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Educating Early Christians through the Rhetoric of Hell: 'Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth' as 'Paideia' in Matthew and the Early Church

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The History of Hellish Rhetoric

I. Why Hell?: The Historical Relevance of the Rhetoric of Eternal Punishment

“And just as the degrees of blessedness in Heaven are measured in accordance with the degrees of charity and grace in life, so the degrees of punishment in hell are measured according to the degree of crime in this life.” (Malleus Maleficarum, Question 15)

In the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a fifteenth-century treatise that was intended to justify the prosecution of witches, the eternal stakes of practicing witchcraft are articulated in a way that mirrors the ancient Christian understanding of heaven and hell.¹ Within the context of these public hearings, the reference to the threat of otherworldly torment was utilized as a motivation for right behavior and doctrinal compliance in this world. In this interpretation of the afterlife, the rewards and punishments after death are measured in degrees so that the punishment in hell fits the crime on earth, expressing the ancient concept of *lex talionis*.² Aided by the imagery from Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, ancient notions of hell were widely used in medieval and early modern Europe.³ This hellish rhetoric has had a profound legacy on the modern world, shaping not only contemporary Christian ideas

¹ See Christopher S. Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

² The term *lex talionis* is used to refer to a variety of forms of retributive justice in which the punishment somehow “fits” the offense. For further literature on the topic see Chapter 7, n. 54.

³ For a more thorough history of the rhetoric of hell in early modern Europe see Piero Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991). For a discussion of the specific ways in which the *Apocalypse of Paul* is interpreted in medieval fantastic literature, see Tamás Adamik, “The *Apocalypse of Paul* and Fantastic Literature,” in *The Visio Pauli and the Gnostic Apocalypse of Paul* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer and István Czachesz; Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 144–57.

about the afterlife and divine justice, but also secular notions of criminal justice.⁴

Although early modern Christians and medieval Christians like Dante had a critical role in the transmission and interpretation of this rhetoric, they were not the first Christians to use the afterlife as a persuasive tool. The language of damnation appears in the New Testament and the picture of eternal torment is expanded in other early Christian literature, most notably the early Christian apocalypses. When modern readers encounter these texts of torment, the most commonly asked question is “does hell exist?” Even among scholars of the early twentieth century there was a temptation to focus on whether Matthew’s discussion of the “outer darkness” belongs to the words of the historical Jesus, or if the myth of the redeemer’s descent to Hades belongs to the central message of the early Church.⁵ While these questions are certainly of importance for the understanding of the historical Jesus, or for doctrinal matters, they are post-enlightenment questions that are posed to ancient texts. These questions probably would not have occurred to the ancient audiences who heard Matthew or the early Christians who preserved the *Apocalypse of Peter* and read it on a regular basis. Since the concept of “other worlds” beyond the present physical world would fit well within the realm of the “possible,” the most pressing questions for the ancient audience would be “who is in hell?,” “why are they there?,” or “what happens there?” For early Christians, then, the descriptive details were the salient features of otherworldly punishment, which conveyed a message about how to live in this world.⁶

⁴ For instance, the concept that future punishment could act as a “deterrent” for certain behaviors plays a major role in the United States criminal justice system.

⁵ See, for examples, Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus* (New York: Abingdom, 1970), 60–68; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2007), 1: 14–15; repr. of *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951-55).

⁶ This distinction is not simply based upon assumptions about preenlightenment thought, but is based in the rhetorical theory of the ancient world. See Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.2.30, who asserts that “truth” is not as important for the rhetorical effect of imagery as is “verisimilitude.” For fuller discussion of this idea and its implications for our study, see Chapter 3, p. 54-56.

Simply observing that hell functioned rhetorically in order to educate readers in an ancient context is only the starting point for our inquiry. We also need to clarify what kind of education these depictions of hell provided, why hell appealed to ancient authors as a pedagogical tool, and what effects the rhetoric of damnation was expected to have upon ancient audiences. Our primary sources for answering these questions include Jewish, Greek, and Roman depictions of the abode of the dead, since early Christian depictions of hell were crafted by authors who were conversant in the discourses of a rapidly changing cultural milieu. In this sense, our study is built upon the work of early twentieth-century scholars who noted that the Christian interest in hell was gleaned from surrounding cultures and was not part of the “kerygma” of the early church.⁷ In another sense, we are departing from that line of thinking, not primarily excavating the text in order to find the sediment of specific myths or ideas about the afterlife in early Christian hell. We will demonstrate that whether or not hell contains the “kernel” of the Christian message, it was viewed by ancient Christians as a useful vehicle for communicating the message. As a vehicle for educating early Christians, a better understanding of the rhetoric of eternal punishment can provide invaluable data about the attempts of early Christians to establish, fortify, and expand their fledgling communities.

II. Hell and the History of Religions

Several broader studies have been conducted which trace the origins of the early Christian idea of hell, including monographs by Alan Bernstein, Jan Bremmer, Georges Minois, Alan Segal, and Herbert Vorgrimler.⁸ To some extent, these works are de-

⁷ See Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 65-66, in which he argues that the New Testament passages that refer to hell are “echoes” of the myth of the redeemer’s struggle with the demons of the underworld, “a myth which originally has nothing to do with the person of Jesus but only later has been adapted to him.” Similarly, Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1:14-15, contends that the threat of “hell-fire” in the synoptic gospels is “only a primitive expression for the idea that in what a man does his own real being is at stake — that self which he not already is, but is to become.”

⁸ Georges Minois, *Histoire des Enfers* (Paris: Fayard, 1991); Alan E. Bernstein, *The Formation of Hell: Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Herbert Vorgrimler,

pendent upon the body of literature that treats the afterlife, the abode of the dead, and the cult of the dead within contemporaneous religious and cultural contexts. Greek and Roman ideas about the descents to Hades have been examined in detail, clarifying the relationship between the descents to Hades and ancient Orphism, and elucidating the way in which these descents to Hades operated in different literary contexts.⁹ Several of the studies on the afterlife within ancient Judaism have focused upon the range of meaning of the various terms for the abode of the dead in the Hebrew Bible and their semantic and cultural antecedents,¹⁰ or have explored the specific cultic practices surrounding death.¹¹ More recently Hebrew Bible scholars have engaged broader thematic questions about the way in which death,

Geschichte der Hölle (München: W. Fink, 1993); Jan N. Bremmer, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife: The 1995 Read-Tuckwell Lectures at the University of Bristol* (New York: Routledge, 2002); Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

⁹ Eduard Norden, "Die Petrusapokalypse und ihre antiken Vorbilder," in *Kleine Schriften zum klassischen Altertum* (ed. Eduard Norden; 1893; repr., Berlin: de Gruyter, 1966), 218–33; Fritz Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1974); Raymond J. Clark, *Catabasis: Vergil and the Wisdom-Tradition* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1979); Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, "Reading" *Greek Death: To the End of the Classical Period* (Oxford: Clarendon Press Press, 1995); Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (2d ed.; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Radcliffe G. Edmonds, *Myths of the Underworld Journey in Plato, Aristophanes, and the "Orphic" Gold Tablets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Miguel Herrero de Jáuregui, *Orphism and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010); Katerina Oikonomopoulou, "Journeying the Underworld of Lucian's *Cataplus*," in *Education and Representations of the Beyond in Later Antiquity* (ed. A. Lefteratou, K. Stamatopoulos, and I. Tanaseanu-Döbler; Göttingen, Forthcoming).

¹⁰ Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969); Ruth Rosenberg, "The Concept of Biblical Sheol Within the Context of ANE Beliefs." (Ph.D. diss.: Harvard University, 1980); Philip Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002).

¹¹ Herbert C. Brichto, "Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife – A Biblical Complex," *HUCA* 44 (1973): 1–54; Marvin Pope, "The Cult of the Dead at Ugarit," in *Ugaritic in Retrospect: Fifty Years of Ugarit and Ugaritic* (ed. G. D. Young; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1981), 159–79; George C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment* (JSOT Supp. 43; Sheffield: JSOT, 1985); Klaas Spronk, *Beatific Afterlife in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Kevelaar: Butzon & Bercker, 1986); Theodore J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit* (HSM 39; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989); Stephen L. Cook, "Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel," *Religion Compass* 1 (2007): 1–24.

burial, and the afterlife were depicted in different literary and historical contexts.¹² In addition to the Hebrew Bible notions of the abode of the dead, the extra-biblical materials are also invaluable sources for understanding ideas about the afterlife within ancient Judaism, specifically the Dead Sea Scrolls and Jewish apocalyptic literature.¹³

Scholarly inquiry regarding the early Christian conception of hell has been focused on the early Christian apocalypses, since they are the earliest sources in which the topic of hell receives significant attention. Following the discovery of the Akhmim fragment (winter 1886-87), Albrecht Dieterich was one of the first scholars to show concerted interest in the early Christian apocalypses and the topic of hell.¹⁴ Dieterich traced a genetic relationship between Greek literature on the afterlife and the *Apocalypse of Peter*.¹⁵ In particular, he concluded that the Egyptian Christian community behind the Akhmim fragment relied upon Orphic-Pythagorean traditions for its understanding of heaven and hell.¹⁶ As later scholars have argued,¹⁷ the major

¹² Jon D. Levenson, *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel: The Ultimate Victory of the God of Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Bryan Cribb, *Speaking on the Brink of Sheol* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2009); Shaul Bar, *I Deal Death and Give Life* (Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2010); Christopher B. Hays, *Death in the Iron Age II and in First Isaiah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Robert Williamson Jr., “Death and Symbolic Immortality in Second Temple Wisdom Instructions” (Ph.D. diss.: Emory University, 2011).

¹³ Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Kelley Coblentz Bautch, *A Study of the Geography of 1 Enoch 17–19: “No One Has Seen What I Have Seen”* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); John J. Collins, “The Otherworld in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Other Worlds and their Relation to this World: Early Jewish and Ancient Christian Traditions* (ed. Tobias Nicklas et al.; Boston: Brill, 2010), 95–116.

¹⁴ Although Dieterich’s work was foundational for twentieth-century scholarship, several others preceded him. Dieterich’s work was preceded by a few editions of the text and an article by Eduard Norden, which appeared just a few months before Dieterich’s monograph. See Norden, “Die Petrusapokalypse,” 218–33.

¹⁵ Dieterich began his work by dealing more broadly with Greek popular belief in the afterlife. Albrecht Dieterich, *Nekyia: Beiträge zur Erklärung der neuentdeckten Petrusapokalypse* (1893, 1913; repr., Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1969), 19–45.

¹⁶ Dieterich, *Nekyia*, 225–32. Leading up to this conclusion Dieterich discusses the Eleusinian and Orphic mysteries and in particular the Orphic descents to Hades.

weakness of Dieterich's work was the chapter in which he claims that Jewish apocalyptic literature did not influence the *Apocalypse of Peter*.¹⁸ That critique aside, Dieterich's work paved the way for the comparative study of Greek and Roman views of the afterlife and those of early Christians. Dieterich's case for a direct relationship between the concept of Hades in the Greek and Roman *nekylia* traditions and early Christianity has been strengthened by later scholars, especially as new evidence has come to light. Our work builds upon the work of this group of scholars, arguing not only for inherited imagery, but also for a shared rhetorical orientation between the Greek and Latin depictions of Hades and early Christian understandings of hell.

Martha Himmelfarb's *Tours of Hell* argues against Albrecht Dieterich, contending that the tours of hell have significant Jewish antecedents and are not primarily analogous with OrphicPythagorean literature.¹⁹ Instead, Himmelfarb isolates the "demonstrative explanation" as a key form in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and in the tours of hell, found in many tour apocalypses and originating in the Book of the Watchers.²⁰ Himmelfarb's work not only provides a needed analysis of the relevant Jewish apocalypses and their antecedents, but her careful charting of the historical relationships between the relevant apocalyptic texts is also axiomatic for others who study these texts.²¹ However, in her examination of the Jewish parallels as a corrective to Dieterich, Himmelfarb leaves out the significant Greek and Latin materials (apart from a few summaries).²² While the "demonstrative explanation" and the tour format are not unique to the ancient Jewish depictions of the afterlife,²³ Himmelfarb's emphasis on the Jewish apocalypses provides a fuller picture of

¹⁷ Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 41–45; Jan N. Bremmer, "The Apocalypse of Peter: Greek or Jewish?," in *The Apocalypse of Peter* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer and István Czachesz; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 5–7.

¹⁸ See Dieterich, *Nekylia*, 214–24.

¹⁹ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 41–45. Dieterich's own work was likely influenced by the tendency of the early twentieth-century "history of religions" school to preference "pagan" religions and texts over and against Jewish themes.

²⁰ Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 45–56.

²¹ See Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell*, 133, 171, for graphic summaries of her conclusions.

²² See the critiques of Himmelfarb's work in Richard Bauckham, "Early Jewish Visions of Hell," in *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 50–52; Bremmer, "The Apocalypse of Peter: Greek or Jewish?," 6–7.

²³ For a discussion of the form of the "tour" see chapter 3.

the various streams of tradition that influenced early Christian conceptions of eternal punishment. Furthermore, her work on the format and function of the apocalyptic “tours” infuses new life into the conversation, shifting our focus away from literary dependence toward the mode of presentation of these vivid scenes of torment and their effects on ancient audiences.

After the publication of Himmelfarb’s work, scholarship has moderated between her claims and the earlier assertions of Dieterich. For instance, Richard Bauckham notes that Himmelfarb has “probably played down too much the extent to which this development was indebted to Greek ideas.”²⁴ Instead Bauckham rightly corrects this vision with regard to the *Apocalypse of Peter*:

It is important to be clear on two points and the difference between them: (1) that the immediate sources of the *Apocalypse of Peter*’s description of the punishments in hell were certainly in Jewish apocalyptic; but also (2) that these Jewish apocalyptic traditions may very well include images and ideas which ultimately derive from Greek *katabasis* literature.²⁵

On the whole, Bauckham intends “to support and make more precise the connexion she [Himmelfarb] establishes between the tours of hell and the broader tradition of tour apocalypses.”²⁶ Bauckham is also trying to close the gap that Himmelfarb leaves between the cosmic tours that do not include tours of hell (i.e. *I Enoch*) and apocalypses exclusively concerned with the fate of the dead (i.e. *Apocalypse of Peter*).²⁷ With respect to these aims, Bauckham’s work makes helpful advances toward a fuller picture of the concept of hell in antiquity. For the present study, perhaps the most relevant contribution that Bauckham makes is his assumption that hell functions pedagogically, although he does not expound upon it.²⁸

²⁴ Richard Bauckham, “The Apocalypse of Peter: A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kokhba,” in *The Fate of the Dead: Studies in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden Brill, 1998), 207.

²⁵ Bauckham, “Apocalypse of Peter,” 207.

²⁶ Bauckham, “Early Jewish Visions of Hell,” 51.

²⁷ Bauckham, “Early Jewish Visions of Hell,” 51.

²⁸ While Bauckham suspects that hell functioned pedagogically in antiquity, he does not elaborate upon this assumption, nor does he provide an understanding of ancient pedagogy to confirm this suspicion: “Hell, we must suppose, tended increasingly to crowd paradise out of our tradition both because it was thought pedagogically more effective to warn people with pictures of punishment in hell than to attract them with pictures of reward in heaven.” See Bauckham, “Visiting the Places of the Dead in the Extra-Canonical

III. Beyond Genesis: Ideology, Fluidity, and the History of Interpretation

Like Bauckham, Jan Bremmer has sought to revive the connection between the Greek and Latin descents to Hades, and the Jewish and Christian apocalypses, but with a particular focus upon the “Orphic-Pythagorean ideas about the underworld”:

The conclusions of Bauckham seem in general unassailable. Yet while happily conceding his main points, we are still faced with the problem raised by Dieterich as to whether the ApPt stands in the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition.... A balanced view about Dieterich’s ideas still remains a desideratum.²⁹

In particular, Bremmer focuses upon “recent insights” into ancient Orphism, which he believes strengthen Dieterich’s basic hypothesis.³⁰ In more recent essays Bremmer revises this hypothesis, suggesting that the lines of influence were multidirectional. According to his most recent hypothesis Bremmer concludes that the Jewish Sibylline Oracles influenced Virgil, and in turn, some Jews were inspired by the Orphic tradition.³¹ Bremmer’s hypothesis betrays his willingness to think of the exchange of ideas in antiquity as a fluid process in which different groups adopted different components of the concept of hell to suit their own purposes, rather than imposing a linear model of

Apocalypses,” in *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (ed. Richard Bauckham; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 94.

²⁹ Jan N. Bremmer, “Apocalypse of Peter: Greek or Jewish?,” 7–8. See Chapter 3, for a discussion of Radcliffe Edmonds, who qualifies the certitude with which we can identify an “Orphic-Pythagorean” tradition in the Greek and Latin descents.

³⁰ For summary of the evidence see Bremmer, “Apocalypse of Peter: Greek or Jewish?,” 7–14.

³¹ See Jan N. Bremmer, “Orphic, Roman, Jewish and Christian Tours of Hell: Observations on the *Apocalypse of Peter*,” in *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World: Early Jewish and Ancient Christian Traditions* (ed. Tobias Nicklas et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 318–21; Jan N. Bremmer, “Tours of Hell: Greek, Roman, Jewish and Early Christian,” in *Topographie des Jenseits: Studien zur Geschichte des Todes in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike* (ed. Walter Ameling; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2011), 13–34. As Tobias Nicklas rightly cautions, however, the various cultural influences on our text do not necessitate complex theories regarding the text’s provenance (such as the one Bremmer has recently suggested). See Tobias Nicklas, “‘Insider’ und ‘Outsider’: Überlegungen zum historischen Kontext der Darstellung ‘jenseitiger Orte’ in der Offenbarung des Petrus,” in *Topographie des Jenseits: Studien zur Geschichte des Todes in Kaiserzeit und Spätantike* (ed. Walter Ameling; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2011), 35–48.

“development” upon the evidence.³² In addition to acknowledging that there are different kinds of “influence” at play in the ancient world, Bremmer’s work also demonstrates that the matter of the influence of Greek and Latin literature upon the Jewish apocalypses is not a “yes or no” question. In this regard Bremmer’s arguments have paved the way for our own, in which we will contend that the Jewish and Christian apocalypses utilize the Greek and Latin rhetoric of visual description (*ekphrasis, enargeia*) and the form of the descriptive tour (*perigeisis*), but also utilize imagery that would appeal to their unique audiences.

These attempts to moderate between Dieterich and Himmelfarb clarify the relationships between the Jewish, Greek, Roman, and early Christian texts, and ultimately illuminate the origins of the earliest conceptions of Christian hell. Since our own study is not only concerned with the genesis of this idea, but also the way in which hell was operative for early Christians, the most germane lines of inquiry are those that take the work of Bauckham and Bremmer as their starting point.³³ These studies ask different sets of questions, considering the geographic provenance, circulation, and influence of the early Christian apocalypses themselves.³⁴ For instance, Tobias Nicklas has examined the way in which *Apoc. Pet.* 4 represents a distinctive view on “bodily resurrection,” deftly pointing to the ways in

³² For an excellent discussion of the dangers of imposing philosophical models of “development” upon the history of thought, see Candida R. Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 6–8.

³³ Bauckham and Bremmer also fit into this group of more recent scholarship themselves, working on questions of reception history. See, for example, Richard Bauckham, “Augustine, the ‘Compassionate’ Christians, and the Apocalypse of Peter,” in *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Boston: Brill, 1998), 149–59, which details Augustine’s reception of the *Apocalypse of Peter*. See also, Jan. N. Bremmer, “Orphic, Roman, Jewish and Christian Tours of Hell,” 322, in which he concludes that “In the end, every Apocalypse has to be looked at as the product of a tradition that has been appropriated in a particular time and place.”

³⁴ See, for example, Attila Jakab, “The Reception of the *Apocalypse of Peter* in Ancient Christianity,” in *The Apocalypse of Peter* (ed. Jan N. Bremmer and István Czachesz; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 174–86; Kirsti Barrett Copeland, “‘The Holy Conquest’: Competition for the Best Afterlife in the *Apocalypse of Paul* and Late Antique Egypt,” in *Other Worlds and Their Relation to This World: Early Jewish and Ancient Christian Traditions* (ed. Tobias Nicklas et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2010); Tobias Nicklas, “Resurrection-Judgment-Punishment: *Apocalypse of Peter* 4,” in *Resurrection from the Dead: Biblical Traditions in Dialogue* (ed. Geert Van Oyen and T. Shepherd; BETL; Leuven: Peeters, Forthcoming), 457–70.

which the *Apocalypse of Peter* interprets other traditions and provides an important witness to the concept of an “eschatological bodily resurrection.”³⁵ In endeavors like this one, the historian is able to look both backwards and forwards and thereby cultivates an understanding of the subtle changes in both the form and function of a concept over time. In this spirit, the history of interpretation and the history of human thought are ever on the horizon within this book, beckoning us to be mindful of the ways in which the communities that produced and preserved our texts were carefully cultivating each of the distinctive iterations of hell’s horrors. Thus, the work of this book is not only to demonstrate that there was some continuity in the ways in which hell functioned pedagogically in antiquity, but also to characterize the innovations in pedagogical methods or content in each text.

IV. A Word about Terminology for Eternal Punishment

Since we are interested in the way that the language of “hell” functions, we will be attentive not only to the various terms used to describe each instance of otherworldly discourse, but also to the relationship between these terms and their literary and historical contexts. Although the goal of this study is to determine how the concept of hell functioned within early Christianity, our historical investigation will also include texts in which there is no concept of hell at all, or a seed of the idea at most. In some cases, the lexical distinctions that are made in an individual text will suffice (Gehenna, Sheol, Hades, etc.). More frequently, however, the linguistic terms themselves will fall short of describing the way that the concepts functioned in their ancient environs, and we will use other descriptors instead (abode of the dead, judgment, eternal punishment etc.).

³⁵ Nicklas, “Resurrection-Judgment-Punishment.” Nicklas demonstrates that in the case of *Apoc. Pet.* 4, the resurrection has nothing to do with salvation, but is an occasion for God’s judgment.

In places where we are discussing the development of the idea or more than one concept we may use the word “hell” in order to gesture toward the broader constellation of ideas under consideration. This use of the term “hell” will be particularly important as we move through the early Christian materials, in which the conceptual and lexical distinctions between different depictions of the otherworld begin to be blurred, subsumed, and transformed into the early Christian concept of hell.³⁶

V. Plan of the Book

This book will proceed thematically, grouping the sources, first, according to their rhetorical orientation and cultural milieu. As a result, we will follow only a rough chronology, beginning with the earliest sources (Hebrew Bible) and ending with later sources (early Christian apocalypses and church fathers). Along the way, however, some of the texts will be out of order chronologically (discussing Lucian before *1 Enoch*, for example), in order to compare the rhetorical function of “hell” across texts of the same genre or cultural heritage.

Chapter 2 begins our discussion by examining the concept of the abode of the dead within the Hebrew Bible. This chapter introduces the numerous terms that refer to the abode of the dead in the Hebrew Bible, as well as the diverse ways that the concept was employed rhetorically. In addition to simply describing the conditions after death, the abode of the dead is used in the Hebrew Bible as vivid imagery, as a symbol of divine judgment, or as a tool for moral formation. These different rhetorical uses of the abode of the dead in the Hebrew Bible provided a broad range of images and concepts, which facilitated the early Christian use of hell as an educational tool.

Chapter 3 examines the Greek and Roman sources, using the concepts of *paideia*, and the rhetoric of visual description in order to illuminate the rhetorical function of Hades. This chapter begins with a broader discussion of *paideia*, and then evaluates the extent to which Greek and Latin descriptions of Hades were

³⁶ See Chapter 6, p. 140–144, for a discussion of the way in which Matthew’s alternating use of the terms Gehenna and Hades indicates the slippage occurring between the terms, and the incipient notion of “hell” that emerges out of Matthew’s use of diverse terminology to depict eternal punishment.

used in service of this program of education. First, we will describe the concept of *paideia* in detail, describing its role in the development and maintenance of Greek and Roman cultural and ethical ideals. We will then use the school handbooks and the Progymnasmata in order to demonstrate that Greek and Roman “students” were reading texts that included visual descriptions of Hades, and the effect that this visual rhetoric was intended to have upon its audiences. This discussion will conclude with an evaluation of the Greek and Latin depictions of Hades, arguing that these texts employed the rhetoric of visual description in order to “emotionally move” readers to engage in specific behaviors or a particular kind of involvement in the *polis*.

Chapter 4 treats the depictions of the underworld that are found in the Jewish apocalypses. This chapter explores the parallels between the tours of the underworld in the apocalypses and the rhetoric of the Greek and Latin journeys to Hades. The purpose of this comparison is not to demonstrate literary dependence, but to acknowledge the ways in which the rhetoric of description in the apocalypses overlaps with that of the Greek and Latin texts we have surveyed. We will begin with a discussion of the “tour” genre in the Jewish apocalypses and the date and provenance of each text under consideration. Then, we will evaluate the way in which these tours use the rhetoric of visual description, similar to that of the Greek and Latin texts, but with distinctive pedagogical outcomes.

Chapter 5 begins our study of the early Christian materials, surveying the depictions of eternal punishment in the New Testament. This chapter will treat the texts that mention eternal punishment only a few times, or in a cursory fashion. This chapter will demonstrate that the rhetoric of visual description is present in the depictions of eternal punishment found in Mark, Luke, James, 2 Peter, and Revelation, but is used much less frequently than in Matthew. What is more, these visual descriptions of “hell” function pedagogically in a much more limited sense than in Matthew and later Christian texts, drawing primarily from the tradition of the “Two Ways” that we saw at work in the Hebrew Bible descriptions of the abode of the dead.

Chapter 6 deals with the depictions of eschatological judgment and eternal punishment that are found throughout the Gospel of Matthew. This chapter will begin with the emphasis on teaching in Matthew, demonstrating that Matthew was particularly interested in educating early Christians in service of the formation of the fledgling *ecclesia*. Next, we discuss the

prominent role of eschatological judgment in Matthew, emphasizing the way in which Matthew uses eschatology in service of his particular pedagogical aims. Finally, we will argue that Matthew's depictions of eternal punishment function pedagogically, combining the Greek and Roman rhetoric of visual description, and the imagery of the abode of the dead from Jewish, Greek, and Roman texts. At this nexus of ecclesial development, eschatology and eternal punishment, the earliest depiction of Christian hell was born, and through later interpretations of Matthew this rhetoric of eternal punishment would dominate the way that early Christians conceived of hell.

Chapter 7 demonstrates the way in which the New Testament depictions of eternal punishment were interpreted and expanded in the early Christian apocalypses and the church fathers. Our analysis of the early Christian apocalypses will note the predominance of the Matthean imagery in these graphic depictions of hell, and examine the ways in which the apocalyptic authors expand and enliven Matthew's conception of the "outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." In the early Christian apocalypses the rhetoric of description is more detailed and vivid, bringing audiences face to face with specific sinners and their gruesome punishments. Mirroring the rhetoric of visual description from the Greek and Roman tours of Hades, as well as the tour format itself, the apocalypses provide a more comprehensive behavioral model than what was merely suggested in the New Testament. Finally, our brief discussion of the rhetorical function of hell in the church fathers demonstrates that hell was also used as a part of early Christian *paideia* outside of the apocalypses.

Chapter 8 summarizes our findings and draws conclusions regarding the significance of this study to the history of early Christianity. We will also briefly reflect upon the ways in which the concept of hell as pedagogy has been employed in our own world, often without regard for the mismatch between the ancient context and our own.