

HELL:
The Place of Everlasting Punishment!
Message 2

INTRO: In our culture, we are familiar with the picture of two roads. One is broad and easy, and the end is the flames of hell; and the other is narrow and difficult, and the end is heaven. Our topic is, "Hell: The Place of Everlasting Punishment!" That is the end of the broad road.

In the first message we sought to answer the question why hell is necessary. It is necessary because of sin. Man cannot dwell with God if he has sin and if his sins are not taken care of, he must go to some other place than heaven. Hell is the only other place there is. God never made hell for man, he made it for the fallen angels, but when man dies in sin, he too must go here. Furthermore, hell is necessary because a just God must punish sin, and the punishment must fit the crime. That is why hell is so terrible, and why it must last forever.

We also asked with Mercy Aiken, if hell is real, why did God not warn man in the OT? Well, we said the teaching of hell was there in seed form in the earliest chapters of Genesis. But this morning we want to see that it is also develops into a clear OT doctrine. In the NT this will become much clearer.

V. THE PROOF OF HELL IN THE BIBLE

A. In The Old Testament

1. The problem with the term 'sheol'

So, there is one major task that falls to anyone either wishing to prove the doctrine of hell in the OT or disproving it. That task is to give a good explanation for the Hebrew word 'sheol' as used in the OT. In the NT the Greek translation of the Hebrew 'sheol' is the word 'hades'.

Mercy Aiken gives the following as a popular myth in biblical teaching. He writes, "Two thirds of the Bible (the Old Testament) do not mention Hell at all. ('Sheol,' the Old Testament word that is sometimes translated as Hell, **only means 'grave'** by definition, and it is where everyone in the

Old Testament went when they died--good or evil, Jew or Gentile.) Thus the Old Testament does not contain the concept of Hell!"

This, as I see it, is the pivotal point in the whole argument in the OT. So, our question is, does the word 'sheol' refer to the grave only, or can it also refer to hell? The word sheol is the only Hebrew word translated hell in the KJV. In the KJV it has been translated as the 'grave' 31 times, and as 'hell' 31 times. Three times it has been translated 'pit'. So, there already, is some evidence that this word may mean the grave.

What complicates matters with regard to this question is that in the OT both the righteous and the unrighteous go to sheol. So, Aiken's argument is that since both the righteous and unrighteous go to sheol, therefore it cannot mean hell, and that argument makes good sense. So we must ask, "If both the righteous and unrighteous go to sheol, what does it then refer to?" The argument runs like this: If the righteous go there, one thing is certain, it cannot refer to hell for the righteous do not go to hell! So, the logical conclusion is that since it quite often does refer to the grave, therefore it must always refer to the grave, and not to hell at all.

So let us first show that the righteous go to sheol. The classic verse to show that the righteous go to sheol is Genesis 37:35 where Jacob refused to be comforted because he was certain some evil beast had killed his son Joseph. And Jacob said, "For I shall go down into the grave (sheol) to my son in mourning." No one will argue that Jacob did not go to hell. Would he say, "For I shall go down to hell to my son in mourning"? Of course not. So, the only word translated hell in the OT is this word sheol. So, the argument goes, since it refers to the grave, therefore it cannot mean hell. That is Aiken's argument.

That the wicked go to sheol is often referred to in the OT. For example, Psalm 9:17 says, "The wicked shall be turned into hell (sheol), And all

the nations that forget God." So the conclusion is that both the righteous and unrighteous go to sheol, therefore sheol cannot be hell.

2. The suggested answers to the term 'sheol'

a. Sheol means the grave

Now several solutions have been proposed to the fact that both the righteous and the unrighteous are assigned to sheol or hades. Mercy Aiken suggests that sheol always means the grave, and that is that. Here is what he says, "'Sheol,' the Old Testament word that is sometimes translated as Hell, only means 'grave' by definition, and it is where everyone in the Old Testament went when they died--good or evil, Jew or Gentile."

b. Sheol is the place of all departed spirits

But is that the only way this word can be viewed? There is a second view, held by many solid evangelical Christians, and it is that at death, all go to sheol because sheol contains two compartments. The one compartment is the 'bad' side, called 'gehenna' and the other is the good side called 'paradise'. Both are contained in the center of the earth and both are in the one compartment called sheol in the OT, or hades in the NT. So, sheol is the place of all departed spirits, but some are in gehenna, the bad place; while others are in paradise, the good place.

The argument for this position runs like this: When Jesus died, He went to hades, or sheol, but He went to the paradise side. The thief on the cross went there with Him as well, just as Jesus had promised. The rich man that was in hades was in the gehenna side. That is hell, the place of torment.

Let me explain this very briefly. According to this position, when Jesus descended into hades, He preached there to the spirits in prison (1 Pet. 3:19). When Jesus ascended to

heaven, He led captivity, that is, He led those who had been captive in the lower, captive to the higher paradise we know as heaven (Eph. 4:8).

I do not want to take our time here to explain all the details of this rather popular teaching other than to simply say I do not subscribe to it. Let me add that many fine Christians hold to this view. However, the conclusion of this view is one possible answer how both the righteous and unrighteous go to sheol because sheol has two compartments, one for the saved and one for the unsaved.

c. Sheol refers to the grave and to hell

There is a third view that explains how both the righteous and unrighteous go to sheol. In this view, the use of sheol in many references simply refers to the grave. In other references, however, it refers to hell, hell as we understand it. That is the solution, it seems to me, that the KJV translators used because of the 65 occurrences of the term sheol in the OT 31 times it has been translated as 'grave' and 31 times as 'hell'. The other three times it has been translated 'pit'. In other words, sheol may refer simply to the grave where both the righteous and unrighteous go or it may have special reference to hell, where only the unrighteous go. Many very good Christian scholars argue that this is the correct view. This view has good support, but it has difficulties as well.

d. Sheol refers to the intermediate state and to hell

A third possibility is that sheol may refer to either the intermediate state or to hell. This is the view I have come to hold and I want to give some time to explaining it. I will first seek to give evidence that it may refer to the intermediate state, and then, that it refers to hell as well.

1) Evidence that sheol refers to the intermediate state

Now before we consider this point I want to say that to me, there is some question whether the word sheol ever refers directly to the grave. The reason I question that is because there is a Hebrew word for grave, so why another? The Hebrew word for grave is 'kebooraw'.

Now to the evidence that sheol speaks of the intermediate state, we ask first, what is the intermediate state? Man enters three states in the course of his unending existence, with the third state lasting forever. The first state man enters is that of physical life. It is the state we enter at birth, and which ends at death.

The second state is the intermediate state. In this state the body is dead, but the soul and spirit are either in heaven or in hell. Man has been divided by death into a state where the body is dead. This is the intermediate state.

The third state is the resurrected state. Body, soul and spirit have been put back together again. We will not take time to go into the resurrection but there is a resurrection of the body experienced by both the just the unjust. These are two separate resurrections and they occur at different times. When the righteous are resurrected they enter the eternal state with their resurrected body reunited with the soul and spirit. When the unrighteous are resurrected they enter hell with their resurrected body which has been reunited with the soul and spirit.

Now, in death, man's three major parts are severed. The body is placed in the grave and the soul and spirit go to either heaven or hell. This is the intermediate state. This state remains in effect until

the body is resurrected and reunited with the soul and spirit.

The conclusion I have come to is that the word sheol may be used to refer to the intermediate state, or it may refer to hell. Context determines which it is. There is no question that all people at death enter the intermediate state and this is sheol. That is why both the righteous and unrighteous enter 'sheol' at death. When we speak of the body, in the intermediate state, it is in the grave. Thus when we make reference to the body after death in the intermediate state, we are speaking of the grave. In this way 'sheol' may refer simply to the grave.

In Genesis 37:35, after Jacob had seen Joseph's bloodied tunic, he said, "For I shall go down into sheol to my son in mourning." Jacob would not be comforted and was sure his body would go down into the grave in death, the state he was sure his son had now already entered.

In Acts 2:27, a quote from the Psalms, Jesus said, "...You will not leave My soul in Hades (Heb. sheol), nor will you allow Your Holy One to see corruption." Jesus' soul would not be left in the intermediate state, that is without a body, nor would God allow His body to decompose, as is the case with the rest of mankind after death. And the facts are, before His body decomposed, it was reunited with His soul and spirit, and He entered the third and final state.

The view that sheol and hades refer to either the intermediate state or hell is very closely related to the position of the KJV that it may refer to either the grave or hell.

2) Evidence that sheol refers to hell

So, having considered that sheol may refer to the intermediate state, I want to show you that in numerous instances sheol does certainly refer to something more than this. Let me take you to the very first occurrence of the word 'sheol' where it evidently means more than simply the grave (Deut. 32:22). The time has come where Moses will die and the Lord shows Moses how the children of Israel will depart from God. So, just before Moses died, he wrote a song about Israel and it is found in Deuteronomy 32. In verses 15-22 we see Israel departing from God, and then in verse 22 we find these words, "For a fire is kindled by my anger, And shall burn to the lowest hell; It shall consume the earth with her increase, And set on fire the foundations of the mountains."

Now, this is the 7th occurrence of the word sheol in the Bible. The first five refer to Jacob's death and are translated 'grave'. The next two are with regard to the priest Korah and company, and how God opened the earth and swallowed them up. In both instances the word sheol has been translated 'pit'.

Now in Deuteronomy 32:22, it seems evident that more than the grave is meant, for it refers to the 'lowest' hell. What is the lowest 'sheol'? If sheol only refers to the grave, what is the 'lowest' sheol? If the grave is 'down', is it the lowest down? Well, most graves are very shallow and in Israel many were above ground. What is the lowest down? Certainly not the grave. So the KJV translators have not translated the word sheol as the grave, but hell. Furthermore, now we have fire and God's anger connected with the lowest 'sheol'. This seems to be a reference to something beyond the grave and that expression occurs elsewhere as well.

Now let me next take you to what is likely the oldest book in the Bible, that is, the book that was likely the first to be written of all 66 books. I have preached through this book and told you that this was likely the very first book written because it deals with the very first and deadliest of all sins, pride.

We turn to Job 11:9 where the word 'sheol' occurs. The speaker in this chapter is Zophar. And in Job 11:7-9 he says, "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven - what can you know? Deeper than sheol, what can you do? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea."

Now here we have the limits of the Almighty compared to the heavens for height and to 'sheol' for depth. Now the grave is not by any stretch of the imagination a comparison for depth, such as heaven is for height. The heavens are the highest of all things. Hell is the deepest of all things as we will see in another message. There is no place lower than hell! The word sheol here can hardly refer to the grave, for there are many places lower than the grave.

Comparing the limits of the Almighty to the height of heaven is certainly a fair comparison. To compare the deep things of God to the depth of the grave is a comparison not worth talking about. A well is usually deeper than that! But if it speaks of the lowest hell, now you have a place man cannot reach in his physical state any more than he can reach the highest heaven. Surely here we have evidence of 'sheol' referring to more than the grave.

Let us consider another reference in Job (read 26:5-6). This time it is Job

speaking. You see, these men reveal that way, way back, hell as we understand it was an understanding they had as well. The Hebrew word translated 'hell' here again is 'sheol'. We have seen earlier that the argument is put forth by some that sheol ONLY means 'the grave'. In this passage Job is speaking and in verse 5 he says that the dead tremble. Certainly that is not a reference to those in the grave or to the body in the grave. No doubt the dead that tremble in their bodiless state are those who are in hell. And so Job says in verse 6, "Sheol is naked before Him." Here sheol is a reference to those who have gone to the place we call hell. What we have in this passage is a Hebrew parallelism, and the parallelism is synonymous. The synonym to sheol, being *naked before God*, is that *destruction has no covering*. In another message we will look at this word 'destruction' again, and see what progressive revelation reveals. There is no doubt that this refers to something other than the grave.

CONCL: So what conclusions can we draw from this word 'sheol' as it is used in the OT? Well, we can agree with Aiken that sheol is what all are assigned to at death, both the righteous and the unrighteous. We saw that the righteous go to sheol. We saw that the wicked go to sheol.

However, my proposition for you is this: When sheol means something other than the intermediate state, it refers to hell. The intermediate state is the state in which the body is separated from the soul and the spirit. After death, all enter the bodiless state. Soul and spirit are alive and go to either heaven or hell, while the body is placed in the grave. This state, as I see it, is called sheol.

Now let me add to this brief study that if Job is the oldest book written, it is also obvious that the concept of hell was so common already in his time that he or his comforters did not need to give any explanation of their use of the term 'sheol' for hell. One thing becomes very clear, hell, with all its horrors, was a common concept from very early times.