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Magazine

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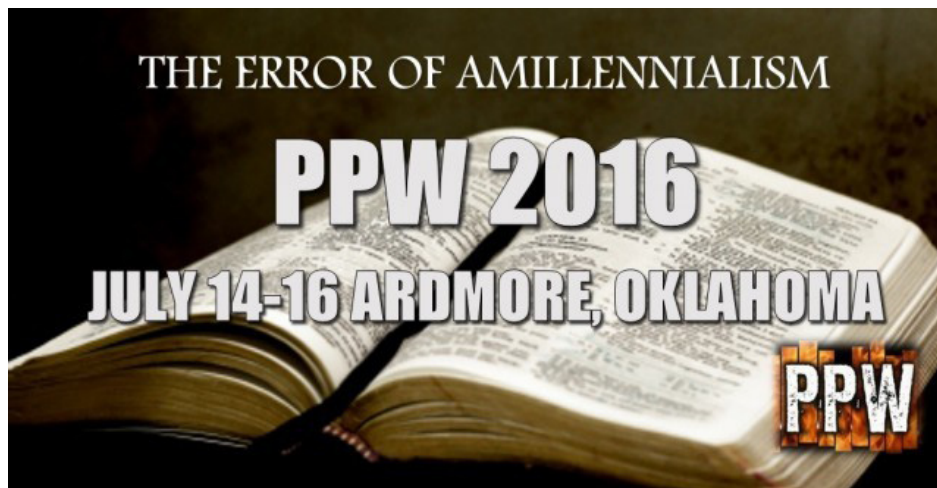
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Editor's Note...

IN THIS ISSUE, Ed Stevens tackles one of the “hard” doctrines of Christianity—eternal conscious punishment. Coming from a reformed position, Ed argues that eternal conscious punishment, not annihilation, is the true biblical teaching regarding the afterlife of the unredeemed. Naturally, that raises a host of related questions, like how does a loving God assign people to a fate of eternal conscious punishment, what is that punishment, and so on. Perhaps even more disturbing is the thought of our unsaved family and friends who have passed on—are they doomed to suffer for eternity?

Personally, I'd love to believe that universalism is true, that God, whose omniscience and omnipotence conceived and brought forth the plan of redemption, also constructed that plan such that everyone is somehow eventually saved and brought into the kingdom, while yet honoring God's holiness and righteousness. Unfortunately, I see too many passages in Scripture which speak to the fate of the wicked—a fate which does not include redemption.

Annihilationism appears to be the perfect compromise; the wicked do not share in the eternal blessings of the righteous, but neither are they eternally punished. But is that what the Bible teaches? For those inclined to believe so, they must, at least in their own minds, be able to answer the objections that Ed raises.

As always, when presenting various doctrinal views in *Fulfilled!*, we are not telling you what to think, but giving you something to think about. We must each work out our own salvation with fear and trembling on these matters, and the standard by which we must judge doctrine is not how palatable or how repelling it is, but by how scriptural it is.

When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” . . . After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. (John 6:60, 66)

Moving on, Don Preston was juggling a number of projects and had the Berean Bible Church conference to prepare for, so he was unable to overrule an objection for this issue. Rather than try and find someone else to fill in, I simply used the situation to save some money by reducing the page count of the issue from the usual twenty pages to sixteen.

A new video produced by Todd Diezsi is scheduled to be available by the time you get this issue (see the ad on page 9). Some well known preterists—Don Preston, David Curtis, Alan Bondar, Ed Stevens—are involved in the project, so it promises to be top-notch. FCG is not directly involved in the production of this video; we are merely sharing the news. For ordering information see the ad on page 9.

Thanks for your continued prayers and financial support!

Blessings,

Brian



The cover is Gustave Dore's engraving of Jacob's dream

Mailbag...

Thanks for letting us know the financial cost of getting your magazine together (no labor cost?). Your efforts in getting God's people more knowledgeable of (or in) His Word is immeasurable. God Bless,

Garrett & Beverly, CA

[If preterism had just one percent of futurism's dollars, we can only imagine what preterist ministries could accomplish. But all in God's time. Until then, FCG will continue to operate on volunteer labor—including all the writers and editors, who graciously donate their talents—BLM]

Thank you so much for the magazine. I am really enjoying all the subjects as sermons. And I am glad those subjects are backed up by the Bible. Because without God in it, it is no good.

Lorese, MS

Nathan and I look forward to your *Fulfilled!* Magazine. We pore over every article and discuss it also with our preterist friends. It is a real treasure to us. We want to continue supporting this magazine.

Nathan & Carol, OR

Was thrilled to get the first magazine. Read it cover to cover. Great job, thank you so much. Followed *Berean Bible Church* link in your magazine and watched an informative sermon. So glad there are people like you to

help keep me growing in God's word! Tony Denton already sent a list, so few people in this area, and so spread out. God bless you and your family,

Rachal, TX

Thank you for the Winter edition of *Fulfilled!* Magazine I received recently—as always there are some thought-provoking articles that I can read several times to take it all in.

Joan, Australia

Thank you for a great, thought-provoking magazine! I really look forward to every issue, whether it arrives “on time” or not! I have a few questions concerning Ed Stevens' article “Seeing the Kingdom Come” in the last (Spring) issue. I would love to see a page—or half page—given to questions and comments from readers.

Janell, AR

[I have forwarded your questions to Ed Stevens. I know he has a lot of material addressing your questions. We do publish reader comments here in the mailbag section (though I have skipped an issue here and there), but I simply don't have the time to coordinate questions and answers amongst multiple readers and authors. Rather, I encourage readers to contact the authors directly if they have questions/comments about a particular article—BLM]



“Thank you for a great, thought-provoking magazine! I really look forward to every issue, whether it arrives “on time” or not!

Perspectives

An Introductory Look at Yahweh's Divine Counsel

by Jeffrey T. McCormack

In recent years, there has been a rise of interest in the subject of giants called “Nephilim” and the Sons of God called “Watchers” in the Bible. Much of this interest swirls around the End Times crowd and involves speculation that approaches the absurd.¹

SADLY, MORE AND MORE people today are uninformed about the Hebrew and biblical concept of Yahweh's divine council, which included divinely appointed princes also known in the Bible as “sons of God” and the “Watchers.” An examination of extra-biblical ancient Hebrew writings brings this concept into sharper focus. For those with eyes to see it, the divine council is also clearly present in Scripture, so we will stay within the canon for this introduction.

While the Church often explains the plural “us” in Old Testament passages as a reference to the triune godhead (e.g., Gen 1:26, “Let **us** make man in our image,” during day six of creation, and Gen 11:27, “Come, let **us** go down . . .” at the Tower of Babel), this reading of Trinitarian theology into these verses does not reflect the ancient Hebrews' understanding. Rather, the Hebrews understood these passages as examples of Yahweh speaking to His heavenly council.²

While Scripture is clear that God is one (Deut 6:4), it also speaks in terms of a cosmic worldview that includes a body of divine beings. This body comprises a sort of governmental bureaucracy that works alongside of and in counsel with Yahweh. The idea of Yahweh having a governing body around Him may sound strange to us today, but it was not so to the ancient Hebrews, nor to the early Church who gave us the Scriptures. These angelic beings are referred to by different names, one of which is “sons of God”:

*Now there was a day when the **sons of God** came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them. (Job 1:6 & 2:1; cf. Gen 6:1-2)*

They are also known by the term “Watchers” and/or “holy ones,” as we see in Daniel: “The sentence is by the decree of the **watchers**, the decision by the word of the **holy ones**” (4:17). This council is also evident in the Psalms:

*God has taken his place **in the divine council**; in the **midst of the gods** he holds judgment . . . (Psalm 82:1-2)*

*Let the heavens praise your wonders, O LORD, your faithfulness **in the assembly of the holy ones!** . . . Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, a God*

*greatly to be feared in **the council of the holy ones**, and awesome above **all who are around him?** (Psalm 89:5-7)*

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery informs us that “the divine assembly is . . . a board of advisors or counselors with whom the supreme deity consults, an ‘assembly of the holy ones’ (Psalms 89:5)”³ Biblical scholar Michael Heiser elaborates:

The term divine council is used by Hebrew and Semitics scholars to refer to the heavenly host, the pantheon of divine beings who administer the affairs of the cosmos. All ancient Mediterranean cultures had some conception of a divine council. The divine council of Israelite religion, known primarily through the psalms, was distinct in important ways.⁴

Space does not permit discussing it here, but read 1 Kings 22:19-22 to see this divine council at work.

Author Brian Godawa also notes, “Biblical scholars refer to this hierarchy as the divine council, or divine assembly and it consists of beings that are referred to in the Bible as *gods*.”⁵ Now, in early history, as the people became more disobedient toward Yahweh, He finally disowned them, turning them over to the leadership of these princes/sons of god. He turned them over to these “gods,” and Yahweh Himself chose a new people for His own:

*When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples **according to the number of the sons of God**. But the **LORD's portion** is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. (Deut 32:8-9)*

This is referring to the division of humanity at the Tower of Babel (Gen 10), when Yahweh divided humanity into the 70 nations (Gen 11). The nations were divided and to each Yahweh assigned one of these divine sons of god to be their respective “god.” Thus, when we read of gods such as Baal and Molech, we are reading of these angelic leaders. These gods were not, however, to be worshipped or followed by Yahweh's people:

*And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the **host of heaven**, you be drawn away and bow down*

The “Watchers” and “sons of God” in the Bible

to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. (Deut 4:19)

The people of Yahweh were not to serve those gods He had appointed to lead the other nations. Nevertheless, Israel failed to follow this command “*and went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them*” (Deut 29:26).

Jewish commentator Jeffrey Tigay writes, “[These passages] seem to reflect a Biblical view that . . . as punishment for man’s repeated spurning of His authority in primordial times (Gen 3-11), God deprived mankind at large of true knowledge of Himself and ordained that it should worship idols and subordinate celestial beings.”⁶

Even Yahweh’s people had divine, princely leaders. Rowland, speaking of Israel’s prince, says “This notion of the guardian-angel of Israel has its parallels in apocalyptic literature, where we find the notion that all the nations of the world have their guardian angels in the heavenly world.”⁷ We see this concept more clearly in Daniel 10, where Daniel is visited by one of these princes, who mentions a heavenly battle in which “*the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me.*”

So we see that Michael is one of these divine princes, and he was fighting against another national prince so that the messenger could get to Daniel. But whose prince is Michael? The messenger, speaking to Daniel, referred to Michael as “*your prince*” (10:21)—specifically, the prince of Daniel’s people (12:1).

There are other princes of this type mentioned throughout Scripture, but because of the Church’s ignorance of this divine hierarchy found in Hebrew cosmology, we find throughout much of later Christian history that all these references have been comingled and assigned to a single being—Satan. This makes for a very dualistic view that posits the biblical narrative as being focused on just two spiritual arch enemies—Yahweh and Satan.

Delving deeper into Psalm 82, we read that those princes allotted to the nations were not obedient in their task, and Yahweh was going to judge them, and, although they are heavenly beings, they would die “like men” and He would take back the nations to Himself.

God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: “How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?” . . . I said, “You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you; nevertheless, like men you shall die, and fall like any prince.” Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations! (Psalm 82:1-8)

Then, in Isaiah we are given a further glimpse at the judgment of these princely leaders, and God resuming the role as leader of the nations:

On that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. They will be gathered together as prisoners in a pit; they will be shut up in a prison, and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders. (Isa 24:21-23)

Naturally, we also find the concept of this cosmic battle, in which Yahweh takes back the nations, in the New Testament period. This is the type of spiritual battle backdrop we find in Hebrew thought being mentioned by the Apostle Paul:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Eph 6:12)

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (Col 1:16)

The word used here for “rulers” is a term we see often in Scripture and is connected to the idea of these heavenly, princely rulers. In some Bibles, like the King James Version, it is translated as “principalities and powers,” and refers to “a class of heavenly beings possessing unspecified power. This word pair occurs in early Jewish literature only in 1 Enoch 61:10. Perhaps they are the angels whom YHWH has put in charge of the nations.”⁸

So we see that Paul is using a term that is related to the ancient belief that the nations had heavenly princes. Let us examine additional verses with similar terminology:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 8:38-39 KJV)

And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. (Col 2:15 KJV)

Thus, when we arrive at the book of Revelation, we find John depicting one of the final major battles as being between these princely powers. On one side is Israel’s prince, Michael, and the other is the accuser, Satan.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And

continued on p. 8

The Divine Council

by Jeffrey T. McCormack

... continued from p. 7

the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Rev 12:7-9)

Another thing most seem to miss is that Satan is cast out of heaven late in the game, around the time of the Messiah's birth. Author Evan Wilson sums it up well:

Satan, the dragon, is merely another in a long line of powers that Michael and others have spent their obedient career restraining, subduing and defeating. It is also amazing that in the interests of inflating the archfiend they (theologians) take his fall and place it before the world's beginning, while in prophecy it happens just prior to the birth of Messiah.⁹

After Satan is cast out, he is allotted a short time to do his work (Rev 12:12); thus we find him more active during the ministry of Christ than seen previously in Scripture. Once Satan is kicked out of the heavenly council, he begins working as a deceiver of the nations within the Roman Empire. He is let loose to go and seek whom he may devour, while Jesus and the Apostles move about shutting him down everywhere they go.

Jesus made mention of Satan's fall after sending the evangelistic mission of the disciples. They returned exclaiming how *"even the demons are subject to us in your name!"* And [Jesus] said to them, *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you"* (Luke 10:17-19).

So Satan had fallen, and now his demons and power were being overthrown through Christ and His disciples, with Paul stating that *"the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet"* (Rom 16:20a).

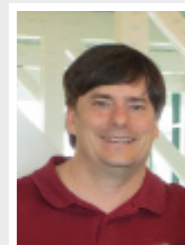
When Christ comes onto the scene, this divine prince, "Satan," offers Him control of the entire known world, that is, the Roman Empire. However, Jesus ultimately knocks him down, crushes his head, and takes it from him. And as promised, through Christ, Yahweh was now taking back all of the nations.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . . (Matthew 28:18-20)

So in essence, what we see in the New Testament period is Christ inheriting all the nations of the earth, and then sending his servants to clean out the infestation and

Jeffrey T. McCormack

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residue of the principalities and powers that formerly ruled. The disciples were going from town to town casting out demons and declaring that a new Prince and King was in power; they went about destroying the enemies of the new King until all of those enemies were finally placed under His feet, at which time it was declared:

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. (Rev 11:15)

So this ends our very brief introductory look at the Watchers—those divine beings that played a part in Yahweh's divine council, and His plans to rule and instruct the nations. Much more could be shown from Scripture on this topic, and even more could be written by including Hebrew extrabiblical literature such as the Book of Enoch. Hopefully enough has been said to pique your interest to study further.

For a more in-depth look—as well as a multi-part series by Pastor David Curtis—you are welcome to read more of my material at:

<http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/divinecouncil>. †

1. Brian Godawa, *When Giants Were Upon the Earth* (Kindle, 2014), 7.
2. Please note that I am not arguing against the doctrine of the Trinity; I am merely stating that these particular passages do not refer to the Trinity.
3. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman (editors) (InterVarsity Press, 1998), 51.
4. Michael S. Heiser, "Divine Council," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; InterVarsity Press, 2008), 112.
5. Brian Godawa, *When Giants Were Upon the Earth* (Kindle, 2014), 47.
6. Jeffrey Tigay, *JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 435.
7. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (Crossroad Publishing, 1982), 88.
8. *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, Jacob Neusner & William Scott Green (eds.), (Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 502.
9. Evan Wilson, *The Forgotten Heavens*, (Canon Press, 2010), 72.

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Creation to Consummation

Gehenna in the New Testament (all 12 references)

by Ed Stevens

SEVERAL PRETERIST TEACHERS ARE NOW openly affirming *Annihilationism*, and repudiating the idea of *Eternal Conscious Punishment*. They claim that the word *hell* does not belong in the vocabulary of a Christian because they believe that the English word *hell* has no Hebrew or Greek equivalent referring to a place of eternal conscious punishment.

However, they are overlooking the Hebrew word *gehinnom* and the Greek word *gehenna*. Both of these words carry the meaning of a place of punishment in both the seen and unseen realms. In this article we will examine the twelve New Testament verses that use the Greek word *gehenna*. Note that every instance of the English word *hell* in these twelve verses is translated from the Greek word *gehenna*.

Annihilationists believe that *gehenna* refers only to the physical valley of Hinnom, which was the smoldering trash heap outside Jerusalem, where garbage and the dead bodies of wicked folks were thrown to be eaten by maggots, vultures, and wild animals, or consumed by the ever-burning fires. However, these twelve verses, all quoted from the NAS95, demonstrate that *gehenna* refers primarily (if not exclusively) to the place in the unseen spiritual realm where the souls of the unredeemed will be consciously punished forever. First we will quote the verse, and then comment on it:

1. **Matt 5:22** “*But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.*”

What does “calling someone a fool” have to do with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70? This is moral and ethical evil, which Jesus said was deserving of punishment in the *fiery gehenna*. How could burning the offenders’ *bodies* in the trash heap outside Jerusalem have any affect on their guilty *souls*, especially if those souls were annihilated? This implies that, during the afterlife in the unseen realm, there will be conscious punishment in a place called *gehenna*. It would not make sense otherwise.

2. **Matt 5:29** “*If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*”
3. **Matt 5:30** “*If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.*”
4. **Matt 18:9** “*If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.*”

5. **Mark 9:43** “*If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life crippled, than, having your two hands, to go into hell, into the unquenchable fire . . .*”

6. **Mark 9:45** “*If your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame, than, having your two feet, to be cast into hell . . .*”

7. **Mark 9:47** “*If your eye causes you to stumble, throw it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell . . .*”

Since the six verses listed above (Matt 5:29-30; 18:9; and Mk 9:43, 45, 47) are parallel statements, we will deal with all of them together as one group here in this paragraph. Notice the contrast between “entering life” and being “cast into the *fiery gehenna*.” The phrases “enter life” and “enter the kingdom of God” refer to the final destiny of the righteous after the judgment. This same concept is conveyed in the judgment scene of Matthew 25:34 and 46, where the righteous dead *inherit the Kingdom* and *enter into eternal life*. That judgment scene did not take place on earth, but in the unseen spiritual realm. So this group of six verses describes what happens to the conscious souls of both the righteous and the wicked after the judgment—the righteous enter into eternal life, but the wicked are cast into the *fiery gehenna*. Jesus, in Matthew 25:41 and 46, described *gehenna* as being the same place of “*eternal punishment*” and “*eternal fire*” where the devil and his angels were also cast for eternal conscious punishment (see the similar “lake of fire” idea in Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14; 21:8). That cannot be a physical place on earth—like the trash heap outside Jerusalem—since spirit creatures such as the devil and his angels cannot be affected by the physical fires there. Instead, *gehenna* is referring to a place of eternal conscious punishment in the unseen realm, where the conscious souls of the wicked were sent *after the judgment*. The wicked were conscious at the judgment, and were still conscious when they were cast into the same place where the devil and his angels were also cast.

8. **Matt 10:28** “*Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*”

9. **Luke 12:5** “*But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him!*”

Notice that *gehenna* is a place which destroys (brings to ruin) *both soul and body*. The physical Valley of Hinnom did not affect the soul; therefore, *gehenna* must be a spiritual place

The physical valley did not affect the soul; therefore, gehenna must be a place in the unseen realm where the souls of the wicked are brought to everlasting ruin in

Eternal Conscious Punishment

Studies in Redemptive History

Edward E. Stevens

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International Preterist
Association

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in the unseen realm in which *souls* are brought to everlasting ruin in the afterlife. If Jesus was only threatening the burning of dead bodies in the trash heap after individuals' souls had been annihilated, that would be no threat to the wicked. The soul has nothing to fear in annihilation. But Jesus said that bringing the soul to ruin in *gehenna* was definitely something to fear and avoid at all costs.

10. Matt 23:15 *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.”*

The evil, hypocritical lifestyle of the Pharisees is what destined them to *gehenna*. The burning of their bodies in the Valley of Hinnom during and after the Jewish War of AD 66-70 is not all that is threatened here. As we saw in Matthew 10:28 above, there is an additional threat to their souls, which the Valley of Hinnom's physical fires could not accomplish. *Gehenna*

depicts what their souls would suffer in the afterlife, *not merely* what would happen to their bodies in the Valley of Hinnom after the destruction of Jerusalem. Also noteworthy is the fact that there were hundreds of thousands of Jews who were killed outside of Jerusalem and Palestine whose bodies were *not* thrown into the physical Valley of Hinnom. Yet their forever conscious souls were still cast into the *fiery gehenna* for eternal conscious punishment in the unseen realm.

11. Matt 23:33 *“You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?”*

The word “sentence” here is the Greek *kriseos*, which derives from *krisis* and *krino* (“judgment”). *Gehenna* is the place to which the wicked were assigned *after the judgment* of AD 70. The souls of the wicked were conscious at the judgment, and were cast into the same place of “eternal punishment” as the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41). This is not a physical place on earth in the seen realm. *Gehenna* is a spiritual place in the unseen realm to where the souls or spirits of evil men and angels are sent for eternal conscious punishment.

12. James 3:6 *And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell.*

How could the physical Valley of Hinnom on the outskirts of Jerusalem “set on fire” the lives of those living hundreds of miles away in the Diaspora, especially when this was written to living people (not dead ones) before AD 70 at a time when the unbelieving and rebellious Jews had not yet been cast into *gehenna*? James was writing to living Jews, namely, “to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad” (outside Palestine).

The physical fires of the trash heap outside Jerusalem at AD 70 had nothing to do with lighting the evil spiritual fires that were already in their souls before AD 70. Therefore, their evil speech was set on fire (or influenced) by the *gehenna* which is in the unseen realm. That is what Jesus had in mind when He called the hypocritical Pharisees “sons of *gehenna*” (Matt 23:15). Their evil and unregenerate hearts were born from below (*gehenna*), not from above (heaven) (see the similar idea in John 8:23 and James 3:15-17). They were sons of their father the devil (John 8:44; Matt 3:7; 12:34; 1John 3:8-12).

Conclusion

Jesus made it very clear that no one will ever be annihilated. Regarding Judas Iscariot, Jesus said that it would have been better for him if he had never been born, than to experience what he was going to suffer in his afterlife (Matt 26:24; Mark 14:21). If Judas was going to be annihilated, that would be the same in net effect as having never been born. So his annihilation would not have been “worse” than never being born. It would be the same in net effect. Yet Jesus clearly indicates here that the afterlife of Judas would be worse than annihilation or never being born. That necessarily implies that he would *not* be annihilated, nor given another chance to repent and enter into heaven. Instead, it implies that his afterlife would be eternal conscious punishment (ECP).

Furthermore, Jesus said that the person who blasphemes the Holy Spirit would never obtain forgiveness, “*but is guilty of an eternal sin*” (Matt 12:31-32; Mark 3:29; Lk 12:10). How could that sin-guilt be eternally held against the blasphemer if he was annihilated? And how could such a blasphemer ever go to heaven if he never received forgiveness? That proves that both Annihilationism and Universalism cannot be true.

We have seen that Jesus taught more about *gehenna* (hell) than any other teacher/writer in the New Testament. Since He was the creator of *hades* and *gehenna*, He absolutely knew what those places were like, and never misrepresented their true character in His teaching. In His interaction with the Sadducees in Luke 20:27-38, Jesus stated that “ALL are alive to God” after physical death, including the unredeemed. They were not in some kind of unconscious soul-sleep until the resurrection, nor permanently snuffed out of existence—“all are alive to God.” This very effectively refuted the Sadducees, who were Annihilationists. In light of this, how can Annihilationists today be so bold as to suggest that Jesus taught Annihilationism? And since Jesus did not teach Annihilationism, but instead refuted it, how can anyone today dare to teach it? If you would like to know more about what the Bible teaches in regard to the afterlife of the unredeemed, I have a one-page listing of some very helpful books (“ECP Reading List”). If you would like to have it, simply request it by email and I will send it as an attachment. My email address is preterist1@preterist.org ☩

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Life in the Kingdom

Sin, Law, and Judgment in the New Covenant

by Charles Meek and Bruce Thevenot

AS WE SEE IT, there are three brands of preterism: *partial* preterism (which does not take fulfillment far enough), *hyper*-preterism (which takes fulfillment too far), and *biblically authentic* preterism (or “Evangelical Preterism”).¹

A distinguishing mark of some hyper-preterists is their belief that since AD 70, sin does not matter anymore and God’s judgment of sin is complete. They reach this conclusion by lifting certain passages out of context, such as 1 Corinthians 15:56 which states that “the power of sin is the law.” As the argument goes, since THE LAW is no longer binding, sin is no longer an issue. (Many dispensationalists and some liberal Christians reach a similar conclusion but by different avenues.)

The New Testament teaches that we are not under law but under grace (Rom 6:14; etc.), but indeed the law was never capable of securing a righteousness equal to God’s expectation for man. Does this mean that moral laws against theft, murder, adultery, etc. no longer apply? Of course not, so how are we to understand this?

Standard Christian theology (as well as Jewish theology) holds, that, there were three types of law in the Old Testament: (1) *ceremonial* law, which included the dietary laws, as well as the sacrificial system and circumcision, (2) *civil* law under Hebrew theocracy, and (3) the *moral* law. (Writers of Scripture also occasionally employ the word “law” to indicate a morally necessary relationship or principle of cause and effect, not referring to the Mosaic law at all—for example, the “law of sin and death.”)

Even without looking to theologians to make these distinctions, there is an obvious difference between theft or murder—and circumcision or temple rituals. Indeed, this distinction is so obvious that the New Testament writers did not have to explain it in detail, but merely assumed it. Yet we can examine the text to understand that in most instances when Paul and the other writers spoke of “the law” being abolished, they were speaking of the civil and ceremonial components of the Mosaic law. The New Testament repealed these laws, but *moral* law remains in effect, as demonstrated below:

- We find examples of the dietary laws being specifically superseded in Mark 7:19, Acts 10:12-15, and Romans 14:17. In Hebrews 9-10, the writer explains that the essence of the law was the sacrificial system. The dietary laws and sacrificial system together constitute the *ceremonial* law. Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was the replacement for the system of temple

sacrifices for sin. Any doubt about the continuing validity of the sacrificial laws was removed in AD 70 when that system ended with the destruction of the temple. Jesus became the “temple” per John 2:19 and Revelation 21:22.

- Another example of the separation of moral law from Jewish ceremonial law is found in 1 Corinthians 7:19 where Paul makes a distinction between rules of circumcision and moral law, validating the latter.
- An example of the Jewish *civil* law also being repealed is found in John 8:1-11—the woman caught in adultery. Jesus prevented the standard Jewish penalty of stoning to death from being enforced. He affirmed the existence and nature of the sin (“Go and sin no more”), but set aside the death penalty for certain offenses. Another example is 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 13, where Paul does not demand the death penalty for incest.
- Yet, the New Testament actually *strengthened moral law*. Jesus not only confirmed moral law in such passages as Mark 7:21-23, but expanded the sin of adultery to include lust (Matt 5:27-28). In Matthew 5:21-22 and 1 John 3:15 we see that the sin of murder actually includes hatred! And Jesus placed conditions on his love, saying, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15; etc.). Indeed, at least 9 of the 10 commandments were re-affirmed as valid in the New Testament. (Some argue that the Sabbath Day commandment is no longer valid because Christ has become our Sabbath rest. Others argue that Hebrews 4:1-11 is a restatement of the Fourth Commandment to honor the Sabbath.)
- Consider that Jesus accused the Pharisees of ignoring the “more important matters of the law—justice and mercy and faithfulness” (Mattw 23:23), and that Paul quoted parts of the Decalogue (Rom 13:9) and insisted that “all Scripture [i.e. the Old Testament] is God-breathed and is useful for correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). And when James quoted the law of love (James 2:8 from Leviticus 19:18), or condemned partiality, adultery, murder, and slander as contrary to the law (James 2:9, 11; 4:11), and when Peter quoted Leviticus, “Be holy, because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16 from Lev 19:2)—the unmistakable conclusion is that at least part of

Present day living in light of past fulfillment

the law remains authoritative.

- Jesus railed against the burdensome and extra-scriptural body of regulations developed by the Jews over the preceding centuries. Whereas the Jews complicated the Law, Jesus simplified it to its essence, to the Golden Rule—itsself a moral command—saying “for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12).
- The demands for obedience to moral law are pervasive in the New Testament. The writers could say that we are saved through faith, but often in the same book or even the same paragraph taught the importance of righteous living—i.e. moral law. For example, Paul taught in Romans 2:13 that “doers of the law will be justified.” In Romans 3:31, Paul bluntly stated that, “Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary we uphold the law.” In Romans 7:12, 22 Paul said that the law is holy, righteous, and delightful. Compare 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and Galatians 5:19-26, where Paul lists certain things as being especially important. In these passages, Paul was certainly referring to moral law, and was not anticipating its dissolution in AD 70 or ever. In 1 Timothy 1:8 Paul said the law is good, if used properly.
- Antinomianism, the denial of the applicability of moral law in the new covenant, has always been considered heresy in classical Christianity. Both Catholics and Protestants reject it. The law of God exposes the counterfeit love that will not accept its responsibilities toward God and neighbor.

We cannot separate Christianity from its sublime moral imperatives. Moral law existed before the Ten Commandments were given to Moses. We remember transgressions from Adam, Cain, Noah’s neighbors, and Sodom and Gomorrah—with God’s commensurate judgments—*prior to Moses*. Moreover, moral law continues *after* the repeal of the civil and ceremonial laws. The New Covenant, with its frequent demands for obedience, was not abolished in AD 70. Indeed, sin continues in the new heaven and new earth per Isaiah 65:20 and Revelation 22:15.

Although the Ten Commandments codified moral law, Paul explains in Romans 1:18-2:16 that moral law is known by everyone through nature and conscience. In Jeremiah 31:33 and Hebrews 10:16 we see that it is written on our hearts. Thus, moral law applies to everyone, whether they accept it or not, or even whether they know it or not. This is referred to by Christian philosophers as “Natural Law.”

Let’s consider this from the standpoint of simple logic:

First Point of Logic:

- Premise #1: Paul said that no one is justified before God under “The Law” (Gal 3:11).
- Premise #2: Paul said that the doers of “The Law” will be justified (Rom 2:13).
- Premise #3: Paul was not inconsistent.
- Therefore: “The Law” has different meanings depending on the context.

Second Point of Logic:

- Premise #1: Paul said that the first-century Christians were not under “Law” (Rom 6:14).
- Premise #2: Paul told the first-century Christians that immoral people would not enter the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10, etc.).
- Therefore, the moral requirements of the law were not abolished.

Third Point of Logic:

- Premise #1: Antinomians (including some hyper-preterists) believe that moral law does not apply today.
- Premise #2: Antinomians would be quick to complain if someone stole from them or murdered a friend of theirs.
- Therefore: Antinomians are inconsistent and know in their heart that moral law still exists today.

“If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8)

This verse and other passages in the Bible clearly teach that men are by nature sinful (Gen 6:5, 8:21; 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chron 6:36; Job 14:4; 25:4-6; Psalm 14; 51:3-5; 53:1-3; 58:3; 130:3; Prov 14:12; 20:9; Eccles 7:20, 7:29; 9:3; Isa 53:6; 55:8-9; 64:6; Jer 4:22; 17:9; Mark 7:20-23; John 3:19; 8:34, 44; Rom 3:9-12, 23; 5:12-21; 7:14-25; 8:7-8; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph

continued on p. 14

Sin in the New Covenant

by Meek/Thevenot

... continued from p. 13

2:1-3; 4:18).

Neither the atonement nor the new birth removes sin from man's nature. If you deny your own sin, you are not only denying Scripture but have seared your own conscience (Rom 1:20; 2:15; 3:21; etc.). Have you ever failed to do what you should have done? Do you think that you loved God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength—and loved your neighbor as yourself—for even one hour? Even the Apostle Paul wrestled with his own sin (Romans 7)! Do you think you are better than Paul?

The Bible speaks of levels of sin. On one level, we can be considered “blameless” if we avoid the “big” sins. Paul offered lists of these in such passages as 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and Galatians 5:19-21 (see also 2 Thess 2:10 in light of its context in 2 Thess 4:3-8). But on another level, the *sins of the heart* are what condemn us (Matt 5:21; 27-28). These sins include lust, pride, and envy—things that no person can avoid (Mark 7:14-23).

Some Christians have failed to appreciate the doctrine of *imputed righteousness*. This doctrine teaches that the righteousness of Christ is “imputed” to Christians through our faith. Even though Christians in actuality still sin, God *overlooks* the sin of believers through a “legal fiction.” In other words, it is an “alien” righteousness from God, who *considers* the persevering believer sinless because of Christ. Bible passages about this include: Genesis 15:6; Isaiah 43:25; Romans 3:21-25; 4:5-11, 22-24; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:3-14; Philippians 3:9; Colossians 1:22-23; 3:1-5; Hebrews 8:12; 10:17; 1 John 1:5-10.

While believers in Christ under the New Covenant are made new creatures, they are not instantly rendered incapable of sinning, but rather are freed from the “wages” of sin (condemnation to death) and enter into a new and vital relationship with God in Christ. In that relationship believers are enabled by the means of grace to acknowledge, confess, and resist sin and progressively gain mastery over it. However, there is no suggestion that the freedom and ability to sin is entirely removed, either from living believers or from the world. A doctrine of “entire sanctification” has been put forward from time to time, for example by certain Pentecostals and holiness sects in recent history, but that view has never been widely accepted in the church at large.

So the world of the new covenant is not free of sin. If sin doesn't matter anymore, then any religion or even no religion will serve just as well as Christianity. If sin and judg-

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ment don't matter anymore, then anyone gets to heaven. That is universalism, which is an incredible distortion of Christianity.

God did not retire nor did his nature change in AD 70. The attributes of God include his holiness, his demands for justice, and indeed his wrath (John 3:36; Rom 1:18; Eph 5:3-6; etc.). God's wrath is mentioned 46 times in the New Testament. God still hates sin and the worship of any other god. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Psalm 90:2; Mal 3:6; Luke 1:50; Heb 13:8; James 1:17; 1 Peter 1:24-25; Rev 1:8). We remember that “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” (Psalm 9:10; 111:10; etc.) While the Great Judgment upon old-covenant Israel was in AD 70, God still hates sin and will respond accordingly. He demands allegiance.

Yes, a focus of the New Testament is the Great Judgment in AD 70 (Matt 23:29-39). But God continues to judge individuals, and we believe nations as well (Num 32:23; 2 Chron 7:14; Job 12:23; Psalm 9:17-20; 33:12; 110:6; Prov 14:34; Isa 2:4; 60:12; Micah 4:3; John 3:36; Acts 10:42-43; Rom 1:18; 6:23; 12:19; 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10; Gal 6:7; Eph 5:3-6; Heb 9:27; 13:4 Rev 2:10; 14:13; 21:8; 22:14-15). God preserves the faithful, but his wrath is poured out on the unrepentant reprobate. The good news is that we need not fear the Great Tribulation, Armageddon, or the burning of the planet—as futurists think. But we all face judgment when we meet our Maker.

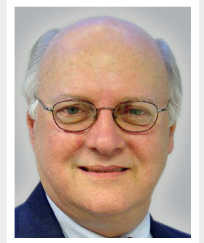
Conclusion

The New Testament writers were not speaking out of both sides of their mouth about how we are saved. There is a close relationship between faith and works. A true saving faith is one that produces good works. Luther said that the relationship between faith and works is like fire and smoke. A true saving faith *will* produce good (moral) works just as a fire produces smoke. We are saved by faith alone, but the Scripture makes a distinction between a *living* faith and a *dead* faith. We are not saved by a dead faith (James 2), but rather by a living, penitent, surrendering faith in Jesus.

The sinfulness of man lies at the core of Christianity. This is why a Savior is even necessary. Christianity is the *only* worldview or religion that teaches this. We are not just sinful around the edges; our sin runs deep. To deny man's sin and God's judgment puts one on the doorstep leading out of Christianity. Authentic preterism does not harm classical Christianity, it corrects and reinforces it.

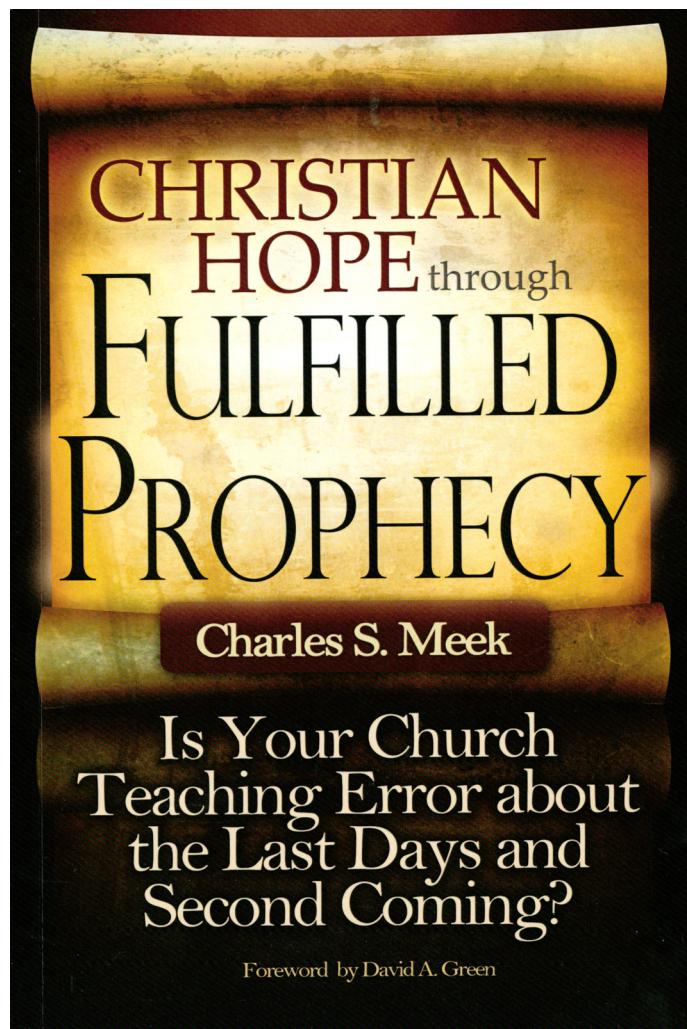
Bruce Thevenot

Bruce is a reformed Episcopal layman and Bible teacher, contributor to “*Christian Hope through Fulfilled Prophecy*,” and co-administrator of the Facebook page “Evangelical Preterism”



When some preterists see that the church has been wrong on eschatological doctrine, they might be tempted to throw out essential doctrines of the Christian faith with the proverbial bathwater. We think this is an egregious error. In years past, Christian pulpits were aflame with righteousness—for example in the American Great Awakenings. This has, sadly, been largely lost in modern mamby-pamby, easy-believism, cheap-grace Christianity. Christianity is losing its power to convert the lost and change the culture. Preterists should lead the charge to regain the power of the full counsel of God. †

1. “Hyper-preterism is an appropriate term for anyone who holds that sin, salvation, the church, the gospel, and God’s eternal character, plan and expectations came to an end in AD 70. Conversely, it is not appropriate as a label for a preterist who merely believes that the Old Testament system came to an end at that time, along with the general resurrection of souls out of Hades, all coinciding with the promised Parousia. We rejoice in God’s continuing application of his work of redemption accomplished once for all times for all his people, past/present/future, through his Son.” — Bruce Thevenot



The last days are approaching—the last days of futurism, that is. Out of the dying and conflicting ism’s of the tradition of futurism is arising the faith-confirming truth of full preterism. Its ascent has been slow, but steady and sure. The life-blood of this “resurrection” has been the enduring and zealous love of humble saints—love for God’s house and love for His word.

Charles Meek is one of those saints. This book, written out of a deep love for the Lord Jesus and His church, is an exhortation to teachers and pastors to re-examine their eschatological traditions. It is an announcement of comfort to those struggling believers who have found it impossible to reconcile the things they have been taught about Bible prophecy with the Bible itself. It is the answer to the enemies of Christianity who have called Christ and the writers of the New Testament false prophets. And it is a call for Christians to open their eyes anew in the realm of eschatology, and to let the Bible actually say what it says.

— from the *Forward* by David A. Green

In This Issue:

Yahweh's Divine Council

Eternal Conscious
Punishment

Sin, Law, and Judgment
in the New Covenant

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Preterism . . . *it's about time!*

It's about the time Jesus told His disciples that He would return—this(His) generation!

It's about the time the New Testament authors told their readers Jesus would return—soon, near, at hand, shortly!

It's about time for a scriptural explanation other than delay!

It's about time for a "last days" view that doesn't conjure up gaps and parenthetical ages!



Preterism
Preterism
Preterism

...maybe it's about time you looked into it!