14, II Chron. 34:4–5).

From then on it was considered an unholy place, fit only for the garbage of the city. Even criminals, unworthy of burial, were cast into it, along with bodies of dead animals and everything else considered useless and worthless. Worms lived on the rotting flesh and fires were kept burning to consume what the worms left.

When Jesus spoke of one being cast into Gehenna, it was like saying that he was useless to God and rejected. As long as one is living, there is hope, and Christ gave beautiful demonstrations of how some, who were considered worthless, could be salvaged and transformed. In fact, we all have to be transformed, with our lives redirected to the will of the Creator, or we shall come to the day of judgment as rebels and worthless sinners, fit only to be cast out on the garbage dump to be consumed by the fire. God created us to have fellowship with Him, to reflect His image, to align our desires with His. All who refuse the Creator’s purpose, no matter how they are esteemed in the world, are of no eternal worth.

But it was not just to indicate worthlessness that Jesus drew the picture of Gehenna. The ultimate end of all that was discarded was destruction. The purpose of the fire was to burn up the garbage. We don’t burn trash to torture it or to purify it. God’s justice is not satisfied by torture, but by death. The unredeemed are not to be purified by

judgment, but to be destroyed, that all God's universe may be free of rebels and at last in harmony with God (I Cor. 15:28, II Peter 3:13).

This picture of judgment corresponds to other word-pictures in both Old and New Testaments. For example, Jude says that Sodom and Gommorah were destroyed by an "eternal fire" which is an example of the day of judgment (Jude 7). That fire completely rid the earth of the wicked cities.

John the Baptist warned that Christ would clean the threshing floor, like a farmer used to do, gathering up the wheat, but burning up the chaff (Matt. 3:12). John writes of all the unsaved being cast into a "lake of fire" where they would meet the second and final death (Rev. 20:14-15).

Man can kill only temporarily. We are not to fear such death, for the spirit returns to God, and in the resurrection, body and spirit live again to make a whole person. It is then that the final destiny is realized. God Who created man is also able to destroy him. "Fear him," Jesus said, "Who is able to destroy both body and soul in Gehenna." Not only is God **able** to destroy the whole person but He promises **to do so** to those who reject Him and will not receive forgiveness which He offers in Christ.

Gehenna, "where the worm does not!" In the original Greek, the word is "maggot." The life of a maggot is short, but taken as a whole, the maggots never died out in Gehenna; they were always feeding on the garbage. Gehenna, "where the fire is not quenched!" No one attempted to extinguish the fires in Gehenna, they were needed to consume the garbage.

Peter writes that one day the earth will be God's great garbage dump, where all the moral and spiritual trash of the world will be burned up. On that day the elements will melt and the heavens will pass away, and the earth and everything in it will be burned up, including all the ungodly (II Peter 3:7-12).

Gehenna (usually translated "hell" in English Bibles), the final destiny of the unredeemed, does not mean eternal dying, but eternal death. It is not for eternal punishing, but for punishment that stands for eternity. It is not merely loss of comfort and peace and blessing, but loss of life. Life is promised **ONLY** to those who are in Christ.

Those who fear God and commit their lives to Him will be taken out of this world (I Thess. 4:13-18) before the final fire of destruction, because Christ has already undergone death for Christians. He was cast out of the city, outside the fellowship of God and put to death for our sin, that we might be fit for His presence in glory.

God promised a "new earth" for the redeemed, the Paradise of God, "where righteousness will dwell," and we can depend on His purpose being accomplished. He is able to take one whose life seems only garbage and transform that life into His very image!

Don't join the throw-away people. Stay out of Gehenna.

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