

Briefing Document: Matthew Lesson 74

Sunday AM-July 12, 2026

Executive Summary

The following briefing examines the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:22 regarding the spiritual reality of murder. The core message focuses on the idea that God's judgment is not reserved solely for outward acts of violence, but also for the internal attitudes of anger, contempt, and slander. By expanding the definition of a "murderer" to include those who harbor selfish anger or speak with malice, the text challenges the self-righteousness of those who believe they are innocent simply because they have not committed a physical crime. The document details three specific illustrations of these internal sins and concludes with an explanation of the historical and spiritual context of "hell fire."

The Internal Standard of Righteousness

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the scribes and Pharisees to reveal that even those who appear most righteous can be guilty of grave sins. He shifts the focus from external actions to the condition of the heart. The text highlights that being free from criminal acts does not make one righteous before God if they harbor hatred.

- **The Rejection of Self-Righteousness:** Jesus suggests that even the "best of men" may be the "worst of men" when their internal thoughts are exposed.
- **A New Definition of Murder:** The teaching asserts that anger and hatred are equivalent to murder in the eyes of God.
- **The Call to Self-Examination:** By equating anger with murder, Jesus forces individuals to look at who they are and what they feel, rather than just what they do.

The Three Illustrations of Sinful Anger

The source context identifies three specific verbal and emotional expressions that carry the same spiritual weight as physical murder.

1. Selfish Anger

The first illustration involves being "angry with his brother." This refers specifically to selfish, brooding anger rather than "righteous indignation."

- **Righteous vs. Selfish Anger:** There is a type of anger that is not sinful, as seen in Ephesians 4:26: "*Be angry, and do not sin.*" This is often a response to holiness or standing up for what is right.
- **The Nature of Sinful Anger:** The Greek term used, *orgizesthe*¹, refers to a long-lived, smoldering bitterness or a nursed grudge.
- **The Penalty:** Jesus states that anyone harboring this kind of bitterness is "*in danger of the judgment*" (Matthew 5:22), implying they deserve the same execution a civil court would give a physical murderer.

2. Malicious Slander (Raca)

The second illustration addresses those who say "*Raca!*" to their brother.

- **The Meaning of Raca:** While hard to translate exactly, *Raca*² is an epithet of derision or scorn. It is a verbal expression of slander directed at someone's character, personality, or appearance. It translates roughly to "brainless idiot," "worthless fellow," or "empty head."
- **Arrogant Contempt:** To use such language is to show "arrogant contempt." The text describes this as "poison under the tongue" (Psalm 140).
- **The Penalty:** Such a person is said to be "*in danger of the council*" (Matthew 5:22).

3. Spiritual Contempt (Moros)

The third and most severe illustration is the use of the word "*Moros*," translated as "You fool!"

- **The Hebrew Root:** The word comes from a root meaning "to rebel." In a biblical sense, a "fool" is one who rebels against God.
- **Context of Truth:** It is not a sin to call someone a fool if it is a truthful warning about their rebellion against God (as Jesus did with the Pharisees). However, it is a sin when used as a hateful epithet to put someone down.
- **The Penalty:** Calling someone a fool out of hatred places a person "*in danger of hell fire*" (Matthew 5:22).

Understanding the Judgment: Gehenna

The term "hell fire" used by Jesus refers to *Gehenna*⁴, a word with a specific historical background in the Valley of Hinnom.

- **The Valley of Hinnom:** Located southwest of Jerusalem, this was a notorious place where King Ahaz once practiced child sacrifice to the god Molech ("*He burned incense in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, and burned his children in the fire*" 2 Chronicles 28:3).
- **The Garbage Dump:** After King Josiah abolished these practices, the valley became an accursed place used as the city's garbage dump. A public incinerator burned there constantly, creating a perpetual fire and thick smoke.
- **The Loathsome Worm:** The environment bred a specific type of worm that was difficult to kill, which is what Jesus refers to in Mark 9:44: "*where the worm does not die.*"
- **The Illustration of Hell:** Jesus used *Gehenna* as a vivid image of hell: an eternal, accursed place where the "rubbish of humanity" is consumed.

Conclusion

The message of Matthew 5:22 is designed to destroy systems of self-righteousness. It teaches that internal feelings—anger, contempt, and the desire to curse others—are enough to deserve eternal judgment. The text concludes that to be rescued from this condition, one must recognize their inability to save themselves, repent, and believe the Gospel.

Greek and Hebrew Vocabulary Guide

Word	Phonetic Pronunciation	Definition
Orgizesthe ¹	or-GEED-zes-thay	A brooding, nursed, or smoldering anger that is not allowed to die.
Raca ²	RAH-kah	An untranslated term of derision; a malicious word of arrogant contempt.
Moros ³	MO-ros	A word for "fool" or "moron"; refers to one who rebels against God.
Gehenna ⁴	geh-HEN-nah	The Greek word for "hell"; refers to the Valley of Hinnom, a place of perpetual fire.

¹ *Orgizesthe* appears in the context of the first illustration regarding anger in Matthew 5:22. ² *Raca* is the untranslated epithet used in the second illustration of slander. ³ *Moros* is the Greek root for "moron" used in the third illustration regarding contempt. ⁴ *Gehenna* is the term translated as "hell fire" and is modeled after the physical garbage dump in the Valley of Hinnom.