

What is the significance of Topheth in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Topheth-in-the-Bible.htm>

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The word Topheth, alternatively spelled Tophet, is thought by some to originate from the Aramaic word taphya, which meant “hearth, fireplace or roaster.” Others link it to the word toph (“drum”), leading to the idea that drums were used in the pagan worship rituals associated with Tophet. What is certain is that Topheth was not a cozy fireplace for Israelites to keep warm. Its first mention is in 2 Kings 23:10 when King Josiah “defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech” (ESV). Topheth was a place where the Israelites committed the despicable act of child sacrifice, a practice God strictly condemned (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31). King Josiah’s reforms included “defiling” Topheth, making it unusable as a gathering place.

Unfortunately, the Israelites had disregarded God’s command and sacrificed their children to the god Molech at Topheth in the Valley of Hinnom, at the south end of Jerusalem. Kings like Ahaz and Manasseh are examples of rulers who indulged in this abhorrent practice (2 Kings 16:3; 21:6). Prophets such as Jeremiah and Isaiah confronted the Israelites about their child sacrifice, suggesting that the practice continued even after the steps Josiah took to end such atrocities.

Jeremiah 7:31-32 records the prophet’s declaration, “They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire—something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when people will no longer call it Topheth or the Valley of Ben Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until

there is no more room.”

The prophet Isaiah also had things to say about child sacrifice: “You who burn with lust among the oaks and under every green tree, who slaughter your children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks? Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion; they, they, are your lot; to them you have poured out a drink offering, you have brought a grain offering. Shall I relent for these things?” (Isaiah 57:5-6). And in Isaiah 30:33, the prophet makes a metaphorical reference to Topheth in pronouncing judgment on the king of Assyria: “Topheth has long been prepared; it has been made ready for the king. Its fire pit has been made deep and wide, with an abundance of fire and wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of burning sulfur, sets it ablaze.”

There is evidence of child sacrifice being practiced in many cultures around the world. Some cases were documented in Greco-Roman sources like Plutarch and Tertullian, and archaeologists continue to uncover sites of ritualistic mass murder of children (www.cbsnews.com/news/biggest-child-sacrifice-evidence-archaeologists-national-geographic-peru-chimu/, accessed 8/9/23). But child sacrifice is not just an outrage of ancient times. The practice is still alive in places like Uganda (www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-15255357, accessed 8/9/23) and India (www.theguardian.com/world/2006/mar/05/india.theobserver, accessed 8/9/23). One can also see the connection between abortion and child sacrifice as many unborn babies around the world are killed daily.

Topheth symbolizes the extent of the Israelites’ rebellion, which ultimately led to their exile. God dealt with the Canaanites for engaging in similar practices (Leviticus 18:24-25), and He did not spare the Israelites. God must judge such a horrendous action

as child sacrifice..

After Josiah's reforms, Topheth became a landfill of sorts—a vile place of burning garbage, raw sewage, and the rotting flesh of the bodies of executed criminals. The Valley of Hinnom, also called Gehenna, had a wicked reputation and was utterly unclean. It thus became an apt illustration of the horrors of hell. Jesus mentioned the fiery valley in His warning against divine judgment in Mark 9:47: "If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell [lit., Gehenna]."

Topheth reminds us of human depravity and the appropriateness of God's justice. Praise the Lord for the beauty of the gospel, which saves us from Topheth.