

The Living Words

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~~ Hell ~~

*The sorrows of **hell** compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.*

Psalm 18:5 (KJV)

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word שְׁאוֹל *she'ol* ^[H:7585] is translated as either “hell” or “grave” or in some translations, it is transliterated as “Sheol.” What is *she'ol* and how did the Ancient Hebrews of the Old Testament perceive it? As I have said before, in order to better understand a word, it is essential to look at its root and other related words.

The verbal root of the word שְׁאוֹל *she'ol* ^[H:7585] is שָׁאַל *sha'al* ^[H:7592] and is used almost 200 times where it is usually translated as “asked” such as we see in Genesis 24:47.

*And I **asked** (sha'al) her and said...*

Why do we ask questions? We are looking for information that is currently unknown to us. This word, “unknown,” is the key to understanding the root שָׁאַל *sha'al* ^[H:7592]. The word שְׁאֵלָה *shi'eylah* ^[H:7596], a noun derived from שָׁאַל *sha'al* ^[H:7592] is also related to the idea of “unknown” such as can be observed in Job 6:8 where it is translated as a request.

*Oh that I might have my **request** (shi'eylah); and that God would grant me the thing that I long for!*

(KJV)

The word שְׂאוֹל *she'ol* ^[H:7585] is the place where one goes when they die. The question is, did they understand this to be simply the grave where one is buried or another place one goes after they die—the underworld? This is a difficult question for one to answer, because the Hebrew Bible never really defines *she'ol*. There is evidence, however, that the Hebrews understood *she'ol* to be more than just the grave. First, the word קֶבֶר *qever* ^[H:6913] is the Hebrew word meaning the “grave.” Second, most scriptures using the word *she'ol* imply a place other than the grave. An example can be found in Genesis 37:35.

and all his sons and daughters rose up to comfort him but he refused to be comforted and he said, because I will go down to my son, unto she'ol, in mourning and his father wept for him.

In this account Jacob believed a wild beast had eaten his son Joseph. As Joseph's body could not possibly be in a grave, Jacob knew that he would be with him somewhere—*she'ol*.

The Ancient Hebrews did not know where, or even what, *she'ol* was. To them it was an “unknown” place, hence its relationship to *sha'al* meaning “unknown.” Ancient Hebrews never speculated on something unknown—to them it was simply “unknown” and left at that. But one with a Greek mindset always desires to know the unknown. It is our Greco-Roman western mindset that needs to know where and what *she'ol* is.

In the New Testament, we find three words translated as “hell.” The first is γέεννα *geenna* ^[G:1067]. When the New Testament was translated into Greek, the translators transliterated rather than translated some Hebrew words into Greek. An example of this is the word ἀλληλουία *hallelouia* ^[G:239], a word found in Revelation chapter 19, and is a transliteration of the Hebrew

word הללו-יה *halelu-yah* ^[H:1984 & 3050] meaning “Praise¹ Yah.” The Greek word *geenna* is a transliteration of two Hebrew words, גַּי *gai* ^[H:1516], meaning “valley” and הַנּוֹם *hinnom* ^[H:2011], a place name of uncertain meaning. *Gai hinnom* or “Valley of Hinnom” is the name of a valley outside Jerusalem. In the days of Yeshua the “Valley of Hinnom” burned continually with fires that consumed the garbage and dead animals dumped there by the inhabitants of the city.

*And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into **hell** (geenna), into the fire that never shall be quenched:*

Mark 9:43 (KJV)

The idea of a “fire” being associated with *she’ol* is unique to the New Testament and no such reference will be found in the Old Testament. Apparently, the fires of hell is a concept introduced into the Hebrew culture from an outside source, possibly while Israel was in Babylon during their captivity.

The second word translated as “hell” in the New Testament is αἰδης *hades* ^[G:86]. This is the Greek word used in the Greek Septuagint for the Hebrew word *she’ol*. *Hades* is used in the New Testament in the same sense as the Hebrew *she’ol*, the place of the dead, the underworld. However, in the New Testament *hades/she’ol* is first described as a place of torment.

*And in **hell** (hades) he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

¹ For a more Hebraic meaning of the word “praise” see page **Error! Bookmark not defined..**

Luke 16:23 KJV

The third word translated as hell is *ταρταροω tartaroo* ^[G:5020] and is found only once in the Bible.

*For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to **hell** (tartaroo), and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment*

2 Peter 2:4 (KJV)

The word *ταρταρος tartaros*² comes from Greek Mythology and was a deep abyss and a place of torment where the Greek gods banished their enemies. The use of this word in the New Testament is a clear case of a Greek influence on the New Testament text.

² The verb tartaroo, from the noun tartaros, means “cast into tartaros.”