

Gehenna And Tartarus

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"Hell" is the English rendering of two different Greek words in the N.T. The English word is from the Anglo-Saxon *hel*, Genitive case *helle* = a hidden place, from the Anglo-Saxon *helan* = to hide. It is in the N.T. used as the translation of two Greek words :-

- I. Gehenna. Gr. *geenna*. This is the transliteration of the Heb. *Gai' Hinnom*, i.e. the Valley of Hinnom or "the Valley" of [the sons of] Hinnom, where were the fires through which children were passed in the worship of Moloch.

In the O.T. Tophet was the Heb. word used, because it was a place in this valley.

In our Lord's day the idolatry had ceased, but the fires were still continually burning there for the destruction of the refuse of Jerusalem. Hence, *gehenna* was used for the fires of destruction associated with the judgment of God. Sometimes, "*gehenna of fire*". See 2Kings 23:10. Isa. 30:33. Jer. 7:31, 32; 19:11-14.

Gehenna occurs 12 times, and is always rendered "hell", viz. Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33. Mark 9:45, 47. Luke 12:5. Jas. 3:6.

- II. Hades. Gr. *hades*, from a (privative) and *idein*, to see ([Ap. 133. I. i](#)); used by the Greeks for the unseen world. The meaning which the Greeks put upon it does not concern us; nor have we anything to do with the imaginations of the heathen, or the traditions of Jews or Romanists, or the teachings of demons or evil spirits, or of any who still cling to them. The Holy Spirit has used it as one of the "words pertaining to the earth", and in so doing has "purified" it, "as silver tried in a furnace" (see notes on Ps. 12:6). From this we learn that His own words "are pure", but words belonging to this earth have to be "purified".

The Old Testament is the fountain head of the Hebrew language. It has no literature behind it. But the case is entirely different with the Greek language. The Hebrew *Sheol* is a word Divine in its origin and usage. The Greek *Hades* is human in its origin and comes down to us laden with centuries of development, in which it has acquired new senses, meanings, and usages.

Seeing that the Holy Spirit has used it in Acts 2:27, 31 as His own equivalent of *Sheol* in Psalm 16:10, He has settled, once for all, the sense in which we are to understand it. The meaning He has given to *Sheol* in Ps. 16:10 is the one meaning we are to give it wherever it occurs in the N.T., whether we transliterate it or translate it. We have no liberty to do otherwise, and must discard everything outside the Word of God.

The word occurs eleven times (Matt. 11:23; 16:18. Luke 10:15; 16:23. Acts 2:27, 31. 1 Cor. 15:55. Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14); and is rendered "hell" in every passage except one, where it is rendered "grave" (1 Cor. 15:55, marg. "hell"). In the R.V. the word is always transliterated "Hades", except in 1Cor. 15:55 (where "death" is substituted because of the reading, in all the texts, of *thanate* for *hade*), and in the American R.V. also.

As *Hades* is the Divine Scriptural equivalent of *Sheol*, further light may be gained from [Ap. 35](#), and a reference to the 65 passages there given. It may be well to note that while "Hades" is rendered "hell" in the N.T. (except once, where the rendering "the grave" could not be avoided), *Sheol*, its Hebrew equivalent, occurs 65 times, and is rendered "the grave" 31 times (or 54%); "hell" 31 times (4 times with margin "the grave", reducing it to 41.5%); and "pit" only 3 times (or 4.5 %).

"The grave", therefore, is obviously the best rendering, meaning the state of death (Germ. *sterbend*, for *w 6a2 hich* we have no English equivalent); not the act of dying, as an examination of all the occurrences of both words will show.

1. The rendering "pit" so evidently means "the grave" that it may at once be substituted for it (Num. 16:30, 33. Job 17:16).
2. The rendering "the grave" (not "a grave", which is Hebrew *keber* or *bor*) exactly expresses the meaning of both Sheol and Hades. For, as to direction, it is always down: as to place, it is in the earth: as to relation, it is always in contrast with the state of the living (Deut. 32:22-25 and 1 Sam. 2:6-8); as to association, it is connected with mourning (Gen. 37:34, 35), sorrow (Gen. 42:38. 2 Sam. 22:6. Ps. 18:5; 116:3), fright and terror (Num. 16:27, 34) mourning (Isa. 38:3, 10, 17, 18), silence (Ps. 6:5; 31:17. Ecc. 9:10), no knowledge (Ecc. 9:5, 6, 10), punishment (Num. 16:29, 34. 1 Kings 2:6, 9. Job 24:19. Ps. 9:17 (R.V. = re-turned), corruption (Ps. 16:10. Acts 2:27, 31); as to duration resurrection is the only exit from it (Ps. 16:11. Acts 2:27, 31; 13:33-37. 1 Cor. 15:55. Rev. 1:18; 20:5, 13, 14).

III. Tartaroo (occurs only in 2 Pet. 2:4) = to thrust down to Tartarus, Tartarus being a Greek word, not used elsewhere, or at all in the Sept. Homer describes it as subterranean (cp. Deut. 32:22, which may refer to this). The Homeric Tartarus is the prison of the Titans, or giants (cp. Heb. Rephaim, [Ap. 25](#)), who rebelled against Zeus.

IV. Sheol In The Old Testament

1 = Grave	2 = Pit	3 = Hell
1. Gen. 37:35.	3. Ps. 18:5.	1. Ecc. 9:10.
1. Gen. 42:38.	1. Ps. 30:3.	1. Song 8:6.
1. Gen. 44:29, 31.	1. Ps. 31:17.	3. Isa. 5:14.
2. Num. 16:30, 33.	1. Ps. 49:14, 14, 15.	3. Isa. 14:9 (marg. grave).
3. Deut. 32:22.	3. Ps. 55:15 (marg. grave).	1. Isa. 14:11.
1. 1 Sam. 2:6.	3. Ps. 86:13 (marg. grave).	3. Isa. 14:15.
3. 2Sam. 22:6.	1. Ps. 88:3.	3. Isa. 28:15, 18.
1. 1Kings 2:6, 9.	1. Ps. 89:48.	1. Isa. 38:10.
1. Job 7:9.	3. Ps. 116:3.	1. Isa. 38:18.
3. Job 11:8.	3. Ps. 139:8.	3. Isa. 57:9.
1. Job 14:13.	1. Ps. 141:7.	1. Ezek. 31:15.
1. Job 17:13.	1. Prov. 1:12.	3. Ezek. 31:16, 17.
2. Job 17:16.	3. Prov. 5:5.	3. Ezek. 32:21, 27.
1. Job 21:13.	3. Prov. 7:27.	1. Hos. 13:14, 14.
1. Job 24:19.	3. Prov. 9:18.	3. Amos 9:2.
3. Job 26:6.	3. Prov. 15:11, 24.	3. Jonah 2:2 (marg. grave).
1. Ps. 6:5.	3. Prov. 23:14.	3. Hab. 2:5.
3. Ps. 9:17.	3. Prov. 27:20.	
3. Ps. 16:10.	1. Prov. 30:16.	