

Does Hell Exist?

ARTICLE SERIES

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What happens to a person (*nephesh*) when they die? Is it possible for one to be condemned to suffer for eternity in an underworld of fiery torment called hell? To answer, we must address the Yahwehist concept of the Hebrew word *sheol*, translated into Greek as “*hades*.”

The term *sheol* is found 65 times in the Old Testament and 10 times in the New Testament under the Greek form *hades*. Unfortunately, these two terms are commonly rendered as “hell” in the English translations.

Sheol is not, as popularly construed, a place where after death, the wicked dwell as conscious, thinking, disembodied immortal souls. Rather, it is a “state of being” for the deceased person or *nephesh* of every human, whether just or unjust—a circumstance equated with darkness. It is not so much the “grave” where the remains of the *nephesh* lie, but rather the “state of the remains” within the grave.

Further, *sheol* will only continue as a state of being until the end of this world-age. Then, after the coming of father Yahweh, it will be destroyed in the great end-time *gehenna* fire.

Definitions

The Hebrew term שְׁאוֹל (*sh-a-u-l*), also rendered שָׁאֵל (*sh-a-l*), i.e., *sheol*, is a transitory state of being often defined as “the abode of the soul after death.”¹ It is a transitory condition due to the fact that the dead will be resurrected back to life from *sheol*.²

The term is derived from שָׁאֵל (*shael*), “a prim. root; to inquire; by impl. to request; by extens. to demand,”³ “questioned, enquired . . . requested,

prayed for”;⁴ “to ask . . . the unseen state.”⁵ Therefore, the state of *sheol* implies a connection with something asked for, as if borrowed or taken away, implying a thing that is hidden from view or concealed.

The meaning of *sheol* is understood by its context and use. In 2 Kings 6:5–7, for example, a man lost the iron head of his axe in a deep pool of water. He cried to the prophet Elisha, “My sovereign, and it is שְׁאוֹל (*sheol*).

In the Greek Septuagint (LXX) version of this verse, *sheol* is translated as κεκρυμμένον (*kekrum-menon*), a form of κρύπτω (*krupto*), “to hide, cover, cloak . . . to hide, conceal, keep secret . . . to hide oneself, lie

hidden,”⁶ i.e., “and the axe head fell into the water; and he cried out, Alas! sovereign: and it was hidden (from view).”⁷ This translation conveys the idea that the axe head was asked for by the water, i.e., it was hidden or taken out of his sight.

The Latin Vulgate renders this verse with a similar meaning. In this text, the man exclaims, “*et hoc ipsum mutuo acceperam* (and this place [the water] has borrowed it to itself).”⁸ Some modern translations interpret the term as used in 2 Kings 6:5 to mean that the man himself had “borrowed” the axe and was distressed by its loss.⁹ This latter view seems less likely. In either case, *sheol* is connected with the idea of asking for something, whether requested, borrowed, or forcefully taken away and hidden. Therefore, *sheol* is a hidden place, a state of being from which Yahweh will request the return of the dead.

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¹ HEL (Hebrew-English Lexicon. Zondervan Edition, 1970), pp. 257f. For שָׁאֵל (*sh-a-l*) as *sheol*, see 1 Kings, 2:6; Job, 17:16.

² The Resurrection will be discussed in another Topic.

³ SEC (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible), Heb. #7585, 7592.

⁴ HEL, p. 257.

⁵ YAC, (Analytical Concordance to the Bible. Robert Young), p. 106.

⁶ GEL (A Greek-English Lexicon. Compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott), pp. 426, 452.

⁷ LXX (Greek Septuagint), 4 Kings (MT - Masoretic Text: 2 Kings), 6:5.

⁸ Cf., Vulg. (Latin Vulgate), loc. cit., “‘Alas, my master!’ cried the man, ‘it was borrowed.’”

⁹ E.g., SRB (The Scofield Reference Bible), loc. cit.; NJB (The New Jerusalem Bible), loc. cit.; REB (Rotherham's Emphasized Bible), loc. cit.

At the same time, *sheol* must not be confused with the grave or place of interment. The Hebrew terms for these concepts are as follows:

בֹּר (bur), בְּאֵר (bar): "a pit hole," "well," "cistern," "grave, sepulchre."¹⁰

שׁוּחַ (shuch), שׁוּחָה (shuchah), variant שׁוּחַת (shuchath): "a grave," "went down, sank" "dungeon," or "a chasm:—ditch, pit."¹¹

גְּדִישׁ (gadish): "grave-mound," "heap," "a stack of sheaves; by anal. a tomb,"¹² In Greek, τάφος (taphos): "a grave (the place of interment): sepulcher, tomb."¹³

קְבוּרָה, also קְבֻרָה (qeburah), or קֶבֶר (qebur): "sepulture; (concr.) a sepulchre:—burial, burying place, grave, sepulcher."¹⁴ In Greek, μνήμα (mnema) and μνημεῖον (mnemeion): "a memorial, i.e. sepulchral monument (burial-place):—grave, sepulcher, tomb," "a remembrance, i.e. cenotaph (place of interment):—grave, sepulcher, tomb."¹⁵

The above items, and others like them, merely represent a locale where the physical remains are placed.

The Greek word used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew שְׁאֵל (sheol) is ᾗδης (hades), and its variants ᾗδου (adou), ᾗδη (ade), and the like.¹⁶ It similarly is defined as a concealed place and properly means, "unseen . . . the place (state) of departed souls."¹⁷ When originally used to

translate the Hebrew term *sheol*, *hades* was understood in the narrowest sense of that term. Unfortunately, unlike the scriptural concept of *sheol*, the pagan Greeks conceived of *hades* as an underworld where immortal souls of the dead dwelt and as a place where these souls were fully conscious and able to experience both pleasure and pain.¹⁸

In ancient Greek mythology, *hades* was both the underworld of the dead and a region lying north among the Kimmerian peoples, in the foggy and cold regions above the Black Sea.¹⁹ In the minds of the ancient Greeks, these two ideas were not contradictory. Rather, they represented one and the same place. Kimmeria was a concealed country, heavily covered with fog, the land of the dead.

When the Kimmerians later moved further north to Denmark and the adjoining northern regions,²⁰ *hades* moved north with them. In the northern dialects, the Greek concept of *hades* was called "hella," "hel," and the like."²¹ The term came down in modern English as "hell,"²² a variation of the Old English term *helan*, also meaning "to conceal,"²³ "to hide" or "cover."²⁴ Regarding the word "hell," S. D. F. Salmond writes:

It [the term hell] is cognate or connected with the German *hehlen* = *hide*, *hüllen* = *cover*, A.S. *helan*, Lat. *celare*, etc. It appears in much the

¹⁰ HEL, pp. 30, 33; CHAL (A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament. William L. Holladay), p. 56; HEL, p. 48; SEC, Heb. #1430.), p. 36; SEC, Heb. #953, 874.

¹¹ HEL, p. 262; SEC, Heb. #7743, 7745; CHAL, p. 364.

¹² CHAL.

¹³ SEC, Gk. #5028; GEL, p. 794; ILT (The Interlinear Literal Translation of the Greek New Testament. George Ricker Berry, p. 98).

¹⁴ SEC, Heb. #6900, 6913; HEL, p. 226; CHAL, p. 312.

¹⁵ SEC, Gk. #3418, 3419; GEL, p. 516; ILT, p. 65.

¹⁶ CS (A Concordance to the Septuagint and the Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament (including the Apocryphal Books). Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath.), 1, p. 24, #6.

¹⁷ SEC, Gk. #86; GEL, p. 12, "the world below . . . the grave, death"; ILT, p. 3, "the invisible world."

¹⁸ E.g., see Apollodorus, *Library*, 1:2:1, where Pluto is made to have dominion in *hades*; *ibid.*, 1:3:2, where Orpheus descends alive to *hades*, talks with Pluto, and brings back his wife from *hades*; *ibid.*, 1:4:1, where Tityus, after dying, was punished by the vultures in *hades* who ate his heart; 1:5:3, Ascalaphus was punished in *hades* when Demeter laid a heavy rock on him there; *ibid.*, 1:9:3, Sisyphus is punished in *hades* by being forced to roll a stone with his hands up a mountain, but it kept rolling backwards; *ibid.*, 2:5:12, Hercules went to *hades*, where Theseus and Pirithous tried to have him bring them out, where Hercules wrestled with Menoetes, talked with Pluto, and then returned from *hades*; and the list continues.

¹⁹ Strabo, 3:23:12.

²⁰ Plutarch, *Caius Marius*, 11:5.

²¹ It is highly probable that the term *hella* (hel, hell) was a form of *Dhyle*, *Dhel*, *Dhell*, itself derived from the very ancient name of the northernmost countries of Europe: "Thyle (Thule, Thiele, etc.)," (e.g., Melae, 3:6; Pliny, 4:16) which was in the ancient Gothic tongue was called "Tiel or Tiule." To this day, part of Norway is still referred to as *Thile* or *Thilemark*, and the extreme northern part of Denmark was called *Thy* or *Thyland* (Smith, *Greek and Roman Geography*, 2, p. 1191). In these northern dialects *Thile* was altered to *Dhile* = *Hella* or *Hel*.

²² HTR (Harvard Theological Review), 76, pp. 263–268.

²³ WNWD (Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition, 1964.), p. 674.

²⁴ ISBE (The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia. Ed. by James Orr, 2, p. 1371.

same form in many of the European languages: Ger. *hölle*, Sw. *helvete*, Go. *halja*, Da. *helvede*, Du. *hel*, Ice. *hel*, O.H.G. *hella*, A.S. *hel*, *helle*, M.E. *helle*.²⁵

In ancient Norse literature, "Hel" was one of the nine worlds and was set in the north polar regions.²⁶ From this circumstance comes the popular expression "cold as Hell." In turn, this regional name served as the source for both the Old Norse underworld goddess Hel as well as Frau Hölle of German folklore.

Hel was the queen of demons.²⁷ She was the goddess of Niflheim (the underworld), the region lying furthest north.²⁸ Therefore, the region surrounding the north pole was defined as hell, a concealed region.

In Old English, hell was also used for any underground cellar (a concealed place). For instance, when a farmer placed potatoes in an underground pit, he was said to have placed them in hell.

In English the Hebrew term "*sheol*" and its corresponding Greek term "*hades*" are variously translated as hell, grave, and pit.²⁹ Nevertheless, every student of Scriptures should be aware that the use of the English term "hell" to define *sheol* and what originally was a narrow understanding of *hades* is fraught with problems.

To begin with, when the Jews and the later neo-Christians adopted the pagan concept of an immortal soul from the Greeks, they also acquired the notion of an eternal punishment in *hades*, defined as the abode of conscious, disembodied souls. For these Jews, neo-Christians, and others, upon death the wicked would go to *hades* where they would be eternally punished. Meanwhile, the pious would

go to heaven.

The neo-Christian writers then began to combine their new understanding of *hades* as a place of eternal punishment for immortal wicked souls with the Greek idea of *tartaros* (a

prison for fallen *ruach* angels) as well as with the concept of *gehenna* fire.³⁰ This mixing of two entirely different concepts served only to confound the real and separate meanings of each term.

These data bring us back to the use of the English term "hell." As S. D. F. Salmond writes, "the word 'hell' is unfortunately used as the rendering of three distinct words with different ideas," namely

the Greek words *hades* (Hebrew *sheol*), *gehenna* (Hebrew *gay hinnom*), and *tartaros* (Hebrew *amoq tahum*).³¹

As we will demonstrate later in our study, *gehenna* is the metaphoric name given to the great unquenchable fire which will engulf the earth at the end of the world-age just as father Yahweh arrives. *Tartaros* is a prison for sinning *ruach* angels.

By translating all three words as "hell," neo-Christians have transformed the Hebrew concept of *sheol* into a realm of immortal souls, eternally imprisoned in a fiery underworld of torment, an idea depicted in Dante's inferno. This idea continues to this day as a Jewish, neo-Christian, and Moslem dogma. Nevertheless, this doctrine is totally false and, as we shall see, is denied by Scriptures.

A State of Being

When human beings die, thereby returning to the '*aphar* (dust) of the ground, they enter into a "state of being" known as *sheol*, a state of darkness and corruption, of no thought or emotion. The state of *sheol* is also relevant for

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²⁵ ADB (A Dictionary of the Bible, Comprising its Antiquities, Biography, Geography and Natural History, ed. William Smith, 3 vols., London, John Murray, 1863.), 2, p. 343.

²⁶ Du Chaillu, *Viking Age*, 1, pp. 29–50.

²⁷ HTR, 76, pp. 263.

²⁸ In Scandinavian folklore the direction north was down, being somewhat analogous to the present sense that when one goes south they are traveling down.

²⁹ See SEC, under Heb. #7585, pp. 418f, s.v. **grave**, p.478, s.v. **hell**, p. 792, v.s. **pit**.

³⁰ Regarding *tartaros* and *gehenna* fire, we will address these in another Topic.

³¹ ADB, 2, p. 343.

sinning *ruach* angels, but only after they have been released from a place of darkness known to the Greeks as *tartaros*. We will discuss the relevancy of *sheol* for these *ruach* beings with a separate Topic.³² For now, our attention will focus on the human experience.

As already demonstrated, when a human dies, their "*ruach* (animating force) goes out," and "he returns to the *adamath* (ground)."³³ Notice that "he," i.e., the "self," goes back to the '*aphar* of the ground from which he was made.³⁴ Psalm 104:29 states, "You (Yahweh) withdraw their (mankind's) *ruach*, they *gava* (breathe their last) and return to '*aphar*." In this process, the *nephesh* or person and his *gewiyah* (body) return to the '*aphar* from out of which Adam was created.³⁵

The link between *sheol* (the state of death) and a man returning to '*aphar* is also made in other ways. *Sheol*, for example, is said to be located in a downward direction toward the ground.³⁶ In fact, one of the scriptural definitions for "death" is when one returns to the state of '*aphar*. In a psalm of King David's regarding the messiah, for example, the messiah speaks of his own death by saying:

My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue clings to my jaws; and to the death belonging to '*aphar* you (father Yahweh) have appointed me.³⁷

According to Scriptures, the *nephesh* (person, self) "clings to the '*aphar*."³⁸ Furthermore,

the *nephesh* clings to the '*aphar* of a person's material body not only during life, but after death as well. If the remains of the human body were totally destroyed, being torn asunder or burned to ashes, the divine *ruach* aspect of the *nephesh* will attach itself to the earth or water where that body dissipates, even if it lies in a dunghill.³⁹

The corrupted state of the *gewiyah* (body), without animating *ruach* (energy), therefore, suspends the physical *nephesh* (oxygen-breathing function in the blood) and reduces the divine aspect of the *nephesh* or person into a state of unconsciousness and death. It is this dimension or suspended state into which the divine aspect of the human

nephesh falls, containing as it does the self and innermost self, that Scriptures call "*sheol*."

Sheol, therefore, is not a place where the body rests but is a "state of being" of the *nephesh* or person while it rests in and clings to the '*aphar* of the ground (e.g., dirt, water, material substance, etc.). It is not the grave but the state of the remains within the grave, or as G. E. Ladd points out, "*Sheol* is not so much a place as the state of the dead."⁴⁰

Sheol is even defined as being in the stomach of an animal, as demonstrated by the story of Jonah when he died after being swallowed by a great fish.⁴¹ When Korah and the other rebels who stood against Moses and Aaron were swallowed up by the ground in an earthquake, Moses wrote that they "went down

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³² The relevancy of *sheol* for angels will be discussed in a separate Topic.

³³ Ps., 146:4.

³⁴ Gen., 3:19; Job, 20:11, 21:23–26; Eccles., 3:20.

³⁵ E.g., Gen., 2:7, 18:27; Eccles., 3:20, 12:7; Job, 4:19, 7:21, 10:9, 13:12, 30:19, 34:15; Ps., 7:5, 22:15, 30:9, 44:25, 103:14, 104:29, 113:7, 119:25; 1 Sam., 2:8; Isa., 26:19; Dan., 12:2.

³⁶ E.g., Psalm, 86:14; Prov., 15:24; Ezek., 26:20.

³⁷ Ps., 22:15f.

³⁸ Ps., 119:25.

³⁹ 1 Sam., 2:8; Ps., 113:7.

⁴⁰ NBD (The New Bible Dictionary. Ed. by J.D. Douglas.), p. 388.

⁴¹ Jonah, 2:1–3.

alive שְׁאֵלָה (*sheol-ah*; toward *sheol*),”⁴² i.e., down through an opening in the ground to their state of death.

Because *sheol* is a state of being and not a place, there is no limit to its capacity. Proverbs states:

Sheol and destruction are never שָׂבַע (*saba*; filled to satisfaction)⁴³ and the eyes of mankind are not שָׂבַע (*saba*; filled to satisfaction).⁴⁴

This inability to fill *sheol* makes it equivalent to a dimension and not a place. *Sheol* grows as the human *nephesh* population grows, for it is a dimension connected directly with the human *nephesh*—a sort of storage condition.

The human *nephesh* was created by combining a physical *nephesh body* with the sacred *ruach* that was breathed into Adam, making him a living *nephesh* or person.⁴⁵ To the contrary, we never read in Scriptures about the *nephesh* of an animal going to *sheol* or being resurrected from the dead. Instead, animals from their very beginning are under the curse of death with no hope of an afterlife.⁴⁶

Sheol is also a state of corruption and darkness where the human *nephesh* is imprisoned until a resurrection. The book of Job remarks:

Although I wait (for death), *sheol* will be my house. In darkness I will spread out my bed. I have called out to corruption, “You are my father,” to

the worm, “My mother and my sister.” And then where is my hope? And who will see my hope? They will go down to the bars (i.e., prison restraints) of *sheol*, when together (we will come) upon the dust of descent.⁴⁷

When mankind is resurrected back to life in the future, they will return from the ‘*aphar*, identified with *sheol* . . . even if that person’s *nephesh* lies in a dunghill.

The dead in *sheol* are, in turn, defined allegorically as prisoners.⁴⁸ The prison-like state of *sheol* is also expressed when David, in the belief that he was going to be murdered by King Saul, requested Yahweh to “Bring my *nephesh* out of prison, so that I will give thanks to your name.”⁴⁹ The prison bars of *sheol* are also metaphorically defined as being behind the gates of *sheol*, “for the gates of *sheol* will not prevail” against Yahweh’s Assembly.⁵⁰ To come near “the snares of death” is

to have the “cords of *sheol*” surround you.⁵¹

Death in *sheol* is allegorically made to be a land and condition of darkness. Job calls it “the land of תְּשֻׁכָּה (*khoshek*; darkness) and the shadow of מוּת (*muth* (death); the land of obscurity, the very dark of the shadow of death, and there is no order and a shining is like אֶפֶל (*aphel*; extreme darkness).”⁵² When mankind is resurrected back to life in the future, they will return from the ‘*aphar*, identified with *sheol*, as we have said, even if that person’s *nephesh* lies in a dunghill. For example, 1 Samuel states:

Yahweh makes dead and makes alive, he brings down to *sheol* and brings up. Yahweh takes away and

⁴² Num., 16:27–34. The Hebrew expression שְׁאֵלָה (*sheol-ah*) does not mean “into *sheol*” as many have incorrectly translated it. In that case the Hebrew would have said something like לְשֵׂאֵל (*la-sheol*; belonging to *sheol*) or בְּשֵׂאֵל (*be-sheol*; into *sheol*). The term שְׁאֵלָה (*sheol-ah*) means they were falling toward the region of their impending death in the ‘*aphar* (dust) of the ground, at which time the ground would close in on them, crushing them to death.

⁴³ SEC, Heb. #7646.

⁴⁴ Prov., 27:20.

⁴⁵ Gen., 2:7; cf., John, 20:22; Malachi, 2:15.

⁴⁶ Gen., 3:14; cf., Deut., 30:19.

⁴⁷ Job, 17:13–16.

⁴⁸ E.g., Ps., 69:33; 146:7; Isa., 14:17, 24:22, 42:7, 49:9; Zech., 9:11.

⁴⁹ Ps., 142:7.

⁵⁰ Matt., 16:18.

⁵¹ 2 Sam., 22:6; Ps., 18:5; cf., Ps., 116:3.

⁵² Job, 10:21f.

he gives riches; he brings low, yes,
he lifts up high. He raises the weak
from the 'aphar, from the
dunghill he lifts up the
needy to cause to sit with
nobles.⁵³

No Thought in Sheol

Quite opposite to the pagan (whether Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian, etc.) notion of a conscious existence in a mythical underworld for immortal souls, there is no life or conscious existence in the *sheol* of Scriptures. The following scriptural verses fully demonstrate this important point:

Return Yahweh, rescue
my *nephesh*; save me for
your mercy's sake; for
there is no memory in death, in
sheol who will give thanks to you?⁵⁴

What profit is in my blood in going
down to the שֹׁחַד (*shuch*; pit, grave);
will you thank the 'aphar? Will it
(the 'aphar) thank you? Will it
declare your truth?⁵⁵

The above Psalm refers to the fact that after returning to the 'aphar a dead man has no ability to thank anyone or receive thanks, for he is unable to speak or understand the speech of someone living. A parallel thought is expressed in the rhetorical question asked by Heman the Ezrahite. He notes that nothing can come from *sheol*, the land of נִשְׁיָה (*neshyah*; oblivion)⁵⁶ and the dark state of death.

**Return Yahweh,
rescue my *nephesh*;
save me for your
mercy's sake; for
there is no memory
in death, in *sheol*
who will give
thanks to you?
(Psalms 6:5)**

Will your mercy be declared in the
sepulcher? your faithfulness in
destruction? Will your
wonders be known in the
ךָשֶׁךְ (*khoshek*; darkness)
and your righteousness in
the land of נִשְׁיָה (*neshyah*;
oblivion)?⁵⁷

This allegorical verse refers
to the state of death as a land of
oblivion, i.e., a condition where
all things are forgotten.⁵⁸ In a
passage from Psalms, 146:3–4,
we read:

Put not your trust in
princes, in a son of Adam,
there is not salvation to
him. His *ruach* will go
out, he returns to the
adamath (ground); IN

THAT DAY HIS THOUGHTS אָבָד
(*abad*; PERISH).⁵⁹

The word used for “thoughts” in this above
passage is אֲשֶׁתֹנָה (*ashtonath*), meaning, “think-
ing:—thought,”⁶⁰ “devices, machinations,”⁶¹
“thought, plan.”⁶² Therefore, upon dying,
one's thoughts are destroyed and perish. In
Ecclesiastes, Solomon advises those alive to
enjoy life properly:

Whatever your hands find to do, do
with your might: for there is no
work, and planning, and knowl-
edge and wisdom in *sheol*, the שָׁמָה
(*shammah*; ruin)⁶³ where you are
going.⁶⁴

⁵³ 1 Sam., 2:6–8.

⁵⁴ Ps., 6:5.

⁵⁵ Ps., 30:9.

⁵⁶ The Hebrew term נִשְׁיָה (*neshyah*) means “oblivion:—forgetfulness” (SEC, Heb. #5388); “forgetfulness” (HEL, p. 175); NJB, loc. cit., “oblivion”; NIV (The Holy Bible, New International Version.), loc. cit., “oblivion”; LXX, loc. cit., “ἡ ἐπιλελησμένη (*ge epilelesmene*; land of lost thought” (see GEL, 1996, p. 643).

⁵⁷ Ps., 88:11f.

⁵⁸ That this verse refers to *sheol*, see NBD, p. 388.

⁵⁹ The Heb. term אָבָד (*abad*) is “a prim. root; prop. to wander away, i.e. lose oneself; by impl. to perish (caus. destroy) . . . destroy, perish” (SEC, Heb. #6 & 7); “perished . . . destroyed . . . perishing, ruin” (HEL, p. 1); “become lost of property . . . perish, of men . . . be ruined, of nation . . . destroy . . . exterminate . . . dissipate (wealth)” (CHAL, p. 1).

⁶⁰ SEC, Heb. #6250.

⁶¹ HEL, p. 204.

⁶² CHAL, p. 286.

⁶³ The Hebrew term שָׁמָה (*shammah*) means “ruin; by impl. consternation” (SEC, Heb. #8047); “desolation . . . astonishment” (HEL, pp. 270ff); “what is horrible, frightful (alw. devastation in judgment) . . . pl. what causes astonishment, horror” (CHAL, p. 375).⁸⁰

⁶⁴ Eccles., 9:10.

In other passages from Ecclesiastes, we read that, although the human *nephesh* rests in *sheol* during death, man's reversion to the 'aphar is no different than that of a dead beast—both return to the 'aphar, both know nothing.

For the event of the sons of mankind and the event of the beast, and the event is one to them; as dies the one so dies the other one, and one *ruach* (animating force) is to all, so that mankind has no advantage over the beast, for all is transitory. All go to one place; all are from the 'aphar and all return to the 'aphar.⁶⁵

For whoever is chosen, to all the living, there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; BUT THE DEAD, THEY DO NOT KNOW ANYTHING and for them there is no more reward, for their memory is forgotten. Also their love and their hatred and their envy already has perished; and for them there is no more part for the world in all that is done under the sun.⁶⁶

In Isaiah, we are told that only the living can know Yahweh's truth and thank him:

For *sheol* cannot thank you (Yahweh), nor can death praise you; those going down into the *bur* (grave, pit) cannot hope for your truth. The living, the living he will thank you as I do today.⁶⁷

Therefore, in *sheol* (defined as oblivion, ruin, and desolation), there is no memory, no speaking, no thinking, no work, no planning, no knowledge, no wisdom, and no hope—only a return to dust, disorder, obscurity, oblivion, and darkness. These definitions make the darkness of *sheol* and the state of death a condition of total mindless silence and destruction, a

fact which is supported by Psalms 115:17, which states:

The dead do not praise Yahu, nor can ALL who go down to silence.

In the ancient Greek LXX translation of this verse, "silence" is rendered "ἄδου (*adou*; *hades*)," showing that *sheol* was understood. Other passages enhance this point. For example, in Psalms 94:17, we read:

Unless Yahweh (should be) to me a little help, my *nephesh* will soon dwell in silence.

The term "silence" in this and other like verses, as G. E. Ladd notes, refers to lying dead in the state of *sheol*.⁶⁸ In the ancient Greek Septuagint, for example, "silence" is also translated in this verse as

"ἄδῃ (*ade*; *hades*)."⁶⁹ In short, at death we cease to exist. As Psalms 39:13 reports:

Look away from me and I will be cheerful before I go away (i.e., die) and אֵינִי (*aynny*; not exist).⁶⁹

James (Jacob) similarly writes:

For what is your life? It is a vapor, which for a little while appears, and then disappears.⁷⁰

In other passages from Ecclesiastes, we read that, although the human *nephesh* rests in *sheol* during death, man's reversion to the 'aphar is no different than that of a dead beast — both return to the 'aphar, both know nothing.

⁶⁵ Eccles., 3:19f.

⁶⁶ Eccles., 9:4–6.

⁶⁷ Isa., 38:18f.

⁶⁸ NBD, p. 388.

⁶⁹ The Hebrew terms אֵינִי (*aynny*) and אֵין (*ayin*) mean, "to be nothing or not exist; a non-entity" (SEC, Heb. #369); "non-existence" (HEL, p. 8).

⁷⁰ James, 4:14.

The Pious Go to *Sheol*

Another fallacy taught by many Jewish, neo-Christian, and Moslem groups, one that must be dismissed, is the notion that upon death, only the wicked go to *sheol* (hell, *hades*) while the pious go off to heaven. As far as the assertion that the pious go off to heaven upon death, we will prove this doctrine to be a total fabrication with our discussions in later Topics.

Indeed, Yahushua the messiah proclaimed that “no man,” except for himself, “has gone up to the heavens,”⁷¹ and only he could make this claim because he had preexisted and lived in the third heavens with father Yahweh.

Regarding who goes to *sheol* upon death, we have a number of scriptural passages that demonstrate that all humans, whether just or unjust, fall into this state. As Bo Reicke notes, “From a neutral viewpoint, Sheol was regarded in Israel as the dwelling place of all the dead, independent of their character.”⁷²

To demonstrate, although it is true that the wicked go to *sheol*,⁷³ it is also just as true that the pious go there as well. The Psalms, for example, show that the elect of Yahweh lay their hope in the fact that Yahweh will resurrect them from *sheol*. The following verses are examples. King David writes:

I have set Yahweh always before me, for (he is) at my right hand; I will not be shaken. Therefore, my

mind is glad and my glory rejoices; my flesh will also rest in hope, for you will not leave my *nephesh* to *sheol*.⁷⁴

**Even knowledgeable
and righteous Jacob,
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Yahweh and who
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Yahu Yahweh, knew
that both he and his
son were destined
to go to *sheol* at
their deaths.**

Surely *eloahim* will redeem my *nephesh* from the hand of *sheol*, for he will קִיֶּה (*qikh*; receive)⁷⁵ me.⁷⁶

I will thank you Yahweh *eloahi* with all my *lebab* (innermost self); and I will glorify your name to forever. For your mercy is great toward me, and you will save my *nephesh* from *sheol*.⁷⁷

In the same way, the book of Hosea foretells the redemption of the nation of Israel from *sheol*:

I (Yahweh) will ransom them from the hand of *sheol*. From death I will redeem them.⁷⁸

Even knowledgeable and righteous Jacob, who was chosen by Yahweh and who spoke personally with Yahu Yahweh, knew that both he and his son were destined to go to *sheol* at their deaths. For example, after hearing the report that his favorite son, Joseph, was killed, he said, “I will go down to my son, to *sheol*, mourning.”⁷⁹ In this verse, it is evident that Jacob believed that Joseph was already in *sheol* and that he would soon join him there.

What happens to the pious also happens to the wicked, to the great as also to those of no significance:

⁷¹ John, 3:13.

⁷² OCB (The Oxford Companion to the Bible), p. 277.

⁷³ E.g., Ezek., 32:25–27.

⁷⁴ Ps., 16:8–10.

⁷⁵ As in the LXX Ps., 48(49):15, “when he will receive me”; SEC, Heb. #3948, also see SEC, p. 829, s.v. receive; BDBG (The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English lexicon: based on the lexicon of William Gesenius, as translated by Edward Robinson, 1849-1916.).

, p. 544, 3948. The translation “take me” gives the wrong connotation. The NIV version is a little closer, having “he will surely take me to himself.”

⁷⁶ Ps., 49:15.

⁷⁷ Ps., 86:12f.

⁷⁸ Hosea, 13:14.

⁷⁹ Gen., 37:35.

All happens alike to all; one event is to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and the clean and to the unclean; to the sacrificer and to those not sacrificing; as the good so as the sinner; he who swears an oath as he who fears an oath. This is an evil among all things done under the sun, that one event is to all; and also the mind of the sons of mankind is full of evil; and madness in their innermost self throughout their lives, and after that they go to the dead.⁸⁰

In a time of great personal despair, Job wished that he had died before birth. In lamenting his present circumstance, he stated:

For now I would have lain down and been quiet; I would have slept. Then it would be rest for me with kings and counselors of the earth, who built ruins for themselves; or with princes having gold to them, who fill their houses with silver; or like a hidden miscarriage I would not have been; like infants who do not see light. There the wicked cease raging; and there the wearied in strength are at rest. The prisoners are at ease together; they do not hear the voice of the slave driver. The small and the great, they are there; and the slave is free from his sovereign.⁸¹

From *Sheol*

As we have demonstrated, when we die, we return to the '*aphar* of the ground,⁸² further

defined as lying in the state of *sheol*, and coming out of *sheol* occurs at our resurrection from the dead.⁸³ This combination of physical material and sacred *ruach* represents the two dimensions involved in our human condition.

One aspect of our nature is physical, fleshly, and therefore is '*aphar*. The second aspect was

breathed into us by Yahu Yahweh⁸⁴ when he breathed the sacred *ruach* into the physical body of Adam.⁸⁵ This infusion of sacred *ruach* in the physical flesh-and-blood body, and its animation of the lungs and brain, made Adam a living *nephesh*,⁸⁶ a quality which was passed down to his wife Eve and every descendant coming from them.

Therefore, when our human form of *ruach*, which is animating *ruach*, is taken away, we die.

Our physical body returns along with the *nephesh* in our blood to the '*aphar*.

If we are burnt to ashes, we are counted as ashes.⁸⁷ Yet the sacred *ruach* that was combined with the material '*aphar* to create our human *nephesh* forms an unseen condition. Our divine aspect, which attaches itself to our flesh of '*aphar*, continues to attach itself to '*aphar* even after death; thus the statement, "my *nephesh* clings to '*aphar*."⁸⁸

Unlike animals, Adam was brought to life with the quality of self-awareness by a combination of earthly flesh with the living force of sacred *ruach* that had been breathed into him from Yahu Yahweh.

The combination of these two components of a man (the sacred *ruach* and the earthly '*aphar*), as we have already described, brings about the dimension or condition called *sheol* wherein the sacred *ruach*, being the divine part of the human *nephesh*, is retained while the material part decays and is destroyed.

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⁸⁰ Eccles., 9:2f.

⁸¹ Job, 3:13-19.

⁸² Gen., 3:19; Job, 20:11, 21:23-26; Eccles., 3:20; Ps., 104:29.

⁸³ Ps., 16:9f; 1 Sam., 2:6-8.

⁸⁴ Gen., 2:7.

⁸⁵ John, 20:22.

⁸⁶ Gen., 2:7.

⁸⁷ Gen., 18:27; Job, 30:19.

⁸⁸ Ps., 119:25.

It is also important to note that animal life (mammal, fish, bird, insect, etc.) differs from mankind in that the sacred *ruach* (*neshemah*; vital breath) of Yahweh was not placed in them. Therefore, there is a difference between human flesh and animal flesh.⁸⁹ As a result, when animals die, they merely dissipate, for there is no resurrection of animal life.

Since both the *'aphar* forming the flesh and the *nephesh* grow simultaneously as the human population grows, it expands the condition of *sheol*. Accordingly, *sheol* is understood as growing exponentially with the human population and cannot be filled.⁹⁰

When the material *'aphar* of man is altered into liquid or gas or is separated into a state of total decomposition, the divine aspect of the *nephesh*, merely attaches itself or clings to the surrounding *'aphar* that was not from the flesh. It lies in the state of *sheol*.

Herein is the reason why Scriptures merely report that we return to the *'aphar* (material substance)—dust, water, or other types—using a more general understanding of the term. It is from this condition of lying in the *'aphar* of the ground, in the state of *sheol*, that humans are resurrected.

The Second Death

As Scriptures point out, all humans must die at least once;⁹¹ therefore, all humans must experience a first death. In the future, as the result of the two great resurrections, Yahweh will bring back to life from *sheol* the *nephesh* of every

deceased human along with their previous personality (*leb* and *lebab*).

The state of *sheol*, nevertheless, will not continue for infinity. It will cease to exist when father Yahweh comes to the earth at the end of the Millennial Judgment Day.

This detail is confirmed by the fact that at the end of the Millennial Judgment Day when all the wicked are delivered up to the second death in the great baptism of the *gehenna* fire (lake of fire) and suffer permanent death, and *sheol* will no longer exist.

To begin with, since there is a resurrection of the dead,⁹² the first experience with death for humans results in a death sleep in the transitory darkness of *sheol*.⁹³ This sleep state for most will continue for many years.

Solomon, for instance, tells us that a man is to rejoice as long as he lives. Nevertheless,

he reminds us that we will spend a great deal of time in death. Solomon also tells us, “remember the days of darkness; for they will be many; all that comes is transitory.”⁹⁴ Yet at some point after the two great resurrections,⁹⁵ there will be a second and permanent death awaiting the wicked (i.e., those who turn toward the darkness).

At the end of the Millennial Judgment Day, the state of *sheol* and death will both be cast into the *gehenna* fire (the lake of fire) and will no longer exist as a state for the *nephesh* of any deceased human.

At that moment, the wicked—who had previously died during the Judgment period or are destroyed at its end when father Yahweh arrives—experience the second death.⁹⁶

The state of *sheol*, nevertheless, will not continue for infinity. It will cease to exist when father Yahweh comes to the earth at the end of the Millennial Judgment Day.

⁸⁹ 1 Cor., 15:39.

⁹⁰ Prov., 27:20.

⁹¹ Heb., 9:27.

⁹² Deut., 32:39; 1 Sam., 2:6; Ps., 16:10, 30:3, 86:12f, 49:12–15; Isa., 26:19; Hosea, 13:14; Dan., 12:2, 13; Matt., 26:18; Mark, 12:26–27 (cf., Matt., 22:31–33; Luke, 20:37f); John, 11:23f; Acts, 17:18, 17:29–32, 23:6, 24:21; 1 Cor., 15:12–19; Heb., 6:1f, 11:17–1; Rev., 11:1–13., 20:1–6, 11–13.

⁹³ 1 Cor., 15:12–50.

⁹⁴ Eccles., 11:8.

⁹⁵ A discussion of the two great resurrection will be contained in other Topics..

⁹⁶ Rev., 20:14.

DOES HELL EXIST?

Because the state of *sheol* is gone, they will perish for eternity.⁹⁷ As Revelation reports:

And death and *hades* (*sheol*) were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And if anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.⁹⁸

Those who suffer the second death will have no need to be retained in *sheol*, for Yahweh has no intention of ever bringing them back into existence. They simply perish for eternity. The reward of the wicked is to “sit in darkness”⁹⁹ and to be cast “into the outer darkness.”¹⁰⁰

Therefore, up until the end of our present world-age when father Yahweh comes to the earth, all the dead will go to *sheol*. Yet when the wicked are destroyed in the second death, they will cease to exist for all eternity. This state of non-existence is referred to in Scriptures as *לֵאֲפֶלֶס* (*aphel*; extreme darkness).¹⁰¹

While speaking in prayer concerning the resurrection and final judgment, Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, reminds us of the final end of the wicked. She states:

He (Yahweh) keeps the feet of his pious ones, and the wicked are silenced in darkness, because a male will not attain victory with force. Yahweh will smash those who are striving against him. He will thunder in the heavens. Yahweh judges the ends of the earth

and gives strength to his king, and exalts the horn of his messiah.¹⁰²

The darkness given to the wicked is not just the location of a dark place. The prophet Amos tells us:

Is not the day of Yahweh darkness and not light, and *לֵאֲפֶלֶס* (*aphel*; extreme darkness) and no *נֶגַח* (*nagah*; glitter of light)¹⁰³ is in it.¹⁰⁴

In short, the coming destruction of the wicked in *לֵאֲפֶלֶס* (*aphel*; extreme darkness) is equated with a state of the total absence of light, even a tiny glitter, i.e., nothingness.

Those saved, on the other hand, receive light (= eternal life)¹⁰⁵ and are revealed the secret things regarding darkness. For example, we are told that Yahweh is “revealing

deep things out of darkness, and he brings to light the shadow of death.”¹⁰⁶ In Isaiah, we read:

And I (Yahweh) will give you the treasures of darkness, and riches from secret places, so that you will know that I am Yahweh who calls (you) by your name, the *eloahi* of Israel.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

The human body is classified as mere *‘aphar*. When a person’s body loses its animating *ruach*, it experiences death and returns to the

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⁹⁷ For the second death, see Rev., 20:14, 21:7f. For the death of the wicked in fire, see Matt., 10:28; Luke, 12:4f; Matt., 5:21f; Ps., 11:5–7 (cf., Rev., 22:4), 21:8–11; 46:4ff, 75:2, 83:13–15, 37:10f, 20, 104:35; Isa., 1:28–31, 5:21–24, 30:27–30, 66:15f, 66:22–24 (cf., Rev., 21:1–8); Zeph., 1:15–18; Mal., 4:1–3; Matt., 3:7–10, 7:17–20, 13:24–30 (cf., 36–43), 13:47–50, 25:32–46; Heb., 10:19–31; 2 Pet., 3:3–13; Rev., 20:11–21:8.

⁹⁸ Rev., 20:14f; cf., 1 Cor., 15:52–57.

⁹⁹ Ps., 107:10.

¹⁰⁰ Matt., 8:12, 22:13, 25:30.

¹⁰¹ HEL, p. 22, “obscure . . . thick darkness; more intense than *לְאֶפֶלֶס*.”

¹⁰² 1 Sam., 2:9f.

¹⁰³ Nagah means, “to glitter; causat. to illuminate” SEC, Heb. #5050, 5051; “shined . . . made light” HEL, p. 158.

¹⁰⁴ Amos, 5:20.

¹⁰⁵ The fact that the inheritance of light equals eternal life will be discussed in another Topic.

¹⁰⁶ Job, 12:22.

¹⁰⁷ Isa., 45:3.

'*aphar* of the ground from which it came. At this point, the *nephesh*, with its personality (*leb* and *lebab*), falls into the state of *sheol*, a boundless dimension that stores and retains the divine part of the human *nephesh*.

Sheol is a hidden place of darkness connected with the '*aphar* of the ground, a "state of being" for the person who has died. Here the divine aspect of the human *nephesh* exists, but it is not alive.

Sheol is also a dimension without sight, sound, thought, speech, or activity. This state of being was created with the ability to retain the human *nephesh*, more especially its divine *ruach* aspect (the personality or self) so that the person can later be resurrected to life with a new body and once again possess animating *ruach* (energy).

In addition, *Sheol* was created to retain the fallen *ruach* beings (angels) who, after having come out of the dark state of *tartaros*, will be destroyed.

In the future, during one of the two great resurrections, the *nephesh* of every human, with its personality, will be brought out of the state

of *sheol* by Yahweh. When the *nephesh* of a person returns, it will be combined with a new incorruptible body and will be given *ruach*, allowing the person to return to life.

Yet the dimension of *sheol* does not continue for eternity. At the end of the Millennial Judgment Day, *sheol* and death are destroyed in a great end-time holocaust, called "the second death," where the wicked meet their final end.¹⁰⁸ They will perish for eternity.

Since both *sheol* and those who experience the second death disappear at the same moment, it indicates that they will no longer need the dimension of *sheol*. At the same time, once the justified of mankind

obtain the inheritance promised in the eternal covenant with Yahweh, and since they will no longer be capable of sinning, they will inherit eternal life and will never again be subject to death.

Accordingly, they also will never need the state of *sheol*. The state of *sheol*, along with all those experiencing the second death, will fall into eternal nonexistence.

**The state of *sheol*,
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¹⁰⁸ Rev., 20:14, 21:8; 1 Cor., 15:24–26.