

## ***Eschatology: Hell***

### ***Sheol, Hades, Grave***

#### *Old Testament Data*

When we dig into the texts that use these words we find certain features that stand out clearly:

- 1) In all 65 occurrences, sheol is not once used in the plural. That is because sheol does not mean merely the grave. There are not two or three or more sheols, but the one only. Instead of meaning the grave, the very word sheol is used to distinguish it from the grave.
- 2) Nowhere in all those 65 references is there any suggestion that the body goes to sheol. The body goes to the grave (qeber), but the soul goes to sheol.
- 3) Sheol is never spoken of as being in the ground, or on the surface of the earth, as the grave (qeber) is.
- 4) Also, in all those 65 texts we do not find that man ever puts anyone in sheol, as he puts bodies into graves.
- 5) When the Jews of Old Testament times meant only the grave they used a different word, qeber, which occurs 64 times in the Old Testament. It occurs in the plural 29 times. Dead bodies are said to be laid there, 37 times. It is said to be in the earth or the ground, 32 times; also to be owned by man, 44 times.

In Scripture, qeber is the grave; sheol is the other side of it.

#### *Temporary Abode of Souls*

Not only does the Old Testament make it clear the difference between the grave and sheol, it makes it equally clear that living souls really do go to sheol. There is a belief out there that at the death of the body the whole human person ceases to exist. The Hebrew word for soul is nephesh.

The Old Testament rings clear: when we part from life on earth it is the soul, the spirit, the real person which passes into sheol (hades), while the body is interred, burned, or otherwise disintegrated. Nowhere, however, does the Old Testament teach that sheol is the place of final human destiny; it conveys, that sheol, although seemingly long to human understanding, is intermediate and temporary.

#### *Evidence of Consciousness*

Among the sheol texts there are those which verify that it is a place of **consciousness**. We read about the "pains of sheol."

##### **Psalm 116:3**

There can be no such without consciousness.

Isaiah 14:9 tells how the inhabitants of sheol were "stirred" to meet the now disembodied emperor of Babylon as he came to join them there.

##### **Isaiah 14:9**

That would be very strange if they were unconscious. They say this to the disrobed new arrival:

##### **Isaiah 14:10**

So there is **speech** in sheol. And further we are told:

##### **Isaiah 14:16-17**

So they will **see** each other there, and they will **ponder** things there.

Those human spirits in sheol also mock and jibe the now enfeebled monarch:

##### **Isaiah 14:18-19**

Notice there is **speech** and **mockery** in sheol. Incidentally, note the distinction made between soul and body, and between grave and sheol.

There is a striking passage in Ezekiel 32:21-27 where God says of Pharaoh:

##### **Ezekiel 32:21-27**

There is Assyria and all of her company... There is Elam and all of her multitude... There is Meshech-Tubal and all of her multitude...

### *Where is Sheol?*

Can we know where sheol is? Perhaps we ought to learn where it is not. It certainly catches the eye that in the 65 places where the word sheol occurs, no less than 29 speak of it as "down." Its first occurrence, for example (Genesis 37:35), is quite definite:

**Genesis 37:35**

Similarly in Isaiah 14:9 we read:

**Isaiah 14:9**

On that basis, along with certain other Scriptures, some earnest brethren maintain that sheol is actually under the ground, deep in the physical earth. Yet, I believe they are wrong.

There are scriptural reasons for rejecting the idea that the phrase "lower parts of the earth" means inside the earth or under the ground.

**Psalms 139:15**

When David thus referred to his prenatal formation in the womb he certainly did not mean under the ground, or, to use a common expression, "the bowels of the earth." His phrase is not to be taken literally.

Similarly, in Isaiah 44:23, we see:

**Isaiah 44:23**

The prophet does not mean somewhere below the ground, or an underworld. Like David, he is simply making a contrast between heaven high above and earth low beneath.

Even in Ezekiel 31:15-18, which is claimed as favoring the notion that sheol is somewhere beneath the earth's crust, we find that the phrase "nether parts of the earth" is used, not of under the earth, but on it.

**Ezekiel 31:16**

God made the nations quake at the sound of (Assyria's) fall. Plainly, those who "drink water" are on the earth, not under it.

**Ephesians 4:9**

The expression "under the earth" cannot mean an underground place where Satan and his insurrectionist consorts have their abode, or from where they carry on the anti-God warfare, for the archfiend and his host are definitively named "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2) and the hosts of evil "in the heavenlies" (Ephesians 6:12).

### *New Testament Teachings*

There is the thrilling news that our Lord Jesus now holds the "keys" of sheol/hades. Previously, Satan held them.

**Hebrews 2:14**

### *Abolition of Hades*

The Book of Revelation foretells the termination and abolition of hades. The purpose it now serves during the interval between death and resurrection will have been completed when the final judgment of the race takes place at the "Great White Throne."

**Revelation 20:11-15**

### ***Is Heaven our Default Destination ... or is Hell?***

What would keep us out of Heaven is universal:

**Romans 3:23**

Sin separates us from a relationship with God:

**Isaiah 59:2**

God is so holy that he cannot allow sin into his presence:

**Habakkuk 1:13**

Because we are sinners, we are not entitled to enter God's presence. We cannot enter Heaven as we are.

So clearly, it is of paramount importance to make sure you are going to Heaven, not Hell.

**2 Corinthians 6:2**

**Joshua 24:15**

*Hell: Heaven's awful alternative*

Hell will be inhabited by people who have not received God's gift of redemption in Christ. After Christ returns, there will be a resurrection of believers for eternal life in Heaven and a resurrection of unbelievers for eternal existence in Hell.

**John 5:28-29**

The unsaved, everyone whose name is not written in the Lamb's Book of Life, will be judged by God according to the works they have done, which have been recorded in Heaven's books (Revelation 20:12-15). Because those works include sin, people on their own, without Christ, cannot enter the presence of a holy and just God and will be consigned to a place of everlasting destruction.

**Matthew 13:40-42**

Christ will say to those who are not covered by his blood:

**Matthew 25:41**

Hell will not be like it is often portrayed in comic strips, a giant lounge where between drinks people tell stories of their escapades on Earth. Rather, it will be a place of utter misery.

**Matthew 13:50**

**Matthew 22:13**

**Matthew 24:51**

**Matthew 25:30**

So they will be thrown into the fiery furnace, they will be bound hand and foot and cast into the darkness, they will be cut into pieces and put with the hypocrites, cast out into the outer darkness and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. It will be a place of conscious punishment for sins, with no hope of relief.

*What did Jesus say about Hell?*

In the Bible, Jesus says more than anyone else about Hell.

**Matthew 10:28**

**Mark 9:43-44**

He refers to it as a literal place and describes it in graphic terms – including raging fires and the worm doesn't die.

In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus taught that in Hell, the wicked suffer terribly, are fully conscious, retain their desires and memories and reasoning, long for relief, cannot be comforted, cannot leave their torment, and are bereft of hope.

**Luke 16:19-31**

The Savior could not have painted a more bleak or graphic picture.

How long will Hell last?

**Matthew 25:46**

Here, in the same sentence, Christ uses the same word translated "eternal" (aionos) to describe the duration of both Heaven and Hell. Thus, if Heaven will be consciously experienced forever, Hell must be consciously experienced forever.

*Is it Unloving to Speak of Hell?*

All roads do not lead to Heaven. Only one does: Jesus Christ.

**John 14:6**

All other roads lead to Hell.

*Earth: the In-between World*

God and Satan are not equal opposites. Likewise, Hell is not Heaven's equal opposite. Just as God has no equal as a person, Heaven has no equal as a place.

Scripture says this about those who die without Jesus:

**2 Thessalonians 1:9**

Because God is the source of all good and Hell is the absence of God. Hell must be the absence of all good. Likewise, community, fellowship, and friendship are good, rooted in the triune God himself. But in the absence of God, Hell will have no community, no camaraderie, no friendship. I am not convinced that Hell is a place where demons take delight in punishing people and where people commiserate over their fate. More likely, each person is in solitary confinement, just as the rich man is portrayed alone in Hell (Luke 16:22-23). Misery loves company, but there will be nothing to love in Hell.

Given the reality of our two possible destinations, shouldn't we be willing to pay any price to avoid Hell and go to Heaven? And yet, the price has been paid.

**1 Corinthians 6:20**

The price paid was exorbitant, the shed blood of God's Son, Jesus Christ.