



Huckleberry Finn Explains Hell to Colonel Grangerford



by Martin Zender

Huckleberry Finn: Well, it's a fine thing for us to come together on the Good Book this way. I reckon I'm ready, if you are. Colonel, how does your happy countenance come to hang so low?

Colonel: Huck, have you ever looked at them verses from Mark, chapter nine and Matthew, chapter five on how Jesus said that it's better to cut off your hand and lose an eye than get tossed into hell, where the fire don't get quenched and the worm don't die? Me and Joe Shepherdson, we discussed it out at his place, but we can't make it rhyme with what you've been sayin' about Jesus bein' greater'n Adam.

Huck: All I know, Colonel, is you got to have a concordance. That's a big, thick book that tells how many times a word shows up in the Bible and how the transmutators come about transmutatin' it how they did. We all know the Bible warn't done up in English. Now there's a lot o' trouble, turning one tongue into another. If the lighting ain't right, or your eyes are twitchin' and you ain't had your coffee, or the King says he'll whip your hide and kick your dog if'n you don't tell it like he says, you can get twisted around on it.

Colonel: You ain't saying God's Word ain't inspired, are you, Huck?

Huck: Of course it's inspired. When God wrote it, *He* knowed what He's talkin' about. But them transmutators don't always know, and you have to check up on 'em to see how they brung it up. It's like at the bank. You and Joe ain't gonna let old Gertie count your money without counting it yourself, are you?

Colonel: Aw, come on, Huck. You know we ain't.

Huck: That's just what I'm saying, Colonel! It's the same ball o' wax with them transmutators. You have to check up on 'em. They don't always get it right. They just ordinary folk, I don't care how shiny their pantaloons is. A concordance tells how they done it—or maybe how they *ain't* done it.



COL. AMBROSE GRANGER FORD, 1882

Colonel: Well, Joe's real good with the Bible, and he has one o' them concordances, and Bertha—that's Joe's wife—she helped us look the word up. It said in the concordance (Strong's, page 478. Young's, pages 474-75) that the word Jesus used there was "Gehenna."

Huck: Now we're looking under the possum's tail! Jesus never did say "hell," and I'll sell the farm on it, because He didn't know a lick o' English. Well, I s'pose He knowed it alright, but He daren't let on because nobody *else* knowed it, mainly because it warn't invented yet. If you and Joe would 'a' gone up to Jesus and said, "Now, Jesus, who's going to hell and whatnot, it's for a friend that we're askin'," He'd 'a' looked at you like you was Beelzebub. He never upset nobody with "hell" in all His born days.

Colonel: He may not have upset 'em with hell, Huck, but He sure rocked 'em with this Gehenna. Them people shook in their sandals just to hear that word.

Huck: Who's "them people?"

Colonel: Why, the Jews.

Huck: Listen to y'self! I was just about to trouble them waters. Jesus was talking to them Israel-types, not

to the whole blame world. That's where folks get it all bungled up. They think Jesus was busy layin' out the whole ball o' wax to all mankind, even those from the nations, on how to get saved forever and go to heaven and strum a harp for eternity and a day. Why, He warn't doing anything of the kind! He ain't even died on the cross yet when He's busy preaching on Gehenna. So tell

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me—how is it folks is s'posed to be decidin' their eternity on Jesus' cross when the thing ain't even happened yet? I give up. It's a mess. Even Tom Sawyer knows that Jesus come preaching a kingdom on earth that was set up to last a thousand years. Now, the way I reckon it, a thousand years is a sight short of eternity. Besides, there ain't no lions and lambs floating around in space, nuther. They're lyin' down together on the earth. That's where the kingdom is. And who cared a whit for it? Why, the Israel-types is the only ones what even knowed about it. A stranger ain't going to sell no farm on it, and Jesus knowed that. That's why He daren't even talk to a common-type unless he had Jacob-blood in his veins. Tell us more about that, Colonel. I ain't got my reading glasses.

Colonel: Well, it says in Romans somewhere that Jesus fixed up with them circumcised people *only*, and that He come to confirm the promises God made to Abraham (15:8).

Huck: Ain't it just like I said?

Joe Shepherdson: I remember a place where He said that He dasn't come except to the lost sheep of the house o' Israel (Matthew 15:24).

Huck: Ain't it just like I said?

Colonel: Here's a good'n, Huck. When Jesus sent out His disciples to preach the kingdom, He told 'em t'not even travel on a road o' the nations, and to not even go to the Samaritans, but to preach only to the lost sheep of the house o' Israel (Matthew 10:6)



“You ever hear Paul drag up Gehenna?” —Huck Finn

Huck: Ain't it just like I said? I ain't no Solomon, but if Jesus is preachin' eternity to all mankind, and this is their one and only chance to get it or else spend eternity on a barb'cue spit, He's got a curious way o' lettin' people know about it. Why, He made sure they *didn't* know about it! Can you make that rhyme with what all the preachers is saying about Jesus preachin' to all mankind about their one and only ticket out of eternal torments?

Colonel: Then, confound it, Huck, who *done* that universal kind o' preachin'?

Huck: Confound it, Colonel, ain't you ever been to Sunday school? Well, I reckon maybe that's where you got it all bungled up. Jesus give that job to Paul! Jesus waited till He done all the work o' gettin' crucified, then He left it to Paul to explain all the glorious details. Now, you ever hear Paul drag up Gehenna?

Colonel: Well, no, I never heard or seen where he *ever* done it.

Huck: That's because he *never* done it! And that's because Gehenna ain't got nothin' at all to do with eternity or with grace or with the doin's of all mankind in all the nations. Gehenna only has to do with them thousand years of the kingdom and them Israel-types on the earth.

And them Israel-types knowed exactly what Jesus was talkin' about, ain't I tellin' it straight? And it ain't got nothin' in God's heaven to do with eternal hell or what them preachers today is brewin' up to scare folks into their churches. And I *know* I got *that* straight.

Colonel: Me and Joe and Bertha, we looked up Gehenna in the Bible dictionary, and this is what we come up with: “Gehenna: a valley on the West and Southwest of Jerusalem, which formed part of the border between Judah and Benjamin.”

Huck: Well, now we're looking the possum in the snout. That don't sound like no Sunday school hell to me. According to the preachers, a billion o' mankind's going to be screamin' for eternity in a valley up next to J'rusalem? Now, I reckon that'll put the hurts to the tourist trade.

Colonel: Me and Joe and Bertha got some more on this, Huck. It seems Isaiah the prophet got worked up about Gehenna in the sixty-sixth chapter. And this might be the key to it, if you ask me. Want me to read it?

Huck: If it ain't the key, I'll walk to Cairo barefoot. I just wonder what took you so long to dig it up.



Colonel: Here it is, in verses twenty-three and four: “All flesh shall come to worship before Me in Jerusalem,” says Yahweh. ‘And they fare forth and see the corpses of the mortals, the transgressors against Me, for their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched, and they become a repulsion to all flesh.’”

Huck: Well, it looks like I won’t be walkin’ to no Cairo barefoot. There’s the whole ball o’ wax in a nut. If that ain’t the Gehenna Jesus is talking about, what with that fire and them worms, I’ll kiss the widow Douglas on the lips. Now tell me, who’s gettin’ the hurts in Gehenna?

Colonel: Why, there ain’t nobody getting’ the hurts. They’s all corpses. I ain’t seen a corpse yet what was gettin’ the hurts.

Huck: That’s the whole point of it! Any fool can see that what we got here is a handful o’ modern corpses, not a billion and six fireproof mummies from the year one. And how’s this for runnin’ a kingdom? They don’t waste no kingdom money fixin’ up jails and such, because they don’t need ‘em. See? There ain’t no criminals! Well, there’s criminals alright, but only for a fearful short spell. Before they know it, they’re done up in Gehenna and fried up like a side o’ bacon in a smoke house and turned into a corpse, dead as can be. Now, if you and Joe is wanderin’ ‘round J’rusalem in the kingdom and come up on Gehenna, you going to go out and get yourselves crossed up with the law?

Colonel: Not us! Why, nobody in his right mind is goin’ to cross the law after seein’ them corpses down in Gehenna.

Huck: I hope! And how’s an Israel-type goin’ to like it? He don’t want tied up in it. He wants to wear a fancy robe in the kingdom with Jesus. That’s why Jesus said he’d be better off with one hand and one eye. But at least he’d have a robe—even if a sleeve needs alteratin’ and he gots to wear glasses. That’s why them Israel-types shook in their sandals at it. But did it ever vex a man o’ the nations? I’ll say not! What’s his business about ruling in the kingdom? Why, he’s got no business there no way. That’s why Jesus never bothered telling him about it, and told His disciples not to, neither. Now, here’s where them preachers get it all in a tangle. Isaiah says Gehenna’s put up for them modern transgressors in the thousand-year kingdom. Preachers change it to say that all do-badders that’s ever lived from the year one is going to be there, and they’re all a-gonna be just squirmin’ and cryin’ and never graduate to corpsehood.

Colonel: That don’t make sense, does it Huck?

Huck: I’ll say it don’t. Besides, the whole gaggle o’ do-badders ain’t even alive then. Why, they never even see the thousand-year kingdom.

Colonel: How you talk!

Huck: Bless me, it’s right in the Bible, Colonel, if you’d just read it. I don’t know where exactly it is, but it says somewhere that the rest o’ the dead don’t even live at all till the thousand years is finished (Revelation 20:5).

Colonel: I’ll be blamed.

Huck: It ain’t your fault, Colonel, so don’t go hard on y’self. Them billions o’ folks that the preachers is hoping for Jesus to burn in Gehenna ain’t even wakin’ up till after Gehenna’s in the hist’ry books. Why, I knowed from day one that the whole earth is going to burn up before them dead sinners even know what hit ‘em (Revelation 20:11). Next thing they know, they’re grindin’ up their dentures at the great white throne. I reckon a dentist’ll do brisk business. Anyhow, them people never even see Jesus’ kingdom, so how they going to hope to be a transgressor in it? Besides, if the whole earth gets burned up, what’s left of Gehenna?

Colonel: Why, I reckon it gets burned up, too.

Huck: Now there’s a piece o’ science.



Colonel: But them worms is still buggin' me, Huck. Jesus says they ain't a-never goin' to die. And that fire. Jesus said it warn't ever going out.

Huck: You worry too much. Blame it, Jesus never said them worms'd never die. There ain't no eternal worms! That's just plain nonsense. He said they *wouldn't* die. And they won't, so long as they got plenty o' food. What do you think them worms is for? All they do is eat up them corpses. What the fire don't get, the worms eat up. It's just like what they done to your t'maters last summer.

Colonel: Aw, come on, Huck. You know I'm still sore about that.

Huck: But it lines up with what I'm saying, Colonel. When your tomaters was all gone, was there any more worms in 'em? I'm talkin' nonsense. There won't be no lack o' worms or fire as long as there's a transgressor. Think! If that fire and them worms ain't there, how's them fancied-up Israel-types gonna make room for more transgressors? As long as there's a transgressor, nobody's gonna be getting' rid o' them worms or dousin' the fire, you can bet. Back in Moses' day, God said nearly the same thing about the fire on the altar. He said it wouldn't go out no how (Leviticus 6:12-13). But what went on? I knowed from the day I was born that the temple got crumpled up, along with the altar,

and now Jesus lives in people's hearts. But as long as that temple was standin', there warn't no chance in Tarshish that anybody's going to wet *that* blaze. And as long as a transgressor's transgressin' in the thousand-year kingdom, there ain't no man alive, I don't care how fancy his robe, what's going to take one o' them worms on a fishing trip. Now—you still worried about them worms?

Colonel: No. No I ain't. You made it make sense to me, Huck. Thank you. But how you goin' t' 'splain them other brands o' hell, and them sheeps and goats, and the Rich Man and Lazy Russ, and that eternal fire in Matthew, chapter twenty-five?

Huck: Wouldn't I like to lay it out! But use your eyes, Colonel. You can see that we're up against people's patience, and this thing's got to end sometime so's people can rest and take their medicines. We'll do it next time around—or soon after.

Colonel: Suits me. Joe?

Joe Shepherdson: Yep. That'll be good.