



***The Soul and the Unseen***  
***and***  
***The Gehenna of Fire***



## THE SOUL AND THE UNSEEN

IN APPROACHING the question of the scriptural meaning of the Hebrew *sheol* and the Greek *hadês*, it is necessary first of all to establish the scriptural significance of "soul." This is because, in Scripture, man, who is said both to be a soul and to have a soul, returns in death to the "unseen," which is *sheol* or *hadês*.

Since man is a corporeal being which, both by association with and as the representation thereof, is a living "soul," it is evident that when he returns to the unseen, his soul returns there as well. Since in death, man, who "is" a "soul," does indeed return to the unseen (e.g., Psalms 9:17), it is correct to say of any certain man who dies, not only that *that* "soul" has returned to the unseen, with reference to the man himself, but that *his* soul has returned there as well, with respect to his sensations or experiences.

### UNTENABLE TRADITIONS

From a realization of this fact alone, it becomes evident that orthodoxy is mistaken, at least in part. For while the soul's pre-existence is repudiated, its post-existence is insisted upon, its survival after death, prior to resurrection. Yet whatever the lot of the human soul *after* this life (prior to resurrection), it is that which obtained unto it as well *prior* to this life. Therefore the orthodox view cannot be correct in both of its claims.

Orthodoxy is mistaken as well in conceiving the human soul to be not the human experience itself, but to be instead, an intangible, immortal entity, a spirit (or "ghost") which, while possessing personal traits

and partaking of personal experience, is nonetheless not a person or corporeal being at all.

Wherever the Scriptures declare that a certain man "died," or wherever they speak of his "death," the orthodox insist that we are not to understand that that *man* died, but only that his present lifetime ended and that his *body* died. It is not that these traditionalists do not know what death is, but that they insist that it does not appertain to man. Indeed, like the spiritualists, they assure us that they are correct in their claim that, in death, man *does not* die because he *cannot* die.

### SENSATION OR EXPERIENCE

Nevertheless, scripturally speaking, the human "soul" is simply the human *experience*. Soul is the *sensation* which *results* from the combination of an organic body with breath or spirit (Genesis 2:7; cp 1:21). Soul is connected with the blood (Leviticus 17:14; "life" AV), and is possessed not only by man but by all living creatures that move or "roam" (Leviticus 11:46).

The expression "living souls" speaks of the entire animate creation generally, "every animal of the field and every flyer of the heavens" (Genesis 2:19; cp 2:24,30), even "the great sea monsters and all the moving living souls with which the waters swarm" (Genesis 1:20,21).

Soul is a *phenomenon*; it is the perception of the senses. It encompasses all sensation, all that is experienced by means of the sentient faculties. By association, soul is the capacity for seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling. In itself, soul consists in the sensation of these things themselves. Man, like the animals, is a "living soul" (Genesis 1:21; 2:7). While both are living creatures, they are termed (by association) living "souls." This is because they are not only *living* creatures but are living creatures which possess *soul*, that is, sentient capacity. Both man and beast

are termed living souls because they are living creatures which, through sentient faculties, are capable of experience.

“Soul” (Hebrew, *nephesh*, Greek, *psuchê*) does not mean “life,” though it is often incorrectly translated “life” in the Authorized Version. Soul is not life itself, though it is intimately connected with it. A man’s “soul,” speaks of a man’s sensations or experiences. A man who is termed a “soul,” speaks of a man from the standpoint of his sensations or experiences.

In Scripture, it is common to speak of men as “souls.” Through this means man comes before us not simply as an organic entity such as a tree, but as a sentient creature partaking of experience. Literally, soul is not something that man is, but something that he partakes of.

When a man is spoken of as a “soul,” the word is a figure of speech (*metaphor* [representation] and *metonymy* [association]). And, even when man is spoken of as possessing a soul, technically, this too is a figure of speech (*ellipsis* [omission]).

When man is spoken of as *being* a soul, he thus becomes *representative* of that with which he is closely *associated*. Yet when man is spoken of as *possessing* a soul, the evident thought in view, while understood, is not expressed. This is because it would be both tedious and needless to do so.

The inherent idea which is present though not expressed when man is spoken of as possessing “a” soul is, capacity of or means of experiencing. The full thought is that man has “a [capacity of] soul,” or sensation. Strictly speaking, man does not have “a” soul but a capacity of soul, a means by which he engages in sentient activity, a faculty by which he *experiences* life.

#### DEFINITIVE TEXTS

“The connection of *soul* with the senses is evidenced

by a selection of interesting passages. ‘My *soul* is disgusted with my life; I shall give free rein to myself and my concern; Let me speak in the bitterness of my *soul*’ (Job.10:1). The taste is especially intended in such scriptures as, ‘with all the yearning of your *soul* you may sacrifice and eat flesh’ (Deut.12:15; *cp* vs. 20,21); ‘you may eat grapes to your *soul’s* desire, to your satisfaction’ (Deut.23:24); ‘their *soul* abhorred all food’ (Psa.107:18); ‘. . . a thief when he steals, In order to fill his *soul’s* needs when he is famishing’ (Prov.6:30); ‘The just man knows the *soul’s* needs of even his domestic beast, yet the compassions of the wicked are cruel’ (Prov.12:10); ‘eating to his *soul’s* satisfaction’ (Prov.13:25); ‘. . . honey of the comb, [is] sweet to the *soul* and healing to the bones’ (Prov.20:24); ‘if you are a person of *soulish* appetite’ (Prov.23:2); ‘The *soul* that is surfeited tramples on honeycomb, yet to the famished *soul*, any bitter thing is sweet’ (Prov.27:7); ‘cause his *soul* to see good from his toil’ (Ecc.2:24); ‘All of a man’s toil is for his mouth, yet even then the *soul* is never filled’ (Ecc.6:7); ‘. . . to make the *soul* of the famished empty’ (Isa.32:6).

“In all of these cases, the point lies in the sensation accompanying the use of food, the physical satisfaction which the *soul* furnishes when we partake of its products.

“This is amply confirmed by our Lord’s words: ‘Do not worry about your *soul*, what you may be eating, or what you may be drinking, . . . Is not the *soul* more than nourishment?’ (Matt.6:25). These creature needs are what the soul craves, yet true satisfaction is not to be found in them. Even as He said on another occasion: ‘For what will a man be benefited, if he should ever be gaining the whole world, yet be forfeiting his *soul*? Or what will a man be giving in exchange for his *soul*?’ (Matt.16:26). This is the evil which the wise

man saw: 'A man to whom the One, Elohim, gives riches and substance and glory, and he has no lack to his *soul* of all that he yearns for, yet the One, Elohim, does not give him power to eat of it' (Ecc.6:2). . . .

"How luminous does our Lord's invitation become in the light of a true understanding of the soul! 'Hither to Me, all who are toiling and laden, . . . and you shall be finding rest in your *souls*' (Matt.11:28,29). It is the soul that feels the pressure and distress of life's burdens and responsibilities, and it is the soul that finds its rest in His yoke."<sup>1</sup>

#### DEATH IS A RETURN

Having established the meaning of soul, that it is a phenomenon or that which pertains to the senses, we must emphasize that, in death, the human soul undergoes a *return*. It returns to that concerning which, apart from revelation, we can only inquire. Yet we do so because we are interested in the whence and whither of things, especially in the whence and whither of man. *From* where did he come, and *to* where does he go?

Now if we should ask, *What* are we, *where* did we come from and *where* are we going? the answer is, From the ground you were taken, For soil you are, And to the soil you shall *return* (cf Gen.3:19). But if we should ask, Yet what of the human *soul*; what becomes of it? the answer is, The soul *returns* to the unseen.

That is, the human soul, man's *experience*, has the same status *subsequent* to this life that it had *prior* to this life. If it had life before this present, corporeal lifetime, then, when that which we term "death" ensues, it *returns* to its previous life. Alternatively, if it did *not* have life prior to this present, corporeal lifetime, then, when that which we term "death" ensues,

1. A. E. Knoch, "What is the Soul?" pp.8,9,11.

human experience *returns* to its previous status, that of non-existence.

Job knew that God would *return* him to death. "I know that You are turning me back to death, to that house appointed for all the living" (Job.30:23). "If He places it in His heart concerning him, He can gather back His spirit and His breath to Himself; all flesh would breath its last together, and humanity would return to the soil" (Job 34:14,15). "You conceal Your face; they are flustered. You gather away their spirit; they expire and return to their soil" (Psa.104:29). "All are going to one place; all have come from the soil, and all return to the soil" (Ecc.3:20).

It is thus, through such passages of Scripture as these, that we become aware that, essentially, death itself is a return. Man is soil and *returns* to the soil (Gen.3:19). The spirit—the imperceptible *power* of life, action, and intelligence—in death, *returns* to God Who gave it (Ecc.12:7). "Death," then, is simply the specialized term signifying the absence of life which follows mortality as contrasted with the absence of life which precedes it.

We may speak of *our* soul even as we speak of *our* body. Even as the elements, however, which compose our body are entirely decomposed in death, the experiences which comprise our soul are entirely terminated in death. This is because "soul" is that which is produced when an organic body is endowed with spirit or breath, that is, with life-giving, soul-enabling power (Gen.2:7).

#### SHEOL AND HADES

The Hebrew for that to which, in death, man returns (the *unseen*, CV; *grave*, *hell*, or *pit*, AV), is *sheol*, which signifies "ASK,"<sup>2</sup> and corresponds to the Greek

2. *Sheol* belongs to the Hebrew word family of the stem *shal*,

*hadês*, meaning “unseen” (cp Psa.16:10; Acts 2:27,31). Thus, in death, the soul returns to the “ask”; that is, it returns to that which must be asked about in order to be known, being unseen.

Since it is imperceptible, that to which the soul returns is naturally the subject of inquiry. How appropriate, then, that the Hebrew should speak of it as the “ask” and that the Greek should speak of it as the “unseen.”

It is true that *sheol* is ordinarily concerned with the state of those who are in “the tombs” (John 5:28), or as we would say, according to our own burial customs, that it is ordinarily concerned with those who are in their graves. Nevertheless, *sheol* does not mean “grave.” It means “ask,” and is used in reference to something that is unseen, which is an object of inquiry.

In Matthew 16:18, the Greek equivalent of *sheol*, which is *hadês*, is used in reference to the unseen domain of the Adversary. Yet in Matthew 11:23, it is used in reference to the unseen *state* (as a consequence of its destruction and desolation) to which the city of Capernaum would one day subside.

In Genesis 37:35, Jacob declared, “I shall go down mourning to my son, to the unseen.” This expression of lamentation, however, does not refer to being lowered into a grave, but to that which he claimed as his portion for the remainder of his lifetime (i.e., continuation in mourning for his son).

We use a similar idiom when we say, “having traveled *down* the road of life and come to the *end* of our journey.” The sense of “go down mourning” is paral-

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ASK, which is regularly used in that sense; cf THE NEW ENGLISH-MAN’S HEBREW CONCORDANCE, p.1220, cp entries 2 and 6 (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984).

lel to the modern idiom, “go down fighting,” namely, to continue on, unintermittingly, until the end.

It should also be noted that Jacob’s words, “to my son,” are elliptical; they are not complete in themselves. Since it would be a neutral expression, the objective ellipsis must be, “to [the status of] my son”—regardless of what that status may be. To say the least, it is begging the question to insist upon some sort of extraordinary, double ellipsis such as, “to [the dwelling place of] my son [where he is still alive, even though not in a body].”

#### THE SOUL IN SHEOL

“We have learned that the soul is not substance; nor is it immaterial spirit. It is only the result of a combination of the spirit with the body . . . .

“A point which seems to have been entirely overlooked, and which will help us much at this juncture, is the fact that the soul *only* is coupled with the unseen. The spirit must never be associated with *sheol* or *hadês*. The body is never connected with the unseen, except in such extraordinary cases as the sons of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who ‘descended . . . *alive* toward the unseen’ [i.e., into the unseen substratum, below the earth’s surface], when ‘the ground which was under them was rent, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up’ (Num.16:31-33), or Jonah, who found his *sheol* in the fish’s belly (Jonah 2:2).<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to this, the soul is definitely spoken of as in *sheol* in at least six passages (Psa.16:10; 30:3; 49:15; 86:13; 89:48; Prov.23:14), as well as in *hadês* in two (Acts 2:27,31). Besides this, the thought latent in

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3. It is as foolish to claim that “hell” (where “lost souls” are tormented prior to judgment) is within the bowels of the earth as it would be to claim that it is within the belly of the great fish which swallowed up Jonah.

the context of these two words is always concerned with *sensation* when the reference is to humanity."<sup>4</sup>

#### SCRIPTURAL USAGE DETERMINES MEANING

It does not follow from the fact that the Greek word *hadês* signifies "unseen," that, when speaking of the human soul in death, *hadês* therefore speaks of an unseen *place*, much less that it speaks of an unseen place where "disembodied spirits" abide. An "abode" is the place where one remains or dwells; it is the place where one lives or resides. Our inquiry is that of the nature of the unseen. It will not do simply to make the bald claim that *hadês* is "the abode of disembodied spirits." We are aware that such were the notions of certain intertestamental Jews and of many ancient Greeks. We also realize that many modern scholars are of the same opinion. Tales, however, about disembodied spirits in the unseen world of Greek mythology even as historical records concerning ancient Jews who, under the influence of such myths, claimed that similar doctrines are to be found in the Hebrew Scriptures, are no basis for truth. What we are interested in is what the Scriptures actually reveal concerning the unseen. If it is a sufficient revelation, God granting us eyes to see, we will then know from the Scriptures themselves whether such sources as those to which so many appeal are right or wrong.

#### CONSOLATION ACCORDING TO TRUTH

The Scriptures always speak of the death and resurrection of *man himself*; they never speak of either the death or resurrection merely of the body. It is *the dead* who are in their tombs (John 5:28); and, the dead *are* in their tombs, not in "the abode of disembodied

4. A. E. Knoch, *Unsearchable Riches*, "Sheol and Hades," vol.54, pp.167,168.

spirits." Indeed, why should we deem it unbelievable that God is rousing *the dead*? (Acts 26:8).

Concerning *believers* who are *reposing* (not, believers' *bodies* which are merely *lying* in the grave; 1 Thess. 4:13), we are told to console one another with the words that *the dead* in Christ shall be rising first, and thereupon the living shall at the same time be snatched away together with them, to meet the Lord in the air and always to be together with Him (1 Thess. 4:16,17). It is remarkable indeed, then, if the dead in Christ are not really dead but are instead in the joy of heaven, that, in a context in which the theme is the consolation of the bereaved, we are *only* told to console one another with *these* words (1 Thess.4:18), the words of the apostle Paul concerning resurrection, and are *not* at all told to console one another as well with some testimony to the effect that our loved ones are not really dead at all but are gloriously alive, even in the presence of Christ Himself.

Howbeit, resolute claims seeking to justify the immortality of the soul are the order of the day. Such claims are regularly set forth, even in the face of the most explicit, scriptural declarations to the contrary. For example, the testimony of Ecclesiastes concerning the dead is viewed as utterly mistaken, and is appraised as but "humanistic thought," the "perspective of autonomous man."<sup>5</sup> Such claims are freely set forth by many, notwithstanding the fact that Ecclesiastes' own author, concerning this same testimony, under divine inspiration, insists that "what was written is uprightness and words of truth" (Ecc.12:10).

Similarly, it is claimed that what the psalmist meant when declaring, "The dead cannot praise Yah, nor all

5. Robert A. Morey, *DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE*, pp.65, 216 (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1984).

those descending into stillness" (Psa.115:17), was that, in death, one can no longer praise God *before men, in this life*: "in the church militant, as is done by saints in the land of the living."<sup>6</sup> This, however, we hardly need to be told. Besides, since the dead descend into "stillness," it is evident that they do not praise God at all.

#### DEATH PRECLUDES LIFE

The Scriptures make it clear that the dead are not alive and that soul (i.e., sensation) is impossible in death. The fact is that "... *the dead do not live* . . ." (cf Rev.20:5).

The unseen is not only commonly set in parallel to death as its practical equivalent (e.g., 1 Sam.2:6; Psa. 6:5,6; 89:48; Hos.13:14), but, the apostle Paul, in a close adaptation of Hosea 13:14, even *substitutes* the Greek word for "death" (*thanate*) where the prophet had used the Hebrew *sheol* (1 Cor.15:55).

Similarly, earlier in the same chapter, in reply to the claim of some of the Corinthians "that there is no resurrection of the dead" (v.12), the apostle argues that if *the dead* are not being roused, (1) neither has Christ been roused; (2) vain is your faith; (3) you are still in your sins! and (4) "Consequently those also, who are put to repose in Christ, *perished*." The apostle does not say that if there is no resurrection, that those no longer having bodies will just have to continue to make do without them, but, that if there is no resurrection, that the dead in Christ *perished*.

In many places, the Scriptures speak of the dead as destitute of knowledge or speech, and as knowing nothing until resurrection. These scriptures are to be believed, not twisted. They make it clear that death

6. John Gill, BODY OF DIVINITY, vol.2, p.208 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978).

is truly death, not life in some other form. The following are a selection of notable passages concerning *sheol* and the state of the dead. May God give us grace to believe them.

"Do return Yahweh! Do extricate my soul! Save me on account of Your benignity. For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the unseen, who shall acclaim You?" (Psa.6:4,5). "What gain is there in my blood poured out, in my descending to the grave? Does soil acclaim You? Does it tell Your faithfulness?" (Psa.30:9). "O Yahweh, let me not be ashamed, for I have called out to You. Let the wicked be ashamed; let them be silent in the unseen" (Psa.31:17). "The dead cannot praise Yah, nor all those descending into stillness" (Psa.115:17). "Let me praise Yahweh throughout my life; let me make melody to my Elohim through all my future. Do not trust in patrons, in a son of humanity with whom there is no salvation. His spirit shall go forth, and he shall return to his ground; in that day his reflections perish" (Psa.146:2-4).

"This is the evil in all that is done under the sun: That one destiny is for all; moreover, the heart of the sons of humanity is full of evil, and ravings are in their heart throughout their life, yet after it, they are joined to the dead. Indeed for anyone who is joined with all the living there is trust; for it is better for a living cur than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know nothing whatsoever" (Ecc.9:3-5). "All that your hand finds to do, do with your vigor, for there is no doing or devising or knowledge or wisdom in the unseen where you are going" (Ecc.9:10). "Indeed the unseen cannot acclaim You, nor can death praise You; and those who descend into a crypt cannot look forward to Your faithfulness. The living! the living one! he is acclaiming You as I

do today; the father makes known to his sons Your faithfulness" (Isa.38:18,19).

#### THE LAST ENEMY

From the scriptural facts set forth in this present exposition, we may be certain that, with reference to the human soul after death, the "unseen" is not a *place* (i.e., a realm or locale) at all, but a *status*. In death, the status of the human soul is that of post-existence. Except for the fact that it follows rather than precedes the time of the soul's existence, the post-death status of a man's soul is the same as that of its pre-generative status, namely, that of non-existence. Therefore, we may be certain that any and all who claim otherwise—be they ancient Jews or Greeks or modern scholars—are mistaken in their beliefs.

Let us rejoice that the day will come when Christ will have gloriously placed *all* His enemies "under His feet" (1 Cor.15:25). "Under His feet," is a figure of speech signifying subjection. The secret of God's will is to head up all in the Christ (Eph.1:10). Thus *all* will become "in Christ," their Head, to Whom all will be subject. This will come to pass in a way that accords with God's *delight*, and as the achievement of that which He purposed in Christ (Eph.1:9).

Let us rejoice that after all other enemies have been subjected, that even the very last of all Christ's enemies will also be subjected. But while we await that day, let us recognize what that last enemy is. "The last enemy is being abolished: *death*" (1 Cor.15:26).

J.R.C.

#### THE GEHENNA OF FIRE

THE OLD ENGLISH "hell," denoted that which is covered (hidden or unseen). Consequently, it once served as a suitable translation of the Greek *hadês*, 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 *sheol* or the Greek *hadês* 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 (Lev.27:28,29), and was later adapted by the apostle Paul to speak of one who was following a destructive course (Gal.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" (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* 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*" (2 Peter 2:4). Jude adds that "messengers who keep not their own sovereignty, but leave their own habitation, [Yahweh, *cp* Jude 5] has kept in *imperceptible*

*bonds under gloom* for the judging of the great day" (Jude 6). Since "chastening" (*kolasis*) speaks of discipline (i.e., "training"; literally, "hitting") with a view to amendment, we may rejoice that for this they are being kept (*cp* Heb.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 Valy 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 (Neh.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") *hinnōm* 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 (Lev.18:21; 1 Kings 11:3,5,7; 2 Kings 23:10; Amos 5:26; Acts 7:43). In Jeremiah's day, the ravine of Hinnom was associated with the worship of Moloch (Jer.32:35). Josiah, in Judah, defiled this shrine by destroying the high places of Moloch, thus putting a stop to the sacrifices offered there (2 Kings 23:10,13).

Moloch worship incorporated human sacrifice, namely, the sacrifice of children by fire. In the days of the Kings, under Ahaz (2 Chron.28:3) and Manasseh (2 Chron.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 Tophet<sup>7</sup> because there is no other place" (Jer.7:31,32; cp Jer.12:3; 19:6; Zech.11:4-9). Perhaps this was first carried into effect through the reforms of Josiah (cp 2 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*":

- <sup>23</sup> **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 <sup>7</sup>in Jerusalem<sup>o</sup>,**  
**Says Yahweh.**
- <sup>24</sup> **And they will go forth and see <sup>i</sup> the corpses of the mortals**  
**Who transgressed<sup>l</sup> <sup>i</sup>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

7. 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.

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" (Matt.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.<sup>8</sup>

"Gehenna" appears in the Greek Scriptures twelve times (Matt.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 deceasing<sup>9</sup> 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

8. excerpted and adapted from *Unsearchable Riches*, vol.4, p.94, by V. Gelesnoff.

9. "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.

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 the soul as well as the body in Gehenna." Since, as explained in the previous exposition, "The Soul and the Unseen," 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."<sup>10</sup>

The fact that a fire is unextinguishable (e.g., Matt. 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

10. *cp Unsearchable Riches*, vol.24, p.118, by A. E. Knoch.

and beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground: "it shall burn and shall not be quenched" (Jer.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 (2 Peter 3:10).

Similarly, the fact that "the Gehenna of fire" is "fire *eonian*" (*aiōnion*; Matt.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 (2 Peter 3:10-13; *cp* Rev.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 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 king-

dom (“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 (Jer.30:7), “the great affliction” (Matt. 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; *cp* Matt. 22:11-13; 25:30).

#### THE TERRESTRIAL KINGDOM

Before the kingdom eon, however, in the concluding period of the present eon, the Son of Mankind will send His messengers to be “culling out of His kingdom all the *snare*s and those *doing lawlessness*, and they shall be casting *them* into a furnace of fire. There shall be lamentation and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 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 (Rev.9:

17,18; 16:8; 18:8,18). Matthew 13:49 limits this judgment to the conclusion of the present eon.<sup>11</sup>

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 (Rom.11:5). They *will* be saved, yet not apart from an upright walk. Though they *will* endure, still, they *must* endure in order either 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 (Rom.6:14); we are justified apart from law (Rom.3:21,24); eonian life itself is a gracious gift (Rom. 6:23). Indeed, in our case, if sin should be increasing, grace will superexceed (Rom.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 only concerns 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.

J.R.C.

11. *cp Unsearchable Riches*, vol.24, p.118, by A. E. Knoch.

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