

Hell and the Grave

Key verses

- **“For You will not leave my soul in sheol, nor will you allow your holy one to see corruption”** Psalm 16:10 N.K.J.V.
(In the above verse “sheol” appears as “hell” in the A.V and “grave” in the N.I.V.)
- **“If I ascend up into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.”** Psalm 139:8

‘Hell’ in the Old Testament

“Hell” is **not a translation** of the original Hebrew word “sheol”. “The grave” or “the pit” is the correct meaning in English for this Hebrew word. The word “hell” in the Authorised version has actually been **inserted by translators** (interpolated), probably because of their preconceived ideas about a mythical place of eternal torment. Modern translators realise that Hebrew words like “sheol” simply meant **“the grave” or “the pit”** to the original inspired writers in biblical times. The translators of the N.K.J.V. simply “sat on the fence”, and in many instances have just left the Hebrew word “sheol” **untranslated**. In the New International Version, **“sheol” is properly translated, “the grave”**.

Old and New Translations

The following are three interesting examples of how translating has changed over the years by comparing the **King James Version**, the **New King James Version** and the **New International Version**.

(The words in capitals represent “sheol” in the original Hebrew)

Psalm 86:13

- A.V. **“my soul from the lowest HELL”**
- N.K.J.V. **“my soul from the depths of SHEOL”**
- N.I.V. **“delivered me from the depths of the GRAVE”**

Jonah 2:2

- A.V. **“out of the belly of HELL cried I”**
- N.K.J.V. **“out of the belly of SHEOL I cried”**
- N.I.V. **“From the depths of the GRAVE I called for help”**

Isaiah 5:14

- A.V. **“Therefore HELL hath enlarged herself”**
- N.K.J.V. **“Therefore SHEOL has enlarged itself”**
- N.I.V. **“Therefore the GRAVE enlarges its appetite”**

You will notice the same situation with Psa.16:10, quoted as a key verse above.

‘Hell’ in the New Testament

Most translations still use (interpolate) the word “hell” in the New Testament. “Gehenna”, or **“The valley of the son of Hinnom”**, which is a correct translation of this Greek word, was the rubbish tip outside of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. This tip was also used to burn the bodies of criminals who had **suffered capital punishment**. Most of the occurrences of the word “hell” in the New Testament refer to this place of burning outside of Jerusalem. Jesus referred to “gehenna” as a place of **total destruction** for those who were **unrepentant** in their criminal activities (Matt. 10:28).

‘Hades’ in the New Testament

The Greek word Hades* (pronounced hah'-dace), comes from two words: 'A', which is “Alpha”, the first letter of the Greek alphabet and is a negative particle which simply means, “without”. The other word is “eido”, which means, “to see”. **So Hades simply means, “unseen”**.

Greek mythology

In Greek mythology 'Hades' is described as the god of the underworld. This so called underworld also came to be named after this mythical god Hades. Should we use this Greek mythology to interpret Scripture?

In Psalm 16:10 we are prophetically taught that **Jesus went to “sheol” ie the grave** when He died. So we must accept that Peter also meant **the grave when he quotes Psalm 16 using the word “hades” in Acts 2:27**. Any other opinion would have us creating a **contradiction** between Old and New Testament teaching.

Some ‘hades’ translations

Here are some interesting comparisons of Bible translations of the word “hades”:

(The words in capitals represent “hades” in the original Greek)

Acts 2:27

- A.V. **“Thou wilt not leave my soul in HELL”**
- N.K.J.V. **“You will not leave my soul in HADES”**
- N.I.V. **“...you will not abandon me to the GRAVE”**

1 Cor.15:55

- A.V. **“O GRAVE , where is thy victory?”**
- N.K.J.V. **“O HADES, where is your victory?”**
- N.I.V. **“Where, O DEATH, is your victory?”**

So the word “hades” in the New Testament is the same as “sheol” in the Old Testament, **both words simply referring to the grave**, and not a mythical place of eternal torment.

The rich man and Lazarus

Despite all other Bible evidence, many cling to this parable in Luke ch16, claiming it is a literal description of the afterlife. The Jews in their “Gemara” writings have a similar parable, so Jesus was actually using the **traditional teachings of the Pharisees** in a tongue-in-cheek fashion to **extract a moral lesson** against them, because they lived in opulence compared to the common folk. Because of earlier Greek rule since 333BC, Greek mythology had firmly imposed itself on Jewish beliefs by the time of Jesus' ministry. Less than 200 years later similar Greek mythology had crept into Christian churches as fulfilment of the Apostle Paul's prediction**.

* Strong's Concordance number 86 NT

** “ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap to themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be **turned aside to fables.**” 2 Tim.4:3-4