

Is there a hell?

A discussion on eternal judgment



“There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of our Lord’s own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason”



C S Lewis - The Problem of Pain

Emotionally, I find the concept [of eternal conscious torment] intolerable and do not understand how people can live with it without either cauterizing their feelings or cracking under the strain. But our emotions are a fluctuating, unreliable guide to truth and must not be exalted to the place of supreme authority in determining it .

.. my question must be — and is — not what does my heart tell me, but what does God's word say?

John Stott, Essentials, 315-16.



If the evils Jesus died for aren't significant enough to warrant eternal punishment, then the grace displayed on the cross isn't significant enough to warrant eternal praise.



Randy Alcorn

There seems to be a kind of conspiracy to forget, or to conceal, where the doctrine of hell comes from. The doctrine of hell is not “mediaeval priestcraft” for frightening people into giving money to the church: it is Christ’s deliberate judgment on sin. . . . We cannot repudiate hell without altogether repudiating Christ.

Dorothy Sayers, *Introductory Papers on Dante* [Methuen, 1954], 44

¹ Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, ² instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

HELL

Hebrews 6:1-2

Scriptural words used for the hereafter

Old Testament



Sheol

(Hebrew)



Langenscheidt's Hebrew/English Dictionary to the Old Testament (p. 337) defines Sheol as:

“netherworld, realm of the dead, Hades.”



SHEOL

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia in Vol. IV, p. 2761, defines Sheol as:

“the unseen world, the state or abode of the dead, and is the equivalent of the Greek: Hades.”



SHEOL

Keil and Delitzsch state that:

“Sheol denotes the place where departed souls are gathered after death; it is an infinitive form from sha-al, to demand, the demanding, applied to the place which inexorably summons all men into its shade.”



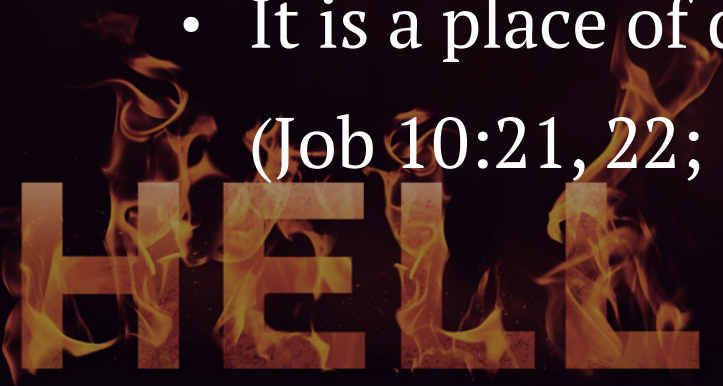
SHEOL

The Hebrew word Sheol is found 66 times in the Old Testament. The Old Testament consistently refers to the body as going to the grave, it always refers to the soul or spirit of man as going to Sheol.



Old Testament scriptures intimate the following about Sheol. We face the age old interpreters quandary about how literally we are to take these things.

- It is a realm from which there is no escape
(gates - Job 17:16 and bars - Isa 38:10)
- It is a place of darkness or shadows
(Job 10:21, 22; Ps 143:3)



SHEOL - ABOUT IT

- It is “down,” “beneath the earth,” or in “the lower parts of the earth”

(Job 11:8; Isa. 44:23; 57:9; Ezek. 26:20; Amos 9:2)

- It is a place where one could reunite with ancestors, tribe or people

(Gen. 15:15; 25:8; 35:29; 37:35; 49:33; Num. 20:24, 28; 31:2; Deut. 32:50; 34:5; 2 Sam. 12:23)



SHEOL - DESCRIBED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS

- It seems that Sheol has different sections, divisions or distinctions
(Deut. 32:22)



SHEOL - DESCRIBED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS

- a “ghost,” “shade,” or “disembodied spirit”
(Job 26:5; Ps 88:10; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Isa 14:9; 26:14, 19)
- Conscious entities while in Sheol able to converse and make moral judgments
(Isa 14:9-20; 44:23; Ezek 32:21)



SHEOL - PEOPLE WHO GO THERE ARE DESCRIBED AS

- Cut off from the living with a new dimension of reality with its own kind of existence (Ps 6:5; Eccles 9:10)
- Experiencing the following
God's anger (Deut 32:22), Distress (Ps 116:3), "cords of distress" (2 Sam 22:6; Ps 18:6), Writhing in pain (Job 26:5)

SHEOL - PEOPLE WHO GO THERE ARE DESCRIBED AS



In the Old Testament, the righteous as well as the wicked went to Sheol at death (Gen 37:35). Yet the Old Testament saints did not have a clear understanding of what to expect in Sheol. They were constantly torn by mixed emotions when they contemplated their death. While New Testament saints think of death as a “gain” (Phil. 1:21), the Old Testament saints thought of it as “loss.”



¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.



Hebrews 2:14-15

Scriptural words used for the hereafter

New Testament



Gehenna

(Greek)



The place where children were sacrificed to the god Moloch was originally in the "valley of the son of Hinnom," to the south of Jerusalem. The valley was later declared to be 'the valley of slaughter' by Jeremiah. It was seen to be accursed, and "Gehenna" therefore soon became a figurative equivalent for "hell."



GEHENNA

¹ Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, . . .

³ He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his children in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites.



2 Chronicles 28:1-4



References to Gehenna, generally allude to the fires of profane sacrificial practices, that someone who is burned in Gehenna is being offered up to some other God — or to no God. The valley was used as a burial place for criminals and for the burning of garbage and offal, using sulfur, the flammable substance we now use in matches and gunpowder.



HELL

GEHENNA

As the years passed, a sense of foreboding hung over the valley. It was a place where the smoke continued to rise, the worm did not die, and there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. Eventually, the Hebrew name gehinnom (canyon of Hinnom) evolved into geenna (gehenna), the familiar Greek word for hell



GEHENNA

All the references to gehenna, except James 3:6, are from Jesus himself, as a place of punishment for the wicked.



GEHENNA

whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire

- Matthew 5:22

more profitable for you that one of your members
perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.

- Matthew 5:29,30, Mark 9:43

GEHENNA



rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and
body in hell.

- Matthew 10:22, Luke 12:5

rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.

- Matthew 18:9

GEHENNA

HELL

Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the
condemnation of hell?

- Matthew 23:33



GEHENNA

Tartarus

(mostly considered the equivalent of Gehenna)



⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell,[tartarus] putting them in chains of darkness to be held for judgment;



2 peter 4:4

Hades

(Greek)



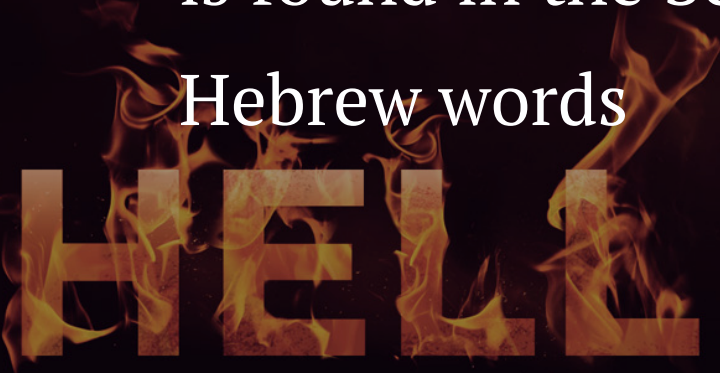
Hades is the name of the Greek god of the underworld, as well as the name of his underworld domain. In Hellenistic literature the word hades was used to mean a variety of things: a grave or tomb; the domain of the dead; the dead, collectively (e.g. one's ancestors or forefathers); or what it had originally meant, the place where dead spirits end up after dying.

HADES



In terms of the New Testament, it appears to mean a grave, or more specifically, a “dead end”. In the Septuagint, Hades is found 71 times. It is the Greek equivalent for Sheol 64 times. The other seven times it is found in the Septuagint, it is the translation of other

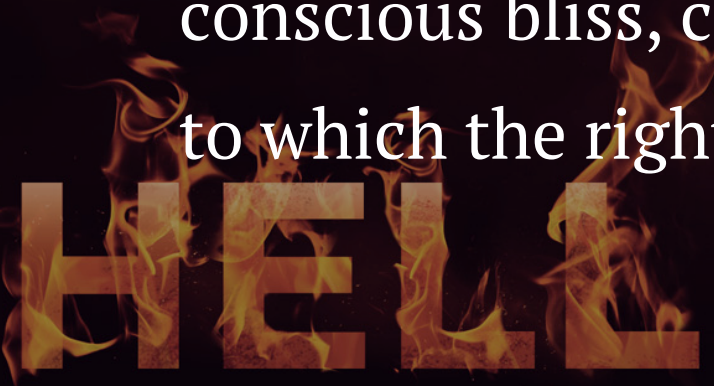
Hebrew words



HELL

HADES

During the inter-testamental period, the Jewish concept of Sheol had progressed to the stage where it was believed that Sheol had two distinct compartments, or sections. One section was a place of torment to which the wicked went (hades) while the other was a place of conscious bliss, called “Abraham’s bosom” or “paradise,” to which the righteous were carried by angels.



HADES

Jesus' parable about the rich man in hades and Lazarus at Abraham's bosom reflects the prevailing perspective of the Jewish teachers of His day. Debate abounds around whether His words in this parable are to be taken literally or figuratively.



HADES

- Jesus went to Hades (not abandoned to)
(Acts 2:31)
- Preached to those imprisoned (imprisoned spirits)
(1 Peter 3:18-22)
- Jesus raised many righteous people from the dead
and took them with Him to heaven
(Matthew 27:51-53, Ephesians 4:*)



² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows.

³ And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—

⁴ was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell.

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

HELL

⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.



2 Corinthians 5:6-8

⁹ if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment.

HELL

2 Peter 2:9

Eternal judgment

HELL

Whatever the opinion are put forward all theologians are united in their belief that eternal judgment is terrible fate to be avoided at all costs.



- Jesus taught it would be;
 - Separation from Him (Matt 7:23 away from me, I never knew you)
 - Burned, burning (parable of the weeds) (Matt 13:18-23)
 - into darkness weeping and gnashing of teeth (parable of the talents) (Matt 25:14-30)
 - Eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Goats in judgment) (Matt 25:31-46)
 - into darkness weeping and gnashing of teeth (parable of the wedding feast) (Matt 22:13)



HELL

Eternal Judgment

- Paul taught it would be;
 - Sudden destruction when the day of the Lord overtakes them (1 Thess 5:3)
 - Everlasting destruction (2 Thess 1:9)
 - Shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might (2 Thess 1:9)
 - Eternal judgment (Hebrews 6:3)
 - a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (Hebrews 10:27)



HELL

Eternal Judgment

- Other New Testament authors taught it would be;
 - Suffer the punishment of eternal fire (Jude 7)
 - hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment (2 Peter 2:9)
 - drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath, tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise for ever and ever. There will be no rest day or night (Revelation 14:10-11)
 - lake of fire (Revelation 20:14-15)

Eternal Judgment



- While it is not the only punishment, fire is frequently mentioned in conjunction with eternal judgment.

(Matt 5:22, 18:8-9, 25:41, Mark 9:43, 48, Luke 16:24, James 3:6, Jude 7, Rev 20:14 -15)



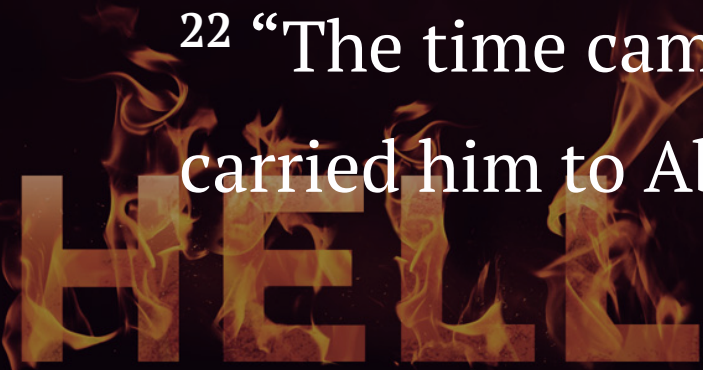
HELL

Eternal judgment and fire

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. ²⁰ At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores ²¹ and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

²² “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died

Luke 16:19-22



and was buried. ²³ In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴ So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ ²⁵ “But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus

Luke 16:22-25



received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’²⁷ “He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that

Luke 16:25-28



they will not also come to this place of torment.’
²⁹ “Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the
Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ³⁰ “‘No, father
Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes
to them, they will repent.’ ³¹ “He said to him, ‘If they
do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not
be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”

Luke 16:28-31



Is it really eternal?

HELL

Ainios (eternal) is used in the New Testament 66 times.
51 times of the happiness of the righteous, 2 times of
the duration of God's glory, 7 times of the punishment
of the wicked, 6 times where it means endless.



Ainos

Aion is an age, a cycle of time. It is translated in the NASb translation into english as; age (20), ages (6), ancient time (1), beginning of time (1), course (1), eternal (2), eternity (1), ever* (2), forever (27), forever and ever (20), forevermore (2), long ago (1), never* (1), old (1), time (1), world (7), worlds (1)

Aion

HELL

4 Main Opinions about Hell



Literal or Orthodox Opinion



Punishment for the wicked is everlasting and is
punitive and not redemptive.



Literal or Orthodox

Metaphorical Opinion



Punishment for the wicked is eternal but scriptural accounts of their suffering and judgment should be taken in a less than literal understanding



Metaphorical

Purgatorial Opinion

Roman catholic



Hell has an antechamber called Purgatory which serves as a place of Divine cleansing from which some will emerge redeemed and blessed of God. These needed to go through a period of purgation of their unconfessed sins and face judgment for them which will eventually lead them to a place of grace.

HELL

Purgatorial

Conditional Opinion



Hell is either temporary or it is redemptive. The temporary opinion (Annihilation) says that only the redeemed will be raised to life but the wicked are raised to face death, an eternal consequence. The redemptive opinion (Universalism) says that although some may have to suffer for a time, all will eventually come to restoration and peace with God

Conditional



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