



LESSON 16

THE DOCTRINE OF “HELL”

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

Now that we have exposed the spurious “immortal soul” doctrine, we can proceed to examine the churches’ related perverse “hell of fiery torment.” According to this hideous teaching, God has created a subterranean region called “hell” which is a fiery place where the “unsaved souls” of the wicked are sent alive after death to be tormented with fire and pain forever. For centuries this despicable, unscriptural doctrine has been a tool of priestcraft for controlling people and frightening them into subjection to “church” authority. This blasphemous teaching is a mockery of true scriptural teaching.

In Part 1 of this lesson, we will begin a study of the word “hell” as used in the *King James Bible*. We will examine the Hebrew term “sheol” translated as “hell.” In doing so, we will find that the church concept of “everlasting torment in fire” is completely foreign and contrary to God’s Word. This vile teaching, like its parent doctrine of the “immortal soul,” are both products of pagan mythology.



Traditional Church Concept Of Hell

ORIGIN OF THE WORD “HELL”

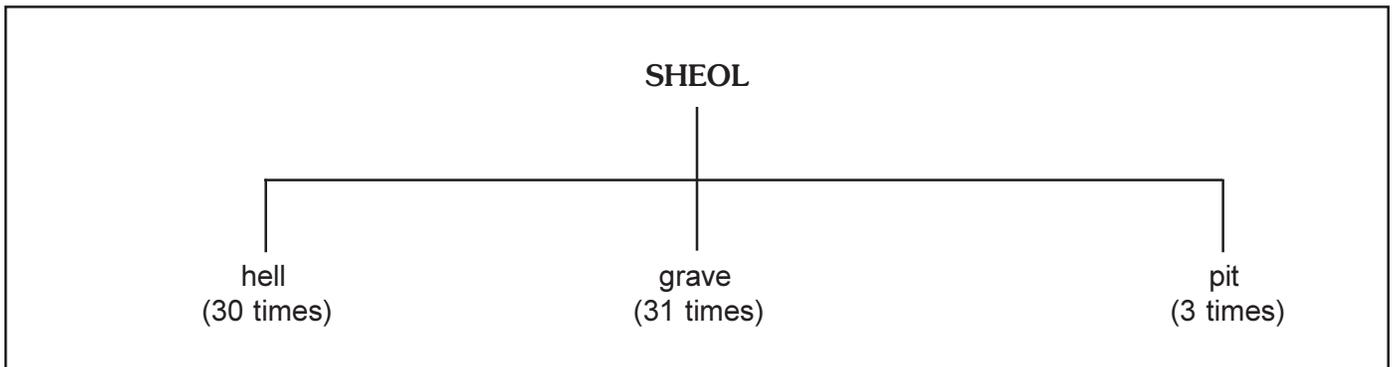
According to Webster’s *New Twentieth Century Dictionary, Unabridged*, the English word “**hell**” comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *helan*, meaning “to cover, conceal.” The word “hell” originally conveyed no thought of fire or torment, but simply of a “covered” or “concealed” place. To “hell” something simply meant to cover it up or bury it out of sight. In fact, in the Old English dialect, the expression “helling potatoes” meant, not to roast them, but simply to cover the potatoes in the ground or in a cellar. The English word “hall” as a covered corridor is also derived from “hell.”

The churches’ use of the word “hell” is graphically portrayed in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. However, this meaning is completely foreign to the original definition of the word. The idea of a “hell” of fiery torment dates back long before Dante or Milton and is found among the pagan religious teachings of ancient peoples in Persia (Babylon), Phoenicia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. While there are variations in detail, the main features of “hell” as perceived by these ancient pagan cultures are basically the same as the views held by today’s church theologians. In fact, the pagan tradition of a “fiery hell of torment” where “immortal souls” suffer everlasting punishment is rigorously taught in churches today.

Since this pagan concept of “hell” has been a basic teaching in the churches for many centuries, it is understandable why *The Encyclopedia American* (1965 ed.) states, “*Much confusion and misunderstanding has been caused through the early translators of the Bible persistently rendering the Hebrew Sheol and the Greek Hades and Gehenna by the word hell.*” Thus, by making an honest comparison of the texts in which these original words appear, we will arrive at a reasonable understanding.

OLD TESTAMENT USE OF “HELL”

The English word “hell” appears 30 times in the *King James Version* of the Old Testament. In each of these 30 entries it was translated from the Hebrew word “**sheol**.” In the actual Hebrew text, “sheol” appears several more times, but the translators rendered it “grave” 31 times, and “pit” 3 times. The chart below summarizes the translators’ rendering of “sheol.”



MEANING OF “SHEOL”

“**Sheol**” means “**the grave**”; “**the place of the dead.**” It is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek “**hades**,” and the English “**hell**.” All three refer to a place of the dead: i.e., the grave. “**Hades**” is the New Testament Greek word meaning “unseen,” or “the grave,” and will be discussed in Part 2 of this lesson.

To the Old Testament Hebrew writers, “sheol” was a place for the dead ... not for living souls. Yet, the churches teach that God sends living, conscious “immortal souls” there. This is a significant contradiction. The translators have also misused the English word “hell” which comes from the old Saxon word “helan” meaning “covered” or “concealed” ... i.e., “buried.” “Hell” is merely a place of burial. None of these words imply fire or torment. That idea came from the old pagan religions of Persia, Greece, and Rome.

THE WICKED GO TO “SHEOL”

FIND THE ANSWERS

1. Psalm 9:17 states, “The _____ shall be turned into **hell** [sheol], and all the nations that forget God.”

The above verse says, literally, the wicked are “turned back to sheol.” There is no suggestion that they are alive and suffering torment in fire. The problem is that when many people read scriptures such as Psalms 9:17, they interpret them according to traditional church views. Instead of thinking of “sheol” as the common place of the dead (all the dead, both saints and sinners), they envision a “hell” of pagan tradition ... the supposed place of endless torment for the churches’ “unsaved immortal souls.”

JACOB TO GO TO “SHEOL”

FIND THE ANSWERS

2. In Genesis 37:35 Jacob says, “For I will go down into the _____ ...”
(Compare with Genesis 42:38; 44:29 and 31)
3. In the above cited verses, the word “grave” is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

Not only do the wicked go to “sheol,” but Jacob (Israel) stated he was to go there. Those who insist the wicked go to a place of endless fiery torment must also imply that the father of the Israelites went there as well. So it appears that the churches would send Jacob, a man of God who is named in Hebrews 11 as an heir of salvation, to their “fiery hell.” This, of course, is absurd. What is logical, however, is that both the righteous and the wicked die and are buried – i.e. they are in “sheol”: in a state or condition of death.

JOB TO GO TO “SHEOL”

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Job Chapter 17.

4. Speaking of death, Job states in verse 13, “If I wait, the _____ is mine house ...”
5. In verse 16 Job speaks of death as going “... down to the bars of the _____ ...”
6. Both answers above are translated from what Hebrew word? _____

The preceding verses show that Job speaks of going to “sheol.” In fact, as the following verse indicates, he even desired to go there to escape his trouble. Find the Hebrew words in Strong’s Concordance.

FIND THE ANSWERS

1. According to Job 14:13, where did Job desire that God hide him? _____
2. The above answer is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

If “sheol,” is the place where the wicked go after death, i.e., the pagan “hell of everlasting torment” promoted by the churches today, then why would Job wish to go there to escape his troubles? That makes no sense, as he would be trading temporary suffering during his short lifetime for “everlasting torment.” However, what does make sense is that Job longed for “sheol” (the state of death), because it would bring an end to his suffering.

Note how Job wanted to be hidden in “sheol”; he wanted God to keep him secret (Job 14:13). These expressions are equivalent to the original definition of “hell” (to cover, to conceal) and the meaning of “sheol” (unknown or unseen). However, the church pagan concept of “hell” (endless torment in fire) has changed and twisted the meaning for churchgoers.

KING HEZEKIAH EXPECTED TO GO TO “SHEOL”

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read 2 Kings 18:1-7.

3. Which of the following statements are true concerning Hezekiah, king of Judah?
 - A. He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD.
 - B. He trusted in the LORD God of Israel.
 - C. He followed the LORD and kept His commandments.
 - D. The LORD was with him.
4. Speaking of his premature death due to sickness, Hezekiah stated in Isaiah 38:10, “...I shall go to the gates of the _____.”
5. The above answer is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

King Hezekiah, who led a revival in Israel (2 Kings 18:5), clearly stated he was going to “sheol” when he died. Would it be reasonable that such a man would expect to go to a place of “endless fiery torment” following his death? Clearly the idea is nonsense.

JONAH IN “SHEOL”

FIND THE ANSWERS

1. Jonah 1:17 states that God caused a great fish to _____ Jonah, and he was in the fish’s belly for three days and nights.

Read Jonah Chapter 2.

2. Verse 1 indicates he prayed to God out of the fish’s _____.
3. Verse 2 says God heard Jonah’s cry from out of the “belly of _____.”
4. The above answer is translated from what Hebrew word? _____
5. Verse 10 states the fish _____ Jonah out upon dry land.

The prophet Jonah was alive, praying in “the belly of hell” (“sheol”). How could a place of “eternal fiery torment” exist in the stomach of a mortal fish living in water? How did Jonah get into “hell” without dying? How did Jonah bodily get out of “hell” after only three days and nights when the churches claim a person’s stay there is forever? Why would one of God’s prophets be sent to a place of fiery torment reserved for the wicked? These questions expose the foolishness of the “hell-fire” doctrine.

Jonah was in the “belly of hell” in the sense that he was inside the fish’s stomach. He was “covered up” or “concealed” (the original meaning of “hell”): he would have been “unknown, unseen.”

DAVID IN “SHEOL”

FIND THE ANSWERS

6. In Psalm 16:10, David says, “For thou [the LORD] wilt not leave my soul in _____ ...”
7. The above answer is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

David expected to be in sheol, and expected God to deliver him from it. David was talking about being raised out of the state of death. This proves that the dead who are in sheol can be delivered or rescued, unlike the traditional hell of the churches which supposedly holds its unfortunate occupants forever. The “hell” (sheol) of the Old Testament is the resting place of **all** the dead.

DAVID'S DELIVERANCE FROM "SHEOL"

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Psalm 18:1-6.

1. According to verse 3, David prayed that God would save him from his _____.
2. In verse 4, David states, "The sorrows of _____ compassed me ..."
3. In verse 5, he says, "The sorrows of **hell** [sheol] _____ me about ..."

Psalms 18 is a song David wrote in which he praised God for delivering him from the hand of his enemies – not from a pagan place of fiery torment. The similarity of wording in verses 4 and 5 indicates that David understood "sheol" as the state or condition of death. David obviously was facing death at the hands of his enemies and would have died had it not been for God's intervention. David was not worried that he might be tormented in everlasting fire. Rather, he was sorrowful about the thought of being killed by his enemies – i.e. the end of his life.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Psalm 116:1-4.

4. Verse 3 states, "The sorrows of _____ compassed me, and the pains of **hell** [sheol] gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow."
5. The prayer in verse 4 states, "O LORD, I beseech thee, _____ my soul."

Here is another example of a prayer to God for deliverance from "hell" (sheol). The "sorrows" and "pains" referred to in this passage are those experienced by the Psalmist during his lifetime – not some nebulous future life. Note that "death" and "hell" are again used together as they were in Psalms 18.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Psalm 30.

6. In verse 1, David extols God because He _____ him up.
7. David states in verse 3 that God brought him up from the **grave** [sheol] and kept him _____ so that he would not go down to the _____.

Here, again, we see David thanking God for delivering him from death – from "sheol." It is obvious from the context that David faced death at the hand of his foes, but God kept him alive. It is ridiculous to think that David, who trusted in God, would be concerned about going to the pagan "hell-fire."

SCRIPTURAL DESCRIPTIONS OF “SHEOL”

The Hebrew Scriptures give some clear descriptions and characteristics of “sheol” which can help us to better understand what it represents. These examples will also show that “sheol” is not the traditional “hell-fire” of the churches.

“SHEOL” IS A PLACE OF SILENCE

FIND THE ANSWERS

1. Psalm 6:5 states, “For in death there is no _____ of thee [the LORD]; in the **grave** [sheol] who shall give thee _____?”
2. Psalm 31:17 says, “... let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be _____ in the **grave** [sheol].”
3. Isaiah 38:18 states, “For the **grave** [sheol] cannot _____ thee [God], death cannot _____ thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.”
4. According to Psalm 115:17, “The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into _____.”

According to the above passages, there is no praising, no celebrating nor remembrance in “sheol.” Instead, “sheol” is characterized by silence. This Biblical description is completely opposite from the church tradition of “hell-fire” which is described as a place of ceaseless shrieking, howling, and cursing.

NO LIFE IN “SHEOL”

FIND THE ANSWERS

5. Ecclesiastes 9:10 states, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no _____, nor _____, nor _____, nor _____, in the **grave** [sheol], whither thou goest.”

The passage above plainly states that after a person dies – i.e. rests in “sheol” – he is **dead**. He no longer possesses any of the mental or physical abilities of life. A dead person (a person in “sheol”) cannot do anything, cannot think anything, nor feel anything. All knowledge and thinking ceases. This is what God’s Word teaches.

Pagan traditions of men, however, teach the opposite of Scripture. Man’s wisdom contradicts God’s Word by teaching that a person continues living after he dies – i.e. he has an “immortal soul.” Man’s doctrine teaches that deceased wicked people go to a place called “hell,” which is described as a fiery place of eternal torment and suffering. Using this pagan definition of “hell” for the “sheol” of the Old Testament is an outright distortion of the truth of God’s Word.

“SHEOL”: A PLACE OF DARKNESS

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10.

1. According to verse 6, “The LORD _____, and maketh _____: He bringeth down to the **grave** [sheol], and bringeth up.”
2. Verse 9 states, “He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be _____ in _____ ...”
3. Speaking of death, Job states in Job 17:13, “If I wait, the **grave** [sheol] is mine house: I have made my bed in the _____.”

The preceding verses associate death and “sheol” with darkness. Scripture often uses the word “darkness” when referring to a lack of life. Since there is no life in “sheol” (the state of the dead), it is logical that darkness would be used to describe it. The “hell of endless fire” taught by the churches, however, certainly is not a place of darkness and silence.

GOING TO “SHEOL” ALIVE

“Sheol” is used to describe a fissure in the earth into which men can fall. Also, it figuratively describes a condition of defeat or captivity. We have already examined the example of the prophet Jonah who went into the “belly of sheol” while still alive. Let’s look at some other examples.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Numbers 16:1-33.

4. According to verse 33, Korah and his associates “... went down _____ into the **pit** [sheol], and the earth closed upon them: and they _____ from among the congregation.” (See also verse 30)
5. Speaking of the wicked, Psalm 55:15 says, “Let _____ seize upon them, and let them go down _____ into **hell** [sheol] ...”
6. Referring to what sinners say, Proverbs 1:12 states, “Let us swallow them up _____ as the **grave** [sheol]; and whole, as those that go down into the pit.”

Note that in the three preceding verses, the words “pit,” “hell,” and “grave” are translated from the same Hebrew word: “sheol.” The word “quick” in Psalm 55:15 meant “alive,” as shown in Numbers 16:1-33 and Proverbs 1:12. Korah and his friends were caught in a type of earthquake that covered them (out of sight) – i.e. swallowed – alive. Obviously, they remained alive for only a brief moment. There is no mention or indication that they fell into a fiery place where they were then tormented endlessly.

DELIVERANCE FROM “SHEOL”

FIND THE ANSWERS

1. Proverbs 15:24 states, “The way of life is above to the _____, that he may _____ from **hell** [sheol] beneath.”

Read Proverbs 23:13-14.

2. According to verse 13, what will keep a child from dying? _____
3. Verse 14 indicates that parental correction will _____ a child from **hell** [sheol].

The verses above express the idea of going into “sheol” prematurely as a result of folly and disregard for God’s Word. Just as Korah’s rebellion against God led to his premature death, those who live contrary to God’s laws will have their lives shortened, both spiritually and physically. In fact, the Fifth Commandment declares that obeying God’s law and honoring your father and mother will lengthen the days you live on the land God gives you. These verses do not state nor suggest anything about a hell of fiery torment.

DESTRUCTION OF “SHEOL”

Man’s pagan “hell-fire” concept portrays a place of endless torment – i.e. undying life of pain. However, the “sheol” of the Bible can be destroyed.

FIND THE ANSWERS

4. God states in Hosea 13:14, “I will _____ them from the power of the **grave** [sheol]; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O **grave** [sheol], I will be thy _____ ...”

Logically, anything that can be destroyed cannot be everlasting. Destruction and endlessness are mutually exclusive terms. God plainly states that He will destroy “sheol” – i.e. He will put an end to it. In 1 Corinthians 15:26, Paul says that Christ will destroy death.

“SHEOL” IS IN GOD’S PRESENCE

Many who adhere to the pagan hell-fire doctrine teach that “hell” is everlasting banishment from God’s presence. However, Scripture refutes this idea.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Psalm 139:1-10.

1. Verse 7 poses the question of where one could flee from God’s _____.
2. Verse 8 states, “If I ascend up into heaven, thou [God] art there: If I make my bed in _____, behold, thou art there.”
3. From what Hebrew word is the above answer translated? _____
4. According to Proverbs 15:11, “**Hell** [sheol] and destruction are _____ the LORD ...”

Obviously, sheol (the grave) is not out of God’s presence. One cannot escape God’s presence, even in death. God has power over “sheol” – i.e. over the dead. That includes those who are spiritually dead as well as those who are biologically dead.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the Hebrew word “sheol” means “hidden from sight.” In Part 2 of this lesson we’ll look at the Greek word “hades” which means “unseen” and corresponds with the Hebrew “sheol.” Both words are usually translated “hell” which correctly means “covered,” or “buried.” While all three words mean pretty much the same, the churches have twisted all three terms to fit old pagan doctrines from Persia, Greece, and Rome. The chart below contrasts Bible doctrine with church/pagan doctrine.

SHEOL What the Bible Teaches	SHEOL What the Churches Teach
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is a state of death. 2. Both the righteous and the wicked go there. 3. One can be delivered (saved) from it. 4. It can be destroyed. 5. It ends suffering and trouble. 6. It is a place of darkness. 7. It is a place of silence. 8. It is cessation of death. 9. It is before (in) God’s presence. 10. It is a place/time of rest. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is a state of immortal life in torment. 2. Only the wicked go there. 3. One cannot be removed from it. 4. It is endless, everlasting. 5. It inflicts agonizing torture. 6. It is a place of abundant fire. 7. It is filled with shrieking and cursing. 8. It is continuation of life in torment. 9. It is unending banishment from God. 10. It is a place of torture and anguish.

Now that we have a Biblical understanding of the concept of “sheol,” in the next lesson we will examine the New Testament use of the word “hell.”



LESSON 16

THE DOCTRINE OF “HELL” PART 1

Page 153

1. wicked
2. grave
3. sheol
4. grave
5. pit
6. sheol

Page 154

1. grave
2. sheol
3. all are true
4. grave
5. sheol

Page 155

1. swallow
2. belly
3. hell
4. sheol
5. vomited
6. hell
7. sheol

Page 156

1. enemies
2. death
3. compassed
4. death
5. deliver

Page 156 (continued)

6. lifted
7. alive; pit

Page 157

1. remembrance; thanks
2. silent
3. praise; celebrate
4. silence
5. work; device; knowledge; wisdom

Page 158

1. killeth; alive
2. silent; darkness
3. darkness
4. alive; perished
5. death; quick
6. alive

Page 159

1. wise; depart
2. correction (beating him with the rod)
3. deliver
4. ransom; destruction

Page 160

1. presence
2. hell
3. sheol
4. before (in the presence of)

NOTES

We suggest the following book for additional study:

Doctrine Of Salvation - Ben Willams

Available free at benwilliamslibrary.com