

# Matthew 11:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.

## Analysis

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'And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.' Jesus's harshest judgment falls on Capernaum, His ministry headquarters (Matthew 4:13). The city was 'exalted unto heaven' (ἕως οὐρανοῦ ὑψωθεῖσα/heōs ouranou hypsōtheisa)—whether referring to its privilege, pride, or prosperity. Yet it will be 'brought down to hell' (ἕως ᾗδου καταβιβασθήσῃ/heōs hadou katabibasthēsē)—complete reversal from highest privilege to lowest judgment. The comparison with Sodom—paradigm of divine judgment (Genesis 19)—is shocking: that notoriously wicked city would have repented if it saw Capernaum's miracles. Capernaum's greater revelation meant greater responsibility and judgment. Reformed theology affirms degrees of punishment: those with more light who reject face severer consequences. This terrifies: growing up in Christian contexts, hearing gospel regularly, witnessing God's work creates accountability. Familiarity with truth doesn't save; only genuine repentance and faith do.

## Historical Context

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Capernaum was prosperous fishing village on Galilee's northwest shore, with customs station, Roman centurion garrison, synagogue. Jesus made it His base

after Nazareth rejected Him (Matthew 4:13-16). Most of His Galilean miracles occurred there or nearby: Peter's mother-in-law healed (Matthew 8:14-15), paralytic lowered through roof (Mark 2:1-12), centurion's servant healed (Matthew 8:5-13), numerous other healings and exorcisms. Yet the city corporately rejected Him. Archaeological excavations confirm the city's later destruction and abandonment—Jesus's prophecy fulfilled. The Sodom comparison is devastating: Sodom's sins (pride, indifference to poor, sexual immorality—Ezekiel 16:49-50) seem minor compared to rejecting incarnate God. This pattern continues: societies with Christian heritage that reject gospel face judgment exceeding pagan nations without such privilege. Western civilization's apostasy may face severer judgment than never-evangelized regions.

## **Related Passages**

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**Psalms 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## **Study Questions**

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1. How does growing up hearing the gospel increase your accountability before God?
2. What does Capernaum's judgment despite witnessing Jesus's ministry teach about the relationship between exposure to truth and salvation?
3. How should churches in historically Christian societies respond, knowing greater revelation brings greater judgment if rejected?

## Interlinear Text

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καὶ	σύ	Καπερναούμ,	τῆς	ἕως	τῆς	οὐρανοῦ	ὑψωθεῖσα,
And	thou	Capernaum	which	to	which	heaven	art exalted
G2532	G4771	G2584	G3588	G2193	G3588	G3772	G5312
ἕως	ᾗδου	καταβιβασθήσῃ·	ὅτι	εἰ	ἐν	Σοδόμοις	
to	hell	shalt be brought down	for	if	in	Sodom	
G2193	G86	G2601	G3754	G1487	G1722	G4670	
γενόμεναι	τῆς	δυνάμεις	τῆς	γενόμεναι	ἐν	σοί	
had been done	which	the mighty works	which	had been done	in	thee	
G1096	G3588	G1411	G3588	G1096	G1722	G4671	
ἔμειναν	ἂν	μέχρι	τῆς	σήμερον			
G3306	it would have remained	until	which	this day			
	G302	G3360	G3588	G4594			

## Additional Cross-References

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**Matthew 4:13** (Parallel theme): And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephtholim:

**Genesis 13:13** (Parallel theme): But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the LORD exceedingly.

**Revelation 11:8** (Parallel theme): And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

**Acts 2:27** (Parallel theme): Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

**Matthew 8:5** (Parallel theme): And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

**Matthew 16:18** (Parallel theme): And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

**Luke 14:11** (Parallel theme): For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

**Lamentations 2:1** (Parallel theme): How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven unto the earth the beauty of Israel, and remembered not his footstool in the day of his anger!

**Jude 1:7** (Parallel theme): Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

**Obadiah 1:4** (Parallel theme): Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD.

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