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Volume 43
Issue 1052

The Gehenna of Fire

by – James R. Coram (1946-2022)

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Key Points:

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The Old English “hell” denoted that which is covered (hidden or *unseen*). Consequently, it once served as a suitable translation of the Greek *hadēs*, which means “imperceptible” or “unseen.” In modern English, however, due to the corrupting influence of human tradition, “hell” has come to mean “the abode of the dead; the place of punishment after death [in which the *dead* are *alive*].” Consequently, since in modern English the notion represented by the term “hell” constitutes, to say the least, interpretation, not translation, it is unconscionable for modern translators to render either the Hebrew *sh’ôl* or the Greek *hadēs* by this expression.



Yet it is worse still, whether in old English or modern English, to render the Greek *tartarōsas* and especially the Greek *geenna*, also as “hell.” Such “translations” are not translations at all; they are but the product of circular reasoning and hoary tradition. Whatever one’s understanding may be concerning the matters to which these words make reference, as a *translation* of the Original, the rendering “hell,” in all cases, is wholly unjustifiable. Yet it is this very rendering, the single term, “hell,” for all these distinct words in the Original, which has spawned all the familiar talk concerning “hell” which prevails among “Bible-believing Christians” today.

GLOOMY CAVERNS OF TARTARUS

Just as “anathema,” which was originally a cursing

formula found in pagan imprecatory texts, was adapted in the *Septuagint* to represent that which was devoted to destruction (Leviticus 27:28-29), and was later adapted by the apostle Paul to speak of one who was following a destructive course (Galatians 1:8-9), the apostle Peter, as his own figure of likeness, coins the verbal form *tartarōsas*, which he adapts from the pagan Greek noun, *Tartaros*, which was the name of the Greek unseen world. It appears in works such as Plato’s *Phaedo* and Homer’s *Iliad*. It is the name given to the murky abyss deep beneath Hades in which the sins of insurgent and defeated immortals (such as Kronos, or the Titans) are punished.

When Peter says that “God spares not sinning messengers,” but “[subjects them] to-CAVERNS-OF-GLOOM TARTARUSING” (II Peter 2:4, *Concordant Greek Text* sublinear, p. 667), “tartarusing” is a coined verbal form used as a figure of speech. In employing this expression, Peter is by no means giving legitimacy to the Greeks’ fantastic notions about their unseen world, called Tartarus. Instead, he is simply adapting this word for his own purpose. Since there is a certain *likeness* between that to which God *actually*

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume 43, No. 1052 – January 6, 2025

Scripture education in a weekly format!

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- the absolute sovereignty and deity of God (Romans 11:36);
- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation that God will save all through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3-4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the universality of death and resurrection (I Corinthians 15:21);
- the unique gospel of Paul – which he calls "my gospel" (Romans 2:16; 16:25; II Timothy 2:8; I Corinthians 15:1-4; Acts 13-28; Acts 20:24);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret in ages past" (Romans 16:25);
- the epistles of the present Secret Administration being Ephesians & Colossians (Ephesians 3:2, 9; Colossians 1:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the One Body (Ephesians 4:16);
- the Secret Administration, being the operational revelation for today (Ephesians 3:9);
- the unprophesied, Celestial hope and calling of the One Body (Colossians 3:4);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Ephesians 3:1-3);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice,

misunderstanding and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);

- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - union in His death, burial and resurrection and ascended seated position among the celestials (Ephesians 2:6);
 - adult sonship position (Ephesians 1:5).

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This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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subjects sinning messengers and that to which the Greeks *imagined* their gods to be subjected in punishment, Peter employs this name for the Greek underworld accordingly.

Sinning messengers are decidedly *not* in “Tartarus.” Except in the deluded minds of Greeks idolators, Tartarus does not exist. Indeed, according to the Scriptures, the sinning messengers are not even said to be undergoing chastening judging at present. Instead, in an estate which may somewhat be likened to the taverns of gloom in the Greeks’ fanciful Tartarus, they are said to be **“being kept for chastening judging”** (II Peter 2:4). Jude adds that *“messengers who keep not their own sovereignty, but leave their own habitation, [Yahweh, cf. Jude :5] has kept in imperceptible bonds under gloom for the judging of the great day”* (Jude :6). Since “chastening” speaks of discipline (*i.e.*, “training”; literally, “hitting”) with a view to amendment, we may rejoice that for this they are being kept (*cf.* Hebrews 12:7-11).

THE RAVINE OF HINNOM

In popular theology, in accord with ancient tradition, it is claimed that “*Gehenna*” is a symbolic expression used in reference to eternal punishment. Milton also employs it thus in his familiar lines:

The pleasant Vally of Hinnom, Tophet thence
And black *Gehenna* call'd, the Type of hell.

— *Paradise Lost*, Book One, lines 404-405

In the Scriptures, however, “*Gehenna*” (“hell,” AV)

– all incredible myths to the contrary notwithstanding – does *not* speak of “the place of the eternal torments of the damned.” Instead, it refers to an actual place on earth, namely, the valley (or “ravine”) of Hinnom (Nehemiah 11:30) in the land of Israel. The ravine of Hinnom is a valley to the southwest of Jerusalem (“*the ravine of the son of Hinnom*,” Joshua 15:8). The Hebrew phrase *gê* (“ravine of”) *hinnôm* became *geenna* in Greek, whence *Gehenna* in Latin and English.

In time, Moloch, a god worshiped by the Ammonites, came to be worshiped by Israel as well (Leviticus 18:21; I Kings 11:3, 5, 7; II Kings 23:10; Amos 5:26; Acts 7:43). In Jeremiah’s day, the ravine of Hinnom was associated with the worship of Moloch (Jeremiah 32:35). Josiah, in Judah, defiled this shrine by destroying the high places of Moloch, thus putting a stop to the sacrifices offered there (II Kings 23:10, 13).

Moloch worship incorporated human sacrifice, namely, the sacrifice of children by fire. In the days of the Kings, under Ahaz (II Chronicles 28:3) and Manasseh (II Chronicles 33:6), children were sacrificed by fire on altars erected within the valley of Hinnom. In later times, according to some, this valley was used for burning the corpses of criminals and animals, and indeed refuse of any sort. Jeremiah spoke of the day when this ravine would no longer be termed the ravine of the son of Hinnom, “*but rather, the ravine of the killed, and they shall entomb in Tophet¹ because there is no other place*” (Jeremiah 7:31-32; *cf.* Jeremiah 12:3; 19:6; Zechariah 11:4-9). Perhaps

1. Tophet was a locale, apparently an elevation, within the ravine of Hinnom; it was the location of the “fane [*i.e.*, temple] heights” where sacrifices were made to Moloch.



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this was first carried into effect through the reforms of Josiah (cf. II Kings 23:10-20).

CAST INTO GEHENNA

These considerations rehearse *Gehenna*'s place in the past. It is in Isaiah 66:23-24, however, that we learn of *Gehenna*'s future role, in the kingdom eon. The book of Isaiah closes with these words, which the Lord Jesus Himself, in the synoptic accounts (Matthew, Mark and Luke), identifies with "*Gehenna*":

- 23 *"And it will come to be,
As often as the new moon comes in its monthly time,
And as often as the sabbath comes in its sabbath cycle,
All flesh shall come to worship before Me in Jerusalem," Says Yahweh.*
- 24 *"And they will go forth and see the corpses of the mortals
Who transgressed against Me,
For their worm shall not die,
And their fire shall not be quenched,
And they will become a repulsion to all flesh."*

The meaning of *Gehenna* must be established from facts furnished by the Scripture, not by falsehoods foisted by human tradition. To the reader of the Hebrew Scriptures themselves, *Gehenna* can only mean a verdict which, besides condemning a man to death, also ordains that, after death, his body should be cast into the loathsome valley of Hinnom. This being the sense of *Gehenna* in the Hebrew Scriptures, we may be sure that *this* is the sense in which Christ used it.

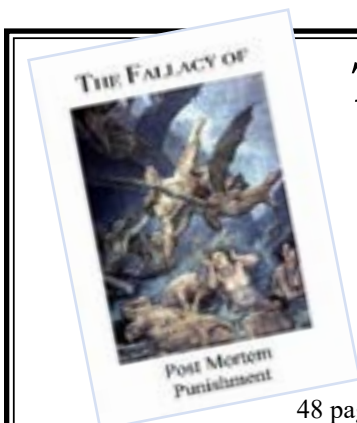
It must be kept in mind, then, as Isaiah 66:23-24 makes clear, that in the era of Israel's restoration, the "*judging of Gehenna*" (Matthew 23:33) will be instituted. In the stated seasons of worship, representatives of the nations who will come to Jerusalem will go forth and see the *corpses of the mortals* who transgressed the law in such a way so as to be subjected to death. Their corpses will remain unburied: worms will prey upon the corrupting flesh, and fires will always be at work to purify the air from pestilential infection.²

"*Gehenna*" appears in the Greek Scriptures twelve times (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5; James 3:6). Not one of these passages has reference to the so-called "final state." The Lord explicitly identifies *Gehenna* with Isaiah 66:23-24 by speaking of it as the place of "*unextinguished fire, where their worm is not deceasing³ and the fire is not going out*" (Mark 9:46). All whose bodies are destroyed in *Gehenna* will be raised to be judged at the great white throne, and go into the lake of fire. *Gehenna* is the capital punishment of the kingdom, without burial.

UNEXTINGUISHABLE, EONIAN FIRE

In Matthew 10:28 the Lord declares, "*And do not fear those who are killing the body, yet are not able to kill the soul. Yet be fearing Him, rather, Who is able to destroy*

2. Excerpted and adapted from *Unsearchable Riches*, vol.4, p.94, by V. Gelesnoff.
3. "Their worm" is a figure of association for the many worms which will be found there. The root of the verb "is not deceasing" (not, "dieth not," in the sense of *never* die, as some might imagine from the AV) does not signify "die" but finish. The sense is that, figuratively speaking, there will be "no end" (for, literally, there will be no end in sight) of worms in *Gehenna* to feed on the corpses cast into it.



The Fallacy of Post Mortem Punishment in Light of a Successful Savior

by — Mike Owens

This is a summary of the biblical, logical and philosophical reasons by which the author has abandoned the notion of hell or punishment after death. God is an all-powerful God of love Who knows how to win hearts and minds. To assume that He needs to use physical or psychological pain in order to gain the admiration, love or loyalty of His creatures is an insult to His sovereignty and wisdom. Like Thomas and Paul – who came to believe by something they saw and experienced, not by faith – everyone, even the Hitlers and Stalins of this world, will experience PRA – Post Resurrection Amazement.

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the soul as well as the body in Gehenna.” Since, as explained in the previous exposition, “The Soul and the Unseen,”⁴ we know that “soul” speaks of sensation, and that in death there is no sensation, we will not imagine that the reason why man is not able to kill the soul is because the soul is immortal. Besides, since, as this very passage plainly states, God is able to destroy the soul, we will be certain that the soul is *not* immortal.

In this phrase, then, “*not able to kill the soul*,” “kill” is figurative, and is a relative statement with reference not to their present life, but to their life in the coming eon. With reference to the delights of the kingdom, those who would kill one of these faithful ones, would not be able to hinder (*i.e.*, put a stop to, or “kill”) the bliss which they will enjoy in that day. Those who come under God’s judgment in the Messiah’s kingdom will not only have their bodies destroyed in the valley of Hinnom, but they will be subjected to total loss (*i.e.*, “destruction”) of the joys which their souls long for in the kingdom. “The martyrs who die for the sake of the kingdom have nothing to fear. So far as their *souls* [*i.e.*, their sensations] are concerned, death gives them an immediate entrance into the delights of the earthly paradise, even though at their martyrdom it was thousands of years in the future.”⁵

The fact that a fire is unextinguishable (*e.g.* Matthew 3:12; Mark 9:43), does not entail its burning for all eternity. It does not follow that a fire which is not put

out, will never go out. After rebuking Israel for her sins and idolatry, Yahweh declared that He would pour out His indignation upon Jerusalem, on man and beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground: “*it shall burn and shall not be quenched*” (Jeremiah 7:20). This was fulfilled in the Babylonian captivity. The fires of that day burned themselves out long ago. Surely the fires of *Gehenna*, if indeed they are still burning at that time, will themselves be consumed by fire, in the day, following the thousand years, in which the earth’s elements are dissolved by combustion (II Peter 3:10).

Similarly, the fact that “*the Gehenna of fire*” is “*fire eonian*” (*aiōnion*; Matthew 18:8-9) affords us no reason to claim that it is an endless fire, and, therefore, that it is a fire that is to be identified with so-called “everlasting punishment.” Indeed, the fact that, following the kingdom eon, the valley of *Gehenna*, together with the entire earth, will be dissolved by combustion (II Peter 3:10-13; *cf.* Revelation 20:11; 21:1), proves that *Gehenna* fire is *not* everlasting fire but *eonian* fire. “Eonian” (of-eon) is the adjectival form of “eon.” In every usage it denotes not endlessness, but that which pertains to or is concerned with one or all of the eons.

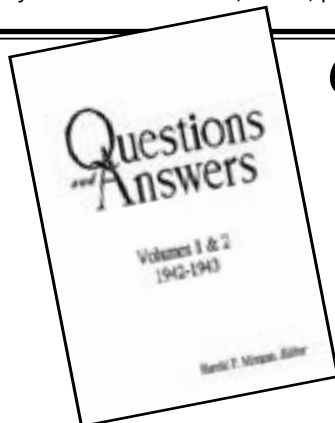
LAMENTATION AND GNASHING OF TEETH: OUTER DARKNESS; A FURNACE OF FIRE

The “*weeping and gnashing of teeth*” which are usually associated with it, in fact, have no connection with *Gehenna*. This expression usually occurs in connection

(see *GEHENNA*, page 8843)

4. [Editor:] See, [Bible Student's Notebook 1051](#).

5. *cf.* *Unsearchable Riches*, vol.24, p. 118, by A.E. Knoch.



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Questions and Answers Volumes 1-10; 1942-1953

Dr. Harold P. Morgan (1883-1953), Editor

Questions and Answers was a periodical devoted to rightly dividing the Word of Truth (mainly from an Acts 28 perspective). Its editor was born in Liverpool, England, but had an extensive ministry throughout the United States, including works in RI (dean and professor of the Providence Bible Institute), NY (founder and president of Buffalo Bible Institute), Kansas City, Bloomington IL, Philadelphia PA, Independence MO, and Riverton NJ. He was the author of numerous works, including *The Revolt Against the Distinctive Ministry of the Apostle Paul*.

Among others, he was associated with Charles Welch, Otis Sellers, John H. Kessler, Robert A. Hadden, Dr. R.F. Suerig, and William B. Hallman. He spent the last years of ministry working as the director of the *Biblical Information Bureau*, and editor of its *Questions and Answers*. Contributors to the periodical included Paul A. Greenmeyer, Arthur Van Someren, Helen P. Brown, W.A. McAtee, Cornelius R. Stam, Raymond Van Dyke, Vincent Bennett, Nevin Meyer Wetzel, William Campbell, Harry Bultema, and Dr. Mahlon D.E. Culbert.

Does Prayer Change Things?

by — Mike Owens

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Relax and know that I am Elohim ((Psalms 46:10, CV).

Prayer is not a tool or method for us to plead with God. It should not be a means by which we attempt to change God's mind toward what we want.

Prayer should be evidence of our reliance on Him as our sovereign Creator and Sustainer.



line with what the Bible really teaches, we could add that it should not be our hope that things will be different than His mighty plan, but that we would see and trust in His sovereign will despite what our flesh may want. We seek an attitude of dependency on God and a desire to have our hearts in tune with His purposes.

Our prayers do not change God's plan. Prayer is to align our hearts with His plan and acknowledge our trust in Him.

Traditionalism has put forth the idea that events are changed by our fervent prayers. The belief that, "if we pray," the future might be different is common to most branches of the church today.

How many times have you heard, "Prayer changes things?" What does that really mean or imply?

Does it mean that the sovereign and perfect will of God is diverted or fine-tuned when we pray?

When we pray, are we hoping that an illness or some circumstance facing a loved one will be changed whether or not our request is in accord with God's will?

What does it mean to pray in Jesus's name? Is that the "abracadabra" that makes our prayers heard, or is it equivalent to saying, "Whatever is Your will"?

Since we know, through God's Word, that He has a predetermined plan for the events in our lives, is it our hope that our prayers might change these events? Or should our prayers be for the purpose of bringing our needs to God with the intention of *showing our reliance on Him*? Should we have a desire to develop hearts that are in tune with His plan, whatever it brings?

As we seek to bring our understanding of prayer in

The way that we understand God affects the way that we pray. Traditionalism's view is that prayer is meant to coax God to fulfill our wish list, no matter how noble it might be. Such thoughts on prayer are due to an inaccurate view of God's attributes, in particular His sovereignty. The Bible teaches that prayer is to "hallow" God's name with our trust in His will as we express our needs.

If we think of God as benevolent only toward those He's pleased with, or toward those who pray the hardest, then we are praying to a false god – a god we have imagined or created to suit our own ideas.

God's will is perfect. Most importantly, it is something we can relax in – and that relaxation brings Him glory.

We can and should experience a contentment, or even excitement, in knowing that He has designed everything and every event for His purposes.

Traditional prayer in my life has been replaced by assurance! I'm now in a place of relaxation as my ability to see His sovereignty in all things is coupled with His love and mercy for all.

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TOPICS:

Major: Prayer; Sovereignty; Will

Minor: Contentment; Realization; Relax

GEHENNA (*continued from page 8841*)

with “outer darkness,” quite the opposite of the lurid flames of Gehenna. Even so, since this fearful phrase is so often predicated of the final condition of the damned, it will be worthwhile to put it where it belongs.

In Matthew 8:12 our Lord, commenting on the faith of the centurion said, “yet the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness. There shall be lamentation and gnashing of teeth.” The kingdom (“the kingdom of the heavens”) is likened to a wedding (Matthew 22:2-14). The sons are Israelites according to the flesh. Just as an unfit guest would be thrust out into the dark night, while within the marriage feast was being enjoyed in brilliant light, so it will be for certain living Israelites who seek to enter the kingdom on earth.

Among those who remain alive after the time of Jacob’s trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), “the great affliction” (Matthew 24:21), will be ones who, while not overtly lawless, nonetheless are unworthy of the kingdom. They will continue to live, yet be barred from it. They will have no part in the wedding festivities, that is, in the glorious reign which will be centered in Jerusalem. Accordingly, they will lament and gnash their teeth in the day when they see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, yet when they themselves are cast outside (Luke 13:28; cf. Matthew 22:11-13; 25:30).

THE TERRESTRIAL KINGDOM

Before the kingdom eon, however, in the concluding period of the present eon,⁶ the Son of Mankind

6. [Editor:] “There is at the end of the Day of Christ a time

will send His messengers to be “culling out of His kingdom all the snares and those doing lawlessness, and they shall be casting them into a furnace of fire. There shall be lamentation and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:41-42). In the nature of the case, lamentation and gnashing of teeth, here, must be confined to those who, while observers of this judgment, nonetheless are not among its subjects, as well as to those wicked ones among its subjects, who, through circumstances, find it impossible to avoid the contemplation of their own imminent doom.

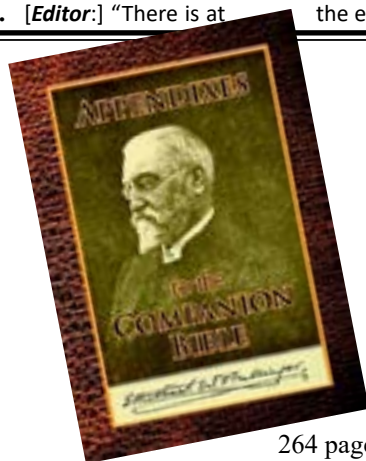
The figure is that of clearing a field for planting. Many will be destroyed, some by literal fire (Revelation 9:17-18; 16:8; 18:8, 18). Matthew 13:49 limits this judgment to the conclusion of the present eon⁷ [see footnote 6].

Under the Circumcision evangel, personal righteousness according to law is essential to life in the kingdom. Only those working righteousness may enter into life. Nevertheless, the chosen ones, who, indeed, are worthy, are only so according to the choice of grace (Romans 11:5). They will be saved, yet not apart from an upright walk. Though they will endure, still, they must endure in order either

of trial which will try every man dwelling on the Earth (Revelation 3:10). He will yet gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and those who do iniquity (Matthew 13:41). It is the removal of the restraints that leads to all of these becoming manifest.” – Otis Q. Sellers (*Rightly Dividing Israel’s Prophetic Kingdom*, Bible Student’s Press)

“The parable of the sower in Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43, clarifies that the tares (evil men) are allowed to grow with the good seed (righteous men) in the Kingdom, and at the time of testing the tares are burned in the fire.” – M.B. Hammond, Jr., *ibid*.

7. Cf. *Unsearchable Riches*, vol.24, p. 118, by A.E. Knoch.



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to enter the kingdom without dying or to be worthy of the resurrection of the just. The salvation of the Circumcision, which though *through* works *accords* with *grace*, nonetheless does not accord with fatalism. Hence, in all gravity, the Lord warns even His own disciples of the judging of *Gehenna* which will come upon *all* capital transgressors.

THE PRESENT GRACE

All of this is contrary to the grace which we enjoy today as members of the body of Christ, through the evangel proclaimed by the apostle Paul. We are not under law (Romans 6:14); we are justified apart from law (Romans 3:21, 24); eonian life itself is a gracious gift (Romans 6:23). Indeed, in our case, if sin should be increasing, grace will super-exceed (Romans 5:20). This is not true concerning the chosen under the evangel of the Circumcision, but it is true concerning those who are chosen according to the evangel of the Uncircumcision. *Gehenna* fire concerns only the transgressors of Moses' law in the coming kingdom on earth. It has no reference whatever to the members of the body of Christ, nor to the final destiny of the lost. It is confined to the coming eon and to the nation of Israel in that day. **BSN**

— *Unsearchable Riches*, Vol. 83, p. 279 (1992)

(edited)

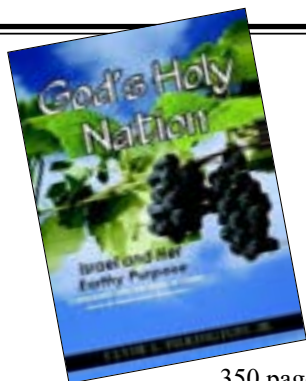
TOPICS:

Major: Eonian Fire; *Gehenna*; *Hadēs*; Hell; *Sheol*; Tartarus; Unseen

Minor: Death; Hinnom, Valley of; Translation

ISRAEL'S WARFARE IS WITH FLESH AND BLOOD ON THE EARTH. OURS IS WITH WICKED SPIRITS IN THE CELESTIAL REALMS. WE SHOULD ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT THOSE WHO OPPOSE US ARE MERELY THE INTERMEDIARIES USED BY THE SPIRITUAL FORCES AND TREAT THEM ACCORDINGLY. IT IS NOT OUR PLACE TO WRESTLE WITH FLESH AND BLOOD BUT TO LOOK BEYOND THE HUMAN INSTRUMENT TO THE REAL ADVERSARY IN THE SPIRIT WORLD. MATERIAL WEAPONS ARE WORSE THAN USELESS. OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD MEN SHOULD BE ONE OF PUREST CONCILIATION, NOT STRIFE.

A.E. KNOCH (1874-1965)



God's Holy Nation – Israel and Her Earthly Purpose

Contrasted with the Body of Christ and Its Heavenly Purpose

by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

Israel plays a key role in God's plan of the ages. Though currently she has been set aside "*until the times of the nations be fulfilled*," He is by no means done with her.

350 pages
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Today, God is operating His purpose in the ecclesia – the Church, the Body of Christ. The Scriptures provide us with the clear, critical distinction between God's *earthly* nation and Christ's *celestial* body.

Christendom, however, has diminished Israel's divine significance in an attempt to advance their artificial homogenization of Scripture's grand theme, thus obscuring the glorious evangel of our day – "*the Good News of the Happy God*" committed to the trust of Paul, our Apostle.

This work highlights some of the more prominent distinctions which belong to God's literal, physical, earthly nation. In so doing, it is our desire to allow the reader to see more clearly God's dealings with God's favored nation, so that they may in turn embrace a *far greater* calling and purpose.