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Sheol
in the
Old Testament.

(2019)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

Sheol in the Old Testament.

Topics.

- Sorrows of sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me.
- Higher than heaven and deeper than sheol.
- They will go down to the gates of sheol and rest together in the dust.
- Sheol is naked before him, and destruction has no covering.
- The LORD will not leave David's soul in sheol.
- The sorrows of sheol surround David.
- Let us swallow them alive like sheol.
- Sheol has enlarged itself and opened its mouth.
- Sheol from beneath is excited to meet you.
- The king of Babylon is brought down to sheol.
- Lies and falsehood will take you to sheol.
- Hezekiah will go down to the gates of sheol.
- Sorceress, adulterer and Idol worshippers descend to sheol.
- Out of the belly of sheol Jonah cried, and the LORD heard His voice.

1

NOTE: the purpose of this study is not to do an in-depth study on each topic, but simply to put the word sheol into its context to discover whether it teaches death in the grave or everlasting torment, agony and suffering for all eternity.

SAMUEL

Sorrows of Sheol Surrounded Me; the Snares of Death Confronted Me.

- **2 Samuel 22:4-7:** I (David) will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised so, shall I be saved from my enemies. ⁵When the waves of *death* surrounded me, The floods of ungodliness made me afraid. ⁶The sorrows of *sheol* (hell in KJV) surrounded me; The snares of *death* confronted me. ⁷In my distress I called upon the LORD, And cried out to my God; he heard my voice from his temple, And my cry entered His ears

Sheol: is from the Hebrew word (sh^eowl) and is only used in the Old Testament. From Strong's Concordance sheol means the grave and is sometimes personified in the Bible as the world of the dead (as if a subterranean retreat). The King James Bible has in certain Scriptures translated the Hebrew word sheol to the English word hell which means that the English word hell in the Old Testament simply means the grave.

David is speaking to the LORD: the words of this song on the day when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. David is saying when death and the grave (sheol) seemed to be all around him God saved him.

Higher than Heaven and Deeper than Sheol.

- **Job 11:7-8:** Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? ⁸They are higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than *sheol* (*hell in the KJV*) — what can you know?

Zophar is saying that God’s wisdom is higher than heaven and deeper than sheol, meaning deeper than the grave, no one can search out the things of God or understand His ways. Proverbs says this is because there are too many conditions to any given thing and that God has designed the world this way so that no one can work out what will happen to them tomorrow.

They will Go Down to the Gates of Sheol and Rest Together in the Dust.

- **Job 17:13-16:** If I (Job) wait for the *grave* as my house, If I make my bed in the darkness, ¹⁴If I say to corruption, ‘You are my father,’ And to the worm, ‘You are my mother and my sister,’ ¹⁵Where then is my hope? As for my hope, who can see it? ¹⁶Will they go down to the gates of *sheol*? (*Pit in KJV*) Shall we have rest together in the dust?”

The expressions, “Going down to the dust” and “Making my bed in the darkness” are simply different ways of saying, “Going down to sheol” (i.e. the grave.)

Sheol is naked before Him, and Destruction has no Covering.

- **Job 26:5-6:** Dead things are formed from under the waters, and the inhabitants thereof. ⁶*Sheol* (*hell in KJV*) is naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.

Job is saying that no-matter how much the corrupt and deceitful may try to hid their wickedness God sees it, and therefore their destruction to sheol is certain since no-one can cover (hid) there evil deeds from God. This is the same as saying, “Therefore their destruction to grave.

PSALMS

The LORD will Not Leave David’s Soul in Sheol.

- **Psalm 16:10:** For you will not leave my (David) soul in *sheol* (*hell in KJV*), Nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption

David being a prophet knew he would be resurrected from sheol (the grave) and that God would not allow Christ’s body to decay in the tomb.

The sorrows of Sheol surround David.

- **Psalm 18:3-5:** I (David) will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; So shall I be saved from my enemies. ⁴The pangs of death surrounded me the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. ⁵The sorrows of *sheol* (*hell in KJV*) surrounded me; The snares of death confronted me

The expression, “The sorrows of sheol surrounded me” simply mean that since David’s enemies seemed to be all around him and therefore looked like they could defeat him certain death seemed to be all around David.

The LORD has delivered David's Soul from the Depths of Sheol.

- **Psalm 86:12-13:** I (David) will praise You, O Lord my God, with all my heart, And I will glorify Your name forevermore. ¹³For great is Your mercy toward me, And You have delivered my soul from the depths of *sheol* (*hell in KJV*).

The expression "You have delivered my soul from the depths of sheol," means that God has saved David from what appeared to him to be certain death. David is thanking God for delivering him from the grave.

The pangs of Sheol laid Hold of David.

- **Psalm 116:3:** The pains of death surrounded me (David) and the pangs of *sheol* (*hell in KJV*) laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow. ⁴Then I called upon the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!"

David is surrounded by troubles and sorrows so much so that he feels death is approaching so he earnestly prays that the LORD will deliver him from sheol (i.e., from dying and being buried in a grave).

PROVERBS

Let us Swallow them Alive like Sheol.

- **Proverbs 1:11-13:** If they (sinners) say, "Come with us, Let us lie in wait to shed blood; Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; ¹²Let us swallow them alive like *sheol*, (*grave in the KJV*) And whole, like those *who go down to the pit* ¹³We shall find all kinds of precious possessions, We shall fill our houses with spoil

The writer of Proverbs is warning his son not to be enticed by those who kill and rob the innocent for their own greedy gain. This verses clearly shows that sheol, the pit and the grave are all the same thing.

ISAIAH

Sheol has Enlarged Itself and Opened its Mouth.

- **Isaiah 5:13-14:** Therefore my people have gone into captivity, Because they have no knowledge; Their honorable men are famished, And their multitude dried up with thirst. ¹⁴Therefore *sheol* (*hell in KJV*) *has enlarged itself and opened its mouth* beyond measure; Their glory and their multitude and their pomp, And he who is jubilant, shall descend into it

Sheol (the grave) is personified as having a stomach with a mouth that is always opened. In this context Israel has committed gross sins and turned to pagan gods. many have died from famine or been killed by their enemies so multitudes of dead bodies have descended into sheol (the grave) it is in this sense sheol is pictured as enlarging itself.

Sheol from Beneath is Excited to Meet You.

- **Isaiah 14:9-11:** Sheol (*hell in KJV*) *from beneath is excited about you*, To meet you at your coming; It stirs up the dead for you, All the *chief ones of the earth*; It has raised up from their thrones All the kings of the nations. ¹⁰They all shall speak and say to you: 'Have you also become as weak as we? Have you become like us? ¹¹ Your *pomp is brought down to sheol* (*the grave in KJV*) and the sound of your stringed instruments; The maggot is spread under you, And worms cover you

This is a proverb that God told Isaiah to speak against the extremely prideful king of Babylon because the king said in his heart:

- I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High (Isaiah 14:13-14).

Sheol (the grave) is personified as having all the dead kings of the earth waiting in excitement to see the great king of Babylon arrive. Isaiah is using biblical lofty language to highlight the vanity of the king of Babylon's extreme pride. We know this is lofty language because Isaiah says that the dead kings stand up on their thrones and it is certain there are no thrones in the grave and that, dead kings do not stand up. Isaiah is using beautiful poetic lofty language to highlight the truth that no-matter how exalted a person maybe by those they rule over or how glorious their kingdom is it counts for nothing when it comes to eternal life since the only place pride will take a person is to the utter most depth of sheol (the grave) where worms and maggots cover them. In simple words, Isaiah is saying, "The king of Babylon's extreme pride will take him down to the grave (sheol).

The King of Babylon is brought down to Sheol.

- **Isaiah 14:13-16:** For you (the king of Babylon) have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; ¹⁴I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' ¹⁵Yet you (the king of Babylon) shall be brought down to sheol (the sides of the pit in KJV), To the lowest depths of the pit. ¹⁶"Those who see you will gaze at you, And consider you, saying: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, Who shook kingdoms

Isaiah is saying because of the king of Babylon said in his heart he will ascend into heaven; exalt his throne above the stars of God; sit on the mount of the congregation; ascend above the heights of the clouds and be like the Most High he will be brought down to the lowest depths of the pit. Notice sheol and the pit are different titles for the grave.

Lies and Falsehood will take You to Sheol.

- **Isaiah 28:14-18:** Therefore hear the word of the LORD, you scornful men, Who rule this people who are in Jerusalem, ¹⁵Because you have said, "We have made a covenant with death, And with sheol (hell in the KJV) we are in agreement. When the overflowing scourge passes through, It will not come to us, For we have made lies our refuge, under falsehood we have hidden ourselves ¹⁶Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. ¹⁷Also I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plummet; The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, And the waters will overflow the hiding place. ¹⁸Your covenant with death will be annulled, And your agreement with sheol (hell in KJV) will not stand; When the overflowing scourge passes through, Then you will be trampled down by it.

Isaiah, is telling the religious leaders of Israel that they cannot hide from God by their lies, and their falsehood nor will their deceptions protect them from death because when Christ the foundation stone comes to Zion (the mountain Jerusalem sits upon) their covenant with God will be broken and they will be taken down to sheol (the grave).

Hezekiah will go down to the gates of Sheol.

- **Isaiah 38:10-13:** I (Hezekiah) said, "In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of sheol (the grave in KJV); I am deprived of the remainder of my years." ¹¹"I shall not see YAH, The LORD in the land of the living; I shall observe man no more among the inhabitants

of the world. ¹²*my life span is gone, Taken from me like a shepherd's tent; I have cut off my life like a weaver. He cuts me off from the loom; from day until night you make an end of me.* ¹³I considered until morning like a lion, so he breaks my bones; from day until night you make an end of me.

At the beginning of this chapter we are told that Hezekiah king of Judah was so sick that he was dying this is why he thought his life would be cut short and he would go down to sheol (i.e., the grave). He prayed and the LORD told Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that the LORD will add fifteen years to Hezekiah life and Hezekiah recovered from his sickness.

Sheol cannot thank the LORD and death cannot praise Him.

- **Isaiah 38:16-18:** O LORD, by these things men live; And in all these things is the life of my spirit; So you will restore me (*Hezekiah*) and make me live. ¹⁷Indeed it was for my own peace That I had great bitterness; But you have lovingly *delivered my soul from the pit of corruption*, For you have cast all my sins behind Your back. ¹⁸For *sheol* (the grave in KJV) cannot thank you, *death* cannot praise you; Those who *go down to the pit* cannot hope for your truth.

Hezekiah king of Judah is thanking God for lovingly delivering him from death and sheol (the grave) because he had a terminal sickness and the LORD healed him so that he would live another fifteen years.

NOTICE: sheol and the pit refer to the grave.

Sorceress, Adulterer and Idol Worshippers Descend to Sheol.

- **Isaiah 57:9:** You (the sons of the sorceress) went to the king with ointment, and increased your perfumes; You sent your messengers far off, And even *descended to sheol* (hell in KJV).

This verse could mean two things:

- The sons of the sorceress attempt to communicate with the dead in the grave by their spiritual practises and in this sense they spiritually descend to sheol.
- The sons of the sorceress and those who follow their practices will be cast down to sheol.

Whichever of these two Isaiah means matters little for this study since it is clear that sheol refers to the dead in the grave.

JONAH

Out of the Belly of Sheol Jonah cried, and the LORD heard His Voice.

- **Jonah 2:1-6:** Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish, ²saying, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of *sheol* (*belly of hell in KJV*) I cried, and you heard my voice. ³For you cast me into *the deep, into the heart of the seas*, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me. ⁴Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; Yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.' ⁵The waters closed in over me to take my life; *the deep surrounded me*; weeds were wrapped about my head ⁶at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought *up my life from the pit*, O LORD my God.

Jonah refers to the belly of the whale as:

- Sheol.
- The heart of the seas.

- The flood that surrounded him.
- Waters that closed over him to take his life.
- The deep that surrounded him.
- The land whose bars close upon him.
- The pit.

All of these are different titles for the grave since Job thought he was going to die forever (v6).

Sheol: means the abode of the dead and refers to the grave, but it should be noted that the grave does not always refer to being buried in a hole dug in the ground. Sometimes bodies are left on the surface of the earth to rot and decay (especially in battles) yet certain Scriptures still refer to them as being in their graves since it is the final resting place of their dead body. Job in this verse is calling the fishes belly and the sea his grave because he thought he was going to mortally die in them.

SUMMARY OF SHEOL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This is the end of all Scriptures in the Old that use the word sheol. We began this study not to do an in-depth study on each topic, but simply to put the word sheol into its context to discover whether it teaches death in the grave or everlasting torture, torment, agony and suffering for all eternity. From these verses we have found that sheol is not used in the New Testament and that sheol is the Hebrew word for the English word grave and is used in relation to death, corruption, decaying flesh destruction, darkness, sorrow, the pit and the dust of the earth. The King of Babylon and the chief ones of the earth are pictured in sheol with worms and maggots eating their bodies. Sheol (the grave) in this context is personified as a hungry mouth enlarging itself by devouring dead bodies. The chiefs of the earth are personified as being alive in sheol waiting with excitement to receive the king of Babylon; they are personified this way to depict the vanity and waste of pride. It is a colorful way of saying no matter how powerful or famous a person is, if they are not humble before God they will ultimately end up in the grave with the wicked. There is not one Scripture in the Bible that use the word sheol that teach or even imply that the dead who have not known God will suffer in some form of conscious eternal body and be tormented by demonic demons and suffer extreme agony in a place of fiery flames for all eternity.

FOOTNOTE

Since the translators of the King James Bible in many of the above verses have translated the Hebrew word sheol to the English word hell and the Greek word hades meaning the grave has also been translated to the English word hell many have been taught that it means those outside of Christ will exist in some form of conscious spirit state and be painfully and cruelly tortured by eternal evil spirit creatures called demons in a place full of fiery flames which will forever burn their bodies for all eternity so that they will never be free of the most extreme agony. Because this teaching is not only a, gross misunderstanding of the Hebrew word sheol and the Greek word hades, but also portrays a gross miss-representation of the nature and character of God the following should be mentioned

Hell: (sheol) (hades) from the Strong's Concordance refers to the place where the wicked are sent it means the grave; the pit; the abode of the dead and a place of no return. Figuratively it carries the idea of extreme degradation in sin. The word hell in the Old Testament is the English translation of the Hebrew word sheol which means grave and in the New

Testament hell is the English translation of the Greek word hades which also means the grave. Following are four reasons this theory of eternal torment may have come about:

1. In the 325 A.D. when the Roman papal church had power over the state and certain bishops at the Council of Nicea determined what the official doctrines of the Christian faith would be they then set about aggressively enforcing them onto society by torturing, imprisoning and burning at the stake those who held a different view to the doctrines they had officially stamped to be the only true doctrines of the Christian faith. One of these doctrines is the traditional teaching of hell that many believe today (i.e., eternal torture in hell for all eternity).
2. This sadistic teaching of hell that proclaims all who die outside of Christ will in some form of conscious spirit state suffer eternal torture, pain and extreme agony in a place full demons and fiery flames for all eternity may have been introduced to scare people into the church. It is almost certain this is one of the reasons it has continued throughout history and very rarely been questioned by ministers and leaders of certain churches.
3. Those who formed this inhuman brutal and extremely violent teaching of eternal agony in flaming fire not only had a total lack of the meaning of the Hebrew word sheol and the Greek word hades, but also had a total lack of understanding the nature and character of God.
4. When the bishops of the Roman papal church established the doctrine of eternal torment, they were influenced by the teachings of pagan religions that existed amongst them at that time.

Whatever the reason and there are no-doubt many other possible scenarios both the Hebrew word sheol and the Greek word hades refer to mortal death in the grave. When the word eternal is added to the word hell it carries the idea of eternal death (i.e., total extinction) for all who are cast into the Lake of Fire (a symbol of eternal death) also called the Second Death. (Rev. 2:11) (Rev. 20:6) (Rev. 20:14) (Rev. 21:8).

For further information see the title:

- Torment and Tormented in, Death (ON WEBSITE MENU).

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.