

HINNOM VALLEY

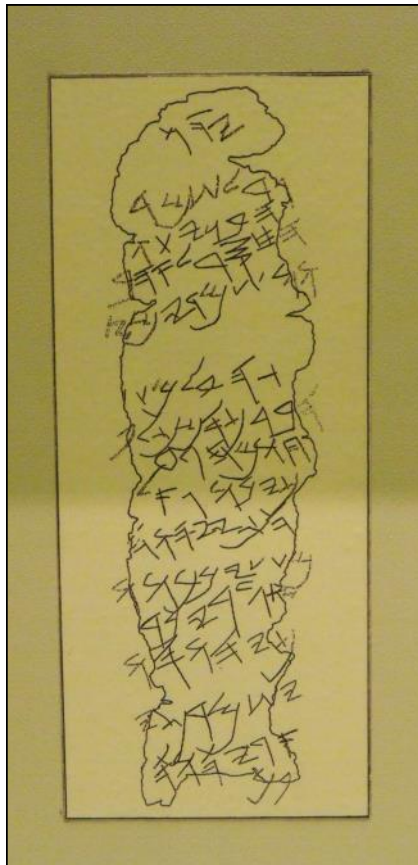
The Valley of Hinnom is on the south side of Jerusalem. It was also known as the Valley of Ben Hinnom, being named after the sons of Hinnom. During the period of the Divided Kingdom, it was known as a place of child sacrifice—even though this practice was condemned in the law of Moses (Lev. 18:21; 20:2; Deut. 12:31). The Lord’s people sacrificed their own children to the false god Molech (2 Chron. 28:3; 33:6; Jer. 32:35). During his reforms, Josiah desecrated the Valley of Hinnom so no one would “sacrifice his son or daughter in the fire” any longer (2 Kings 23:10). Later, Jeremiah prophesied that the site would become “the valley of Slaughter”; the Babylonians would throw the dead bodies of the Judeans there when they conquered Jerusalem (Jer. 7:31-33; 19:6).

The Valley of Hinnom later became a filthy garbage dump, known for its perpetual fires and stench. During the Intertestamental period, this site began to be used as a symbol for fiery, eternal punishment. It was referred to in Greek as *gehenna*, which is translated “hell” in English. Almost all of the occurrences of the word “hell” (*gehenna*) in the New Testament are found on the lips of Jesus (Mt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mk. 9:43, 45, 47; Lk. 12:5; 16:23; see Jas. 3:6); he used it to warn people of the consequences of their sins and to show them their need to repent and follow him wholeheartedly, trusting in his salvation.

At least two interesting points can be made about the Valley of Hinnom. First, the “potter’s field” where Judas hung himself (Mt. 27:7; Acts 1:18-19) is traditionally located at the southeast end of the valley, near the Monastery of St. Onuphrius. It would have likely been located outside “the Potsherd Gate” (Jer. 19:2). Second, two small silver amulets were discovered in a burial cave across from the valley in 1979. They measure approximately 4 by 1 inches and 1.5 by .5 inches. These amulets have part of the Priestly Blessing (Num. 6:24-26) engraved on them. The pottery found with them suggests that the amulets are from about 600 B.C. If this dating is correct, they are evidence against the false documentary hypothesis (JEDP theory), which claims that the P (Priestly) source was from the Post-exilic period (after 538 B.C.).

Today, the Hinnom Valley is covered with green grass and trees, and it looks like a park. If one were unaware of the biblical background, he would never associate it with a place of torment. A parallel can be drawn here with how modern people have minimized the impact of the biblical teaching about hell. Some make jokes about hell, and they misuse the word “hell” as a byword. A few flippantly tell others to go there—as if they had the power to assign such a sentence! The result of all this is that people today do not take hell very seriously. Some even substitute annihilation for hell; they try to remove this fiery torment from the picture

altogether. Nevertheless, Jesus warned about it! Let us consider it a reality to avoid at all costs, and let us warn others so they do not go there either!



Large Silver Amulet Inscribed in Hebrew with Reconstruction
7th-6th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

Small Silver Amulet
7th-6th Century B.C.
(Israel Museum, Jerusalem)

When these amulets were discovered, they were rolled into tiny scrolls in a tomb on the shoulder of Hinnom Valley. They had been inscribed with a thin, sharp stylus, making the reading of the inscriptions difficult. The lower portion of the scrolls quote from Numbers 6:24-26, the Priestly Blessing. These artifacts are touted as the oldest portions of Scripture that have been found.

Large Amulet. “[. . .] YHW[H . . .] the grea[t . . . who keeps] the covenant and [g]raciousness toward those who love [him] and those who keep [his commandments . . .] the eternal [. . .] [the?] blessing more than any [sna]re and more than evil. For redemption is in him. For YHWH is our restorer [and] rock. May YHWH bles[s] you and [may he] keep you. [May] YHWH make [his face] shine. . . .”

Small Amulet. [For so-and-so, the son/daughter of . . .]h/hu. May h[e]/sh[e] be blessed by YHWH, the warrior and the rebuker of [evil]: May YHWH bless you, keep you. May YHWH make his face shine upon you and grant you p[ea]ce.”