

SHEOL-KNOW

***Summary:** This book will PROVE biblically that the state of the unsaved dead is sleeping in "Sheol" until Judgment Day.*

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Chapter One: UNDERSTANDING SHEOL/HADES: "The Intermediate State"

*Seven Important Facts about Sheol/Hades
Confusion Due to Inconsistent Translating of Sheol
Understanding the Two Views of Sheol*

Chapter Two: JACOB, JOB & SOLOMON'S View of Sheol

*What Jacob Said
Job's View of Sheol
Solomon's View of Sheol*

CHAPTER THREE: SHEOL IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS – Part I

*Sheol: Where You Cannot Remember or Praise God
Sheol: "The Land of Silence"
Sheol: "The Pit" or "Well of Souls"
Sheol: A Condition of the Soul (Mind)
Sheol: A Place Where Sheep Go?
Do Animals Have Souls? Do They Go to Sheol When They Die?
"God Will Ransom My Soul from the Power of Sheol"*

CHAPTER FOUR: SHEOL IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS – Part II

*Did David Pray for His Ex-Friend to Go to a Hellish Torture Chamber?
"Who Can Escape the Power of Sheol?"
"If I Make My Bed in Sheol, You Are There"
"Sleeping" in Sheol
Why are Souls in Sheol Referred to as "Sleeping"?*

CHAPTER FIVE: SHEOL IN PROVERBS

*Sheol and Death: Synonymous
"To Avoid Sheol Below"
"Deliver His Soul from Sheol"
Sheol is Never Satisfied*

CHAPTER SIX: SHEOL IN THE PROPHETS

*"Sheol has Enlarged its Appetite"
The Proud King of Babylon Brought Down to Sheol
The Longest and Most Detailed Passage on Sheol
"Progressive Revelation" on the Nature of Sheol?
"Where, O Sheol, is your Destruction?"*

CHAPTER SEVEN: FURTHER SCRIPTURAL INSIGHTS INTO THE NATURE OF SHEOL

Sheol is Contrasted with “the Land of the Living”

Sheol: The Soulful Grave of “All the Living”

Sheol and the Physical Grave: Distinct yet Parallel

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CHAPTER ONE

UNDERSTANDING *SHEOL/HADES*: “The Intermediate State”

The great white throne judgment is when God will resurrect every un-regenerated soul from *hades* to be judged as shown in this passage:

REVELATION 20:13-15

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and *hades* gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. (14) Then death and *hades* were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. (15) If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

We see plain evidence here that unredeemed people are held in a place called *hades* after their physical death. This place is called *sheol* in Hebrew. These disembodied souls are kept in *hades* until judgment day when, as you can see, they are resurrected for the purpose of divine judgment. What is the precise nature of these people’s condition in *hades* during this intermediate period between physical death and resurrection? The traditional religious view is that they will be in a state of conscious torment the entire span. Although this has been the common evangelical position of the “intermediate state,” it’s rarely mentioned or elaborated on in Christian circles.

Is this what the bible *really* teaches? That people who are spiritually dead will suffer hundreds and hundreds of years of torment in captivity immediately after they die merely waiting for God to judge them? (As shown in Part I, the same people who believe this also believe that they will then spend *all eternity in torturous captivity in the lake of fire* after they are judged).

Our purpose in this part of *HELL KNOW* is to thoroughly search the Holy Scriptures to find out the truth about *sheol/hades*, the intermediate state. If *sheol/hades* is indeed a place and condition of conscious torment, then God’s Word will clearly support it from Genesis to Revelation. If the scriptures don’t support it then we need to expose it as a false doctrine, eliminate it from our belief system and proclaim what the bible *really* teaches on the subject. It’s that simple. This is the only way “the truth will set us free.”

Seven Important Facts about Sheol/Hades

Before we turn to the God-breathed scriptures to discover the precise nature of the intermediate state, it's essential at this point to understand seven important facts about *Sheol/hades*, some of which are obvious and some not:

1.) As pointed out in Part I ***Sheol and Hades are synonymous terms, that is, they refer to the same condition or place.*** *Sheol* (*sheh-ole'*) is the Hebrew term and *hades* (*hay'-deez*) is the Greek. For proof of this, note the following Psalm passage, which speaks of *sheol*, then observe how the Hebrew *sheol* is supplanted by the Greek *hades* when the text is quoted in the New Testament:

PSALM 16:10 (NASB)

For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to *sheol*; neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.

ACTS 2:27 (NASB)

Because Thou wilt not abandon my soul to *hades*, nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay.

We see here that the Hebrew *sheol* and the Greek *hades* are synonymous terms in the bible.

Since using both words could be confusing and overly wordy we will simply use the term *sheol* in reference to the intermediate state throughout the rest of this study. The main reason for this is that the Hebrew *sheol* appears much more often in the scriptures than the Greek *hades*; the former appears 66 times in the Old Testament and the latter 10 times in the New Testament. A secondary reason is that the word *hades* is apt to conjure fantastical images of Greek mythology rather than biblical truth; the Hebrew *sheol*, by contrast, offers no such misleading images.

2.) Since this is a study on the subject of *sheol*, ***what*** precisely is it? ***Sheol is defined as "the world of the dead" by the popular Hebrew & Greek scholar James strong; it simply refers to the place and condition of dead souls after their physical decease and before their resurrection to face God's judgment.*** In other words, if people are spiritually dead to God, that is, they've never experienced spiritual regeneration through Jesus Christ, their disembodied souls will go straight to *sheol* when they physically die to be held until judgment day, at which time they will be resurrected for the purpose of judgment. Since this time period in *sheol* is ***after*** physical death and ***before*** resurrection it is commonly referred to as the "intermediate state" by theologians.

3.) ***Where*** exactly is *sheol*? **In our study we shall see clear evidence that *sheol* is located in the heart of the earth, not in the physical realm, but in the dark spiritual realm.** You see, the bible speaks of three existing worlds or realms: **(1.)** The earth and the physical universe, **(2.)** the underworld, which is the dark heavenly realm that parallels or underpins the earth and universe, and **(3.)** God's heaven, called the "third heaven" in scripture. We'll see biblical support for this in Chapter Six.

It should be understood that *sheol* is *not* the underworld itself, it is a compartment or pit *in* the underworld. This will become evident as our study progresses.

4.) ***Sheol must be distinguished from the grave or tomb where dead bodies are put to rest.*** This must be emphasized because translations often render *sheol* as "the grave," for example Psalm 16:10 in the New International Version. Yet scholar W.E. Vine properly points out that *sheol* ***never*** refers to the literal grave or tomb where the body is lain to rest (286). There's a *separate* Hebrew term for the physical grave or tomb, the Hebrew word *qeber* (*keh'-ber*).

However, even though it's true that *sheol* does not refer to the physical grave or tomb, it should be pointed out that since it is defined as "the world of the dead" where souls enter after physical death, *sheol* could arguably be described as the graveyard of souls. In light of this, translations that render *sheol* as "the grave" are not necessarily inaccurate, as long as one understands that the text is not referring to the *physical* grave or tomb where dead bodies are placed.

5.) Another important fact, which I think is obvious, is that ***sheol* is a temporary condition, regardless of its nature.** This is vastly important to keep in mind – *sheol* only applies to the intermediate state of the disembodied souls of spiritually dead people after their physical death and before their resurrection on judgment day. Why is this so significant to understand? Because, regardless of what anyone ultimately believes about *sheol*, we can all agree that it's a **temporary** state, it's not something that lasts forever. Because of this, it's obvious that the subject of *sheol* is not as important as the subject of the second death. Why? Simply because the second death is eternal while *sheol* is not. Hence, the nature of *sheol* is without question a **secondary** issue on the topic of human damnation.

Consequently, even though the bible is very clear on the issue of *sheol*, which we'll see in our thorough study of the scriptures, no matter what conclusion we each personally come to, it has no bearing on the biblical truths already determined in Part I. This is important to keep in mind.

6.) ***Sheol* is not hell; the lake of fire is hell.** We see in the scriptures that *sheol* and the lake of fire (i.e. *Gehenna*) are two *separate* places and states. Revelation 20:13-15, quoted on page 1, plainly shows this distinction: After people are resurrected from *sheol* ("hades") to face judgment, *sheol* itself will then be cast into the lake of fire. Since *sheol* and the lake of fire are plainly shown to be two separate places/states in this passage, then **only one** can rightly be designated as "hell;" and since "hell" commonly refers to a fiery, dark netherworld wherein people suffer *eternal* damnation then it is the lake of fire (or *Gehenna*) that should properly be labeled hell. In light of this, if a person refers to *sheol* as hell, they're simply not being scriptural; the lake of fire is the true hell.

Yet, those of us who understand this should extend grace toward those who mix-up the two terms because most of the confusion over this issue is simply the result of bad translating practices; for instance, the King James Version often renders both *sheol* (*hades*) and *Gehenna* as "hell," giving the impression to English readers that they're one-and-the-same. They're not. Thankfully, more recent translations have helped correct this mistake.

It's interesting to note, incidentally, that the word "hell" is derived from the Old English 'helan,' which means "to conceal or cover," hence in Old English literature you may find references to the helling of potatoes – that is, putting them into pits in the ground – and the helling of a house, meaning to cover it with a thatched roof. "Hell" therefore was originally an accurate description of *sheol* because it properly gave the image of souls concealed in a pit in the netherworld until their resurrection on judgment day. Of course, "hell" has taken on a radical change in meaning in the centuries since.

An alternative way of looking at the distinction between *sheol* and the lake of fire is to simply regard *sheol* as **temporary** hell and the lake of fire as **eternal** hell. This is good for those who, for whatever reason, insist on referring to both *sheol* and the lake of fire as "hell."

7.) **Righteous souls went to *sheol* before the ascension of Christ.** This significant fact about *sheol* is not widely known amongst Christians even though it's obvious in the scriptures and theologians readily acknowledge it. Before Jesus' death and subsequent resurrection from *sheol* (Acts 2:27) the souls of Old Testament saints had to go to *sheol* just as well as the souls of people not in covenant with God. The obvious reason for this is that spiritual regeneration was not available in Old Testament times because Jesus had not yet spilled his blood for the forgiveness of our sins and was not subsequently raised to life for our justification. The blood of animals shed in Hebrew religious ceremonies only temporarily **covered** their sins, it was not able

to *wash* them from sin; only the blood of Christ can do this. As it is written: “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4).

In our study we’ll observe that death and *sheol* are often spoken of together; they go hand-in-hand and are arguably one-in-the-same – death **is** *sheol* and *sheol* **is** death. Well, what is the wages of sin? According to the bible “the wages of sin is **death**” (Romans 6:23). My point is that the souls of Old Testament saints had to go to *sheol* just as heathen people because in order for them to be redeemed from death a person innocent of sin would have to die in their place. The good news is that Jesus Christ did this very thing for all those who believe on him and accept him as Lord. It is believed that when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead as the “firstfruits” (see 1 Corinthians 15:20-23) the souls of the Old Testament saints were raised from *sheol* with him. We see apparent evidence of this in this passage:

EPHESIANS 4:8

When he (Jesus) ascended on high, he led captives in his train

Who were the “captives” that ascended to heaven with Jesus? Who else but the Old Testament saints who were subject to death and *sheol* just as well as heathen people? They were captives to *sheol* – death – until God’s ultimate sacrifice for humanity’s sins was made. When Jesus died he destroyed “him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14) and, by his resurrection, set free those who were captive to death.

Now that Jesus Christ has destroyed death and brought eternal life and immortality to light through his death and resurrection (2 Timothy 1:10), no soul that is spiritually born-again and blessed with God’s gift of eternal life has to go to *sheol*. Now, when a spiritually-regenerated believer physically dies, his or her soul goes straight to heaven, not *sheol*. This is plainly evident in such clear passages as Revelation 6:9-11 and 7:9-17, as well as Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8.

There are, incidentally, many adherents of literal destruction that reject this notion that spiritually-reborn believers go to heaven when they die; they believe that both heathen and Christian souls alike go to *sheol*. I have open-mindedly and thoroughly researched their position but am persuaded by scripture to embrace the above view. We’ll look at this subject in detail in Chapter X and honestly consider arguments for and against; you are welcome to draw your own conclusion. Regardless, even though this is an important issue it’s a detail matter in the grand scheme of things and actually has no bearing on the nature of *sheol*, the subject of this study; hence, whatever the reader’s conclusion after an honest appraisal of the biblical facts, let’s strive for unity and loathe division! Amen?

The notion above that death and *sheol* are synonymous may initially sound strange to those of a religiously-indoctrinated mindset; yet, if such a person patiently and honestly seeks the scriptural truth, it will all make perfect sense as we analyze the Holy Scriptures on the subject. God’s Word is more than able to wash our minds from false religious indoctrination.

One last point regarding this seventh fact of *sheol*: If *sheol* is a condition of conscious torment as religious traditionalists advocate, how do they explain the biblical fact that righteous people went to *sheol* in Old Testament times? Their answer is that there was a separate chamber in *sheol* for righteous souls and base this idea on a literal reading of Jesus’ story of The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). We will thoroughly analyze this passage in Chapter X to find out if this is true.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Confusion Due to Inconsistent Translating of Sheol

Centuries ago theologians evidently did not believe there was a separate compartment to *sheol* for righteous souls in Old Testament times; they simply believed *sheol* was a place of torment for those damned of God in the heart of the earth. This caused some obvious problems: If *sheol* is a condition of conscious torment, how does one explain the many passages that plainly show that righteous souls as well as heathen souls went to *sheol* in Old Testament times?

The solution for the translators of the 1611 King James Version, believe it or not, was to translate *sheol* as “hell” when it applied to unrighteous people and as “the grave” when it applied to the righteous. In other words, they did not uniformly translate *sheol*; in fact, *their definition was determined purely by whether the passage referred to the wicked or the righteous*. The translators of the King James – also known as the Authorized Version – adhered to this as a general rule, so anyone reading this version would understandably come to the conclusion that heathen people went to a horrible netherworld of torments when they died while righteous people like Job and David merely went to “the grave.”

Let’s observe evidence of this:

PSALM 9:17 (KJV)

The wicked shall be turned into hell (*sheol*), and all the nations that forget God.

Since the passage is referring to “the wicked” the King James translators chose to translate *sheol* as “hell;” yet notice how they render *sheol* when the scriptural passage applies to righteous King Hezekiah:

ISAIAH 38:10 (KJV)

I said in the cutting off of my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave (*sheol*): I am deprived of the residue of my years.

Hezekiah, the godly king of Judah, is speaking in this passage; he has a fatal illness and clearly doesn’t want to die. Unfortunately, the King James rendering of this verse isn’t very clear to modern readers so let’s read the same passage from the New International Version:

ISAIAH 38:10

I said, “In the prime of my life must I go through the gates of death (*sheol*) and be robbed of the rest of my years?”

It’s obvious here that Hezekiah expected to go to *sheol* when he died. Since this passage is plainly referring to a righteous man of God, the King James translators decided not to translate *sheol* as “hell” as that would give the impression to any English reader that godly King Hezekiah would go to a place of conscious torment when he died; this evidently contradicted their theology so they simply rendered *sheol* as “the grave.”

The Hebrew word *sheol* appears 66 times in the Old Testament and is translated in the King James Version 32 times as “hell,” 31 times as “the grave” and 3 times as “the Pit.” How the King James translators translated *sheol* was determined purely by whether the passage referred to the wicked or the righteous. We see evidence of this above and we’ll see much more evidence as our study progresses. Scholars agree that there is simply no justification for this lack of uniformity in translating *sheol*.

Before I say anything more, I’d like to stress that I’m not a hater of the King James bible; I have at least three editions of this fine version in my household and enjoy them greatly. Overall, it’s been a great blessing to English speaking people for many centuries now. However, its translation error on this specific issue cannot be condoned.

Needless to say, due to the King James Version's extreme popularity in the centuries following its publication in 1611, it's lack of uniformity in translating *sheol* has not helped the cause of truth regarding the nature of the intermediate state.

Today, the King James is no longer the most popular English version of the bible and more recent translations have, thankfully, corrected this translation error. For instance, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and The New American Standard Bible (NASB) adhere to the policy of not translating either *sheol* or *hades*. It is for this reason that we will regularly use these translations in our study on *sheol* in this part of *HELL KNOW*.

As for the popular New International Version, *sheol* and *hades* are rendered variously as "grave," "death," "depths," and once as "hell." Yet, regardless of how this version translates *sheol* and *hades*, it very conveniently reveals the original Hebrew or Greek term in the footnotes, which is a commendable.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Understanding the Two Views of Sheol

Before we begin our thorough scriptural study on the nature of *sheol*, let's first make sure we understand the two possible views (although there are variations, every legitimate view of *sheol* falls within the parameters of the following two definitions):

1.) *Sheol* is a place where unrighteous souls go to immediately after death where they suffer constant torment until their resurrection on judgment day; in Old Testament times *sheol* also contained a separate compartment for righteous souls where they were comforted and enjoyed Father Abraham's company. According to this view, the disembodied souls of pagans who died hundreds or thousands of years ago have been in a constant state of torture ever since *even though they haven't even been judged yet*. The only legitimate proof text for this position is Jesus' story about The Rich Man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19-31. The story is about a rich man and poor beggar, Lazarus, who die and go to *sheol* (*hades*) where they experience highly contrasting conscious states – the rich man suffers constant torment while Lazarus enjoys comfort in "Abraham's bosom." Adherents of this position insist that this story should be taken literally and that the rich man and Lazarus are actual historical figures. They further insist that the numerous other references to *sheol* in the bible must be interpreted or ignored in light of this literal interpretation of Jesus' story.

2.) *Sheol* is merely the condition of death itself, a place or pit where dead souls are laid to rest "awaiting" their resurrection on judgment day.

Initially I adhered to the first view above solely due to Jesus' story of The Rich Man and Lazarus, which was the *only* passage I ever seriously considered on the topic. This is the case with the vast majority of believers as well. I have since come to accept the second position after much thorough and honest biblical research, prayerfully analyzing literally hundreds of passages on the subject. The scriptural evidence for this second position, believe it or not, is simply *overwhelming*. Jesus is the *living* Word of God, so it's hardly likely that he would disagree with the *written* Word of God; hence his story of The Rich Man and Lazarus is likely a parable, a *symbolic* story intended to convey important spiritual truths, not a historic account. This is supported by three facts: **(1.)** The bible teaches that Jesus "did not say anything to them without using a parable" (Matthew 13:34), **(2.)** Jesus' story of The Rich man and Lazarus is contained within a string of parables, and **(3.)** Jesus clearly used symbolic language in the story such as, "the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" (KJV). Abraham's literal bosom obviously turned to dust centuries earlier, not to mention there would hardly be

enough room in his chest cavity to contain Lazarus, so this is clearly a symbolic statement; and if this statement is symbolic it stands to reason that the rest of the story is symbolic as well.

The fact that the first position above remains in the doctrinal books, despite the incredible scriptural support for the latter, is potent testimony to the formidable force of religious tradition and sectarian bias.

If you find my words hard to believe and doubt the colossal evidence for the second position, judge for yourself as we now journey through the God-breathed scriptures to discover the truth about the nature of *sheol* – God’s Word speaks for itself.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

CHAPTER TWO

JACOB, JOB & SOLOMON'S View of *Sheol*, the Intermediate State

In this chapter we will examine how Jacob, Job and Solomon viewed *sheol*. All three were godly men of the Old Testament era. Jacob was the grandson of Father Abraham and the patriarch of the twelve tribes of Israel; in fact, his name was changed to "Israel." Concerning Job, God Himself regarded him so highly that He boasted there was *no one on earth as great as Job* (Job 1:8). As for Solomon, the bible states that, "King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth. The whole world sought audience with Solomon to hear the wisdom God had put in his heart" (1 Kings 10:23-24).

These scriptural facts reveal that, although far from perfect, Jacob, Job and Solomon were great and mighty men of the Old Testament period. Hence, there's no reason *not* to assume that their recorded statements concerning *sheol* in the God-breathed scriptures are sound; this is particularly so if their beliefs are in harmony with what the rest of the bible teaches.

With this understanding let's consider the very first passage in the bible where *sheol* appears...

What Jacob Said

The term *sheol* first appears in Genesis 37:35. This verse refers to the time when Jacob's eleven sons treacherously sold their brother Joseph into slavery; they then lied to their father by telling him that Joseph was slain by a wild beast. Jacob believed the lie and was understandably heartbroken:

GENESIS 37:35 (NRSV)

All his sons and daughters sought to comfort him (Jacob); but he refused to be comforted, and said, "No, I shall go down to *sheol* to my son (Joseph), mourning." Thus his father bewailed him.

Two simple facts can be derived from Jacob's brief expression of grief in this passage: (1.) Jacob very much expected to go to *sheol* when he died, and (2.) Jacob believed that Joseph was already in *sheol*, that he would remain there, and that he would himself join him when he eventually died.

The King James Version translates *sheol* in this passage as "the grave." Why? Obviously because the verse refers to Jacob and Joseph, both righteous men of God (righteous, that is, in the sense that they were in-right-standing with God, not that they were unflawed individuals). This is in harmony with the King James translator's policy of rendering *sheol* as "hell" when it applied to unrighteous people and as "the grave" when it applied to the righteous. As pointed out in Chapter One, there is absolutely no justification for this practice; the meaning of the word *sheol* does not change depending upon the character of the person going there.

We thus find evidence in the very first appearance of *sheol* in the bible that religious people have tried to mislead the populace about the truth of its nature and who exactly went there.

As for the King James and other translations rendering *sheol* as "the grave," it has already been pointed out in the first chapter that *sheol* never denotes the physical grave or tomb where bodies are laid to rest; there's a separate Hebrew word for this. *Sheol* should only be understood

as “the grave” in the sense that it is the graveyard of souls in the spiritual realm, wherein they are held and “awaiting” resurrection to be judged by God. This will become increasingly clear as our study progresses.

One last important point concerning Jacob’s view of *sheol*: Although Jacob doesn’t state anything about the precise nature of *sheol*, it’s obvious that he didn’t regard it as some sort of nether paradise where his son was hanging out with Father Abraham, which is what many evangelicals today advocate. If this were the case, would he be “mourning” and “bemoaning” him so grievously? Of course not. Someone might argue that Jacob was grieving over his own personal loss and not the destination of his son’s disembodied soul. If this were so, wouldn’t Jacob likely exclaim something to the effect of, “Praise you LORD that my son is now in the blissful presence of Father Abraham, and I will one day go down to this same paradise rejoicing.” Yet Jacob says nothing of the kind; in fact, his reaction is completely opposite to this.

Job’s View of Sheol

Let us now consider Job’s view of the intermediate state. Job was the greatest man of his time and God bragged of his character, integrity, godliness and hatred of evil (Job 1:1,3,8). Furthermore, in the book of Ezekiel God spoke of Job in the same breath as Noah and Daniel, two other great men of God (Ezekiel 14:14-20). The LORD obviously has a very high opinion of Job. We can therefore regard Job’s views on *sheol* as very reliable.

As we shall see, Job goes into quite a lot of detail concerning the nature of *sheol*. Did Job just dream up all this information or did he have divine revelation on the subject? No doubt God revealed these truths to him. We can confidently draw this conclusion because what Job says about *sheol* is in complete agreement with what the rest of the bible teaches on the subject; only if Job’s position contradicted the rest of Holy Scripture would we question its validity.¹

For those unfamiliar with the biblical book of Job, let me briefly explain its contents: Satan argues to God that Job is devoted to Him merely because the LORD has blessed him so greatly; he contends that Job will curse Him to His face if his many blessings are removed. God therefore permits Satan to attack Job to find out. As a result of Satan’s attacks, Job loses his ten children, hundreds of his employees (all but four), all his great wealth and even his health as he is afflicted with painful sores from head to toe.

After many months of suffering, three of Job’s friends go to “comfort” him and end up judging & accusing him of some great hidden sin, which consequently brought about all his horrible suffering. Most of the book consists of Job, in great anguish, profoundly debating with these “friends;” it should be noted, however, that much of what Job says is directed at God Himself. Such is the case with this passage:

JOB 14:10-15 (NRSV)

“But mortals die, and are laid low; humans expire and where are they? (11) As waters fail from a lake, and a river wastes away and dries up, (12) so mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be aroused out of their sleep. (13) Oh that you (God) would hide me in *sheol*, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! (14) If mortals die, will they live again? All of the days of my service I would wait

¹ Some may understandably argue that, since God later accuses Job of speaking “words without knowledge” (Job 38:2), his statements concerning the nature of *sheol* are unreliable. Yet, which of Job’s words did God feel were “without knowledge”? Obviously his erroneous belief that it was God Himself that was afflicting him, not the devil; which naturally provoked Job to rail against the LORD throughout the book. This is what God understandably took issue with, not his theological insights concerning the intermediate state. Once again, Job’s statements about *sheol* should only be questioned if they are not in harmony with what the rest of the bible teaches.

until my release should come. (15) You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the works of your hands.

Much is being said in this passage so let's take it point by point. First of all, in verse 10 Job declares that "mortals die" and then asks "where are they?" He then partially answers his own question in verse 12 by likening death to "sleep" which humans will not "awake" from until "the heavens are no more," or, we could say, a very long time. The important point I want to emphasize from these words is that Job describes the condition of death as "sleep" from which all human beings will one day "awake" or be resurrected.

Yet he still hasn't really answered the question of *where* people go after they die. The very next verse answers this: In his great anguish he cries out to God to hide him in *sheol*. Why does Job pray this? Because his suffering was so great he wanted to escape it through death; and obviously when a person died, Job believed, his or her soul would go to *sheol*.

One may argue that, in verse 12, Job is perhaps referring to the body "sleeping" in the grave, but the obvious focus of his words is the death condition of the soul in *sheol* because in the very same breath, verse 13, he prays to God to go specifically *there*: "Oh that you would hide me in *sheol*, that you would conceal me until your wrath is past, that you would appoint a set time and remember me!"

Job erroneously believed that God Himself was causing his great afflictions; he was obviously unaware of the Devil's hand in the situation. In truth, God only *permitted* Job's afflictions by *allowing* Satan to attack him. Regardless, the fact is that Job believed that by dying and going to *sheol* he would escape his intense suffering.

In other words, as amazing as it may seem, Job was actually hoping and praying to die and go to *sheol*, a place traditionally considered "hell" and viewed as a horrible, devil-ruled torture chamber located somewhere in the nether regions of the earth! Obviously Job's view of *sheol* – "hell" – was quite different from what religious tradition has taught us. He prayed to go to *sheol* because, being one of God's inspired servants, he knew that *sheol* was a condition of unconsciousness which he describes as sleep. Job was understandably weary of his intense suffering and wanted it to end. He knew that in death, in *sheol*, he would find *relief* from his misery, not an increase of it.

A vital fact that needs to be stressed from the above passage is that, regardless of the nature of *sheol*, Job definitely believed that *everyone* would ultimately be resurrected from there. In verse 12 he makes it clear that all mortals who lie down in the sleep of death will one day awaken, that is, be resurrected when "the heavens are no more." And, while Job prayed to go to *sheol* in verse 13, it was not with the expectation that he would remain there forever. Job obviously believed that if God "hid" him in *sheol* He would "appoint a set time and remember" him, which is obviously when his "release" would come (verse 14). Release from what? Why, release from captivity to *sheol*, "the world of the dead" as scholar James Strong defines it. So God "remembering" him and "releasing" him are references to a future resurrection from *sheol*, which is in harmony with what the rest of the bible teaches.

"There the Wicked Cease from Turmoil, and the Weary are at Rest"

Job elaborates greatly on the nature of *sheol* in chapter 3 of the book named after him. In this chapter Job curses the day of his birth because his suffering is so great. In essence, Job is wishing that he were never born into this world because then he would never have had to experience such incredible agony. He then details what it would be like for him if this were so:

JOB 3:11-19

“Why did I not perish at birth and die as I came from the womb?
 (12) Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed?
 (13) For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest
 (14) with kings and counselors of the earth who built for themselves places
 now lying in ruins, (15) with rulers who had gold, who filled their houses
 with silver. (16) Or why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child,
 like an infant who never saw the light of day? (17) There the wicked cease
from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest. (18) Captives also enjoy their
ease; they no longer hear the slave driver’s shout. (19) The small and great
are there, and the slave is freed from his master.”

Job starts off this passage by asking why he didn’t die as an infant. He then indicates that, in this event, he would not be enduring all the great suffering that he was experiencing. He explains in verse 13 that had he died in infancy he would be peacefully “lying down... asleep and at rest.”

Job then further explains that he would have **shared** this condition of sleep and rest with kings and counselors of the earth, with the small and the great, with rulers and slaves, with captives and weary people and, yes, even with the wicked! In this state of death, Job declares in verse 17 that “there the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest,” and in verse 18 he makes it plain that there’s no “slave driver’s shout” as well.

This coincides with what Job later says concerning the wicked:

JOB 21:13

“They (the wicked) spend their days in prosperity and in peace they go down to sheol.”

Note that Job didn’t say the wicked go down to *sheol* in torment; no, they go down to *sheol* in peace. This completely contradicts the religious traditional belief that the unredeemed go to some horrible devil-ruled nether realm immediately after physical death and suffer torments as they are goaded on by slave-driving demons in fiery pits. Instead Job makes it clear that there is no turmoil or torment for the wicked in *sheol*.

If Job’s view of *sheol* is divinely inspired and therefore coincides with the rest of the God-breathed scriptures, these are powerful facts indeed! They reveal that at death kings, counselors, rulers, infants, the wicked, the weary, captives, the small, the great and slaves **all share the same condition**, a condition of peaceful “sleep” and “rest,” which are obvious references to unconsciousness. No wonder Job, stripped of all his possessions, forsaken by his wife and friends, tortured by painful sores from head to toe, mocked and made a byword by everyone and mourning for his ten children & hundreds of servants, prayed to go to such a place. Needless to say, Job’s understanding of *sheol* was quite different from that held by so many misguided religious people today.

Some may wonder if perhaps Job was referring to the literal grave or tomb where the body is laid to rest since there is no specific mention of *sheol* in chapter 3. This idea is ruled out because Job makes it clear in verses 13-15 that, if he died, he’d be lying down asleep **with** kings, counselors and rulers. So Job is plainly referring to a **common** place or condition that all people shared **together**. Biblically speaking, this would be *sheol*, the realm of dead souls, as verified in Ecclesiastes 9:10, a passage we shall examine in the very next section. In addition, Job would not be referring to the literal grave or tomb for the body because it is not acceptable or usual practice to bury people *together* in mass graves or tombs, whether then or now.

Before we continue let’s remember, as detailed in Chapter One, that this was well before the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, hence spiritual rebirth and the consequent attainment of eternal life were yet to be manifested. For this reason, the souls of Old Testament saints could

not be ushered into God's presence when they physically died; the souls of *both* the righteous and unrighteous went to *sheol* during this period because ultimate redemption was not yet available. The righteous captives to *sheol* – death – would not be set free until the resurrection and ascension of the Lord.

Solomon's View of Sheol

Solomon was the wisest man on earth in his time (see 1 Kings 4:29-34) and God utilized his great knowledge and wisdom in three books of the God-breathed scriptures.¹ Solomon had divine revelation concerning the precise nature of *sheol*, the condition of the dead. Witness:

ECCLESIASTES 9:10 (NRSV)

Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in *sheol*, to which you are going.

The language in this text describes beyond any question of doubt that *sheol* is a condition of *unconsciousness*. Notice that, in *sheol*, there's neither good work or bad work; there's neither positive, hopeful thoughts or anguished, hopeless thoughts; there's neither knowledge of what's good and holy or knowledge of what's evil and impure.

This is further verified in verse 5:

ECCLESIASTES 9:5 (NRSV)

The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing.

The obvious reason the dead "know nothing" is because they're no longer alive and conscious – they're *dead*. This coincides with this passage from the Psalms:

PSALM 146:4 (KJV)

His breath goeth forth, he (his body) returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

The Psalmist makes it clear that when a person physically dies *his or her thoughts perish*. Note that there is no mention whatsoever of a person's thoughts continuing to live on in some devil-ruled chamber of horrors. This is obviously because a *dead* person is no longer conscious of anything.

Take another look at Ecclesiastes 9:10 above and observe that Solomon doesn't make a distinction between righteous or unrighteous people. Like Job, he makes it clear that everyone would go to *sheol* at that period of time, whether righteous or wicked, rich or poor, small or great. In fact, Solomon's major point in chapter 9 of Ecclesiastes is that death or *sheol* is the common destiny of all people before redemption was ultimately made available through Christ's death and resurrection. He plainly states in verse 3 that "the same destiny overtakes all." What destiny? The destiny of *sheol*, the state of death, where – he goes on to say in verse 10 – there is neither work or thought or knowledge or wisdom.

Summary

Jacob, Job and Solomon's views of *sheol* can be summarized as follows:

¹ Although it is traditionally believed that Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, which I've always felt was fairly obvious, some modern scholars debate this.

1.) *Sheol* is a condition that **every** spiritually un-regenerated person will experience immediately following physical decease, this includes godly men and women in Old Testament time periods preceding the ascension of Christ. It includes the rich and the poor, the small and the great, the pure and the profane. In other words, *sheol* is the common destiny of anyone who is spiritually dead to God and therefore un-redeemed.

2.) *Sheol* is a condition of **unconsciousness**, likened unto sleep, where there is no work, thought or knowledge of any kind. It is not a place or state of conscious suffering and misery.

3.) *Sheol* is a **temporary** condition; all consigned to *sheol* will ultimately be resurrected.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

CHAPTER THREE

***SHEOL* IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

Part I

The biblical book of Psalms consists of 150 songs called psalms. Most of the psalms were written by Solomon's father, King David. Other psalmists include Moses, Solomon, Asaph, Ethan and Heman. Quite a few psalms were written anonymously. Yet, regardless of who exactly wrote each individual psalm, one fact is certain: All the psalms are "God-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16) as all the psalmists "spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

The book of Psalms possesses a wealth of information regarding the nature of *sheol*, the intermediate state. Despite the fact that there were quite a few authors, the views of the psalmists regarding *sheol* are in complete agreement. This is unsurprising since, as just noted, they all "spoke from God... by the Holy Spirit." Their many revealing statements on *sheol* are also in complete harmony with the views of Jacob, Job and Solomon as detailed in the previous chapter.

Sheol: Where You Cannot Remember or Praise God

Let's examine the very first text in the book of Psalms where the Hebrew word *sheol* appears:

PSALM 6:5 (NRSV)

For in death there is no remembrance of you; in sheol who can give you praise?

In this passage David is praying for God to save his life because his enemies were trying to kill him (as indicated in verse 10). Despite the anguish David was experiencing he didn't want to die; David was "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) and thus wanted to live, serve God and worship Him. He knew that if he died and went to *sheol* he wouldn't be able to do this.

This simple passage completely contradicts the prominent religious position on the matter. As previously noted, religious traditionalists believe that when Old Testament saints died, this being before redemption was made available through Christ, their souls would go to "paradise" or "Abraham's bosom" which was supposedly located in *sheol*. They would be conscious there and supremely comforted as they hung out with Father Abraham. Yet, if this were so, wouldn't they be able to remember God? Would they not be praising Him and thanking Him as the righteous are always ever ready to do, that is, as long as it were possible?

Yet David makes it clear in this passage that souls in *sheol* do not and cannot remember God; they consequently cannot praise Him either. What a positive statement to support the view that those in *sheol* are unconscious – "asleep" in death until their resurrection.

The notion that *sheol* is a condition where a person cannot remember or praise God is corroborated by other biblical texts. For instance:

PSALM 115:17-18 (NRSV)

The dead do not praise the LORD, nor do any that go down into silence, but we (the living) will bless the LORD

This passage clearly shows that those who die “go down into silence.” *Sheol* is a place of silence because those who go there are unconscious, that is, dead. There’s no praising and worshipping of God there nor are there horrible screams of torment. It is a condition of silence. It is the living that bless the Lord, the Psalmist plainly states, not the dead.

Righteous King Hezekiah’s prayer from the book of Isaiah is another coinciding passage:

ISAIAH 38:18-19 (NRSV)

“For *sheol* cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. (19) The living, the living, they thank you as I do this day.”

First, notice in this passage, as well as Psalm 6:5 above, that *sheol* and death are spoken of synonymously (we’ll look at this in more detail in the next chapter). Secondly, witness how Hezekiah makes it clear, just as David and the other psalmist did, that those in *sheol* are unable to thank or praise God.

The obvious conclusion we must draw is that, if the righteous are unable to remember God and cannot praise or thank Him, then they must be *unable to do so*; that is, they must be either unconscious or dead – no longer alive. This is supported by Hezekiah’s statement in verse 19 where he stresses that only “the living, the living” can thank and praise God, not those who go to *sheol*, the world of the dead.

Let’s examine one other scriptural passage that perfectly coincides with the three we’ve just looked at:

PSALM 88:3, 10-12

(3) For my soul is full of trouble and my life draws near the grave (*sheol*).

(10) Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? (11) Is your love declared in the grave (*qeber*), your faithfulness in destruction. (12) Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

Here is further proof that those in *sheol* are dead and therefore unable to rise up and praise God. Furthermore, *sheol* is equated to the literal grave (*qeber*) and destruction, and is also spoken of as “the place of darkness” and “land of oblivion.” The Psalmist makes it clear that God does not show His wonders to the dead in *sheol*, that the dead cannot praise Him there and that God’s love, faithfulness and righteous deeds are all unknown there. What unmistakable proof that souls in *sheol* are dead and conscious of nothing!

This Psalm, written by Heman the Ezrahite when his life was in mortal danger, is a prayer to God for deliverance from death. Note in verse 3 that Heman clearly expected to go to *sheol* when he died just as Jacob, Job, Solomon, David and Hezekiah did. In the King James Version the importance of this statement is kept from the reader by the use of the word “grave” as a translation of *sheol*; this is likewise the case with the NIV rendering of the verse as shown above (although, I should point out, there is a footnote properly indicating that the verse is indeed referring specifically to *sheol*). Because of this mistranslation the average reader is misled into believing the psalmist is talking about the condition of the literal grave where the body is buried and not to *sheol* where the soul goes. The problem with this is that it obscures the truth about the nature of *sheol* to the average reader and consequently perpetuates false religious ideas.

Let’s recap: The writers of the four passages examined in this section – David, Hezekiah, Heman and the anonymous psalmist – are all in perfect agreement that *sheol* is **not** a place of consciousness. According to these inspired biblical writers, *sheol* is synonymous with death and

is thus a condition of silence where it is impossible to even remember God, let alone praise & thank Him.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Sheol: “The Land of Silence”

Let’s examine another enlightening Psalm text by David from both the New International Version and the King James:

PSALM 31:17-18

**let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave (*sheol*). (18)
Let their lying lips be silenced,**

PSALM 31:17-18 (KJV)

**let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave (*sheol*).
(18) Let their lying lips be put to silence;**

Note that this passage is **solely** referring to “the wicked” – people who are in outright rebellion against God, living after the desires of the sin nature. These are David’s enemies; they have rejected his God-appointed kingship and are trying to kill him. David is actually praying for their death for that is the only way their lying lips will be silenced.

With this understanding, observe how David describes the condition these wicked people will experience if they die: He plainly states that they will **lie silent in *sheol***.

According to David, the great godly king, inspired biblical writer and “man after God’s own heart,” the wicked do not constantly scream in torment in *sheol*, but simply lie silent! This description is in perfect harmony with the view that *sheol* is a condition of unconsciousness where souls lie “asleep” in death “awaiting” their resurrection.

This is not the only biblical text that makes it clear that souls lie silent in *sheol*. We saw this same thought expressed in Psalm 115:17 in the previous section. Here’s another coinciding Psalm text:

PSALM 94:17 (NRSV)

If the LORD had not been my help, my soul would soon have lived in the land of silence.

The psalmist is simply testifying that, if the Lord had not delivered him from his wicked enemies (see verse 16), they would have killed him and, as a result, his soul would have gone to “the land of silence.” What is “the land of silence”? Since he’s addressing the place his *soul* would go to after death we know he’s referring to *sheol*.

With this understanding, notice that the psalmist does not describe *sheol* as “the land of shrieking in torment” or as “the land of comforts with Father Abraham” (religionists would have us believe *sheol* is one or the other, depending on whether the soul is wicked or righteous respectively). That’s because neither of these descriptions is true; *sheol* is, in reality, the land of death where there’s no consciousness of anything and thus only silence.

Take another look at the King James rendition of Psalm 31:17-18 above and notice that the passage deviates from the King James standard practice of rendering *sheol* as “hell” whenever the text in question referred to the wicked (and as “the grave” when it referred to righteous people). Why did the translators fail to render *sheol* as “hell” in this particular case since it clearly

refers to “the wicked”? Obviously because the passage plainly portrays the wicked in *sheol* as lying in silence and this contradicts their belief that wicked souls in *sheol* suffer a constant state of screeching torment. *What hypocrisy.*

This certainly shows the dishonest extents religious people will go to cover up the scriptural truth and perpetuate their false religious beliefs.

Sheol: “The Pit” or “Well of Souls”

The fact that *sheol* is a condition of silence is also pointed out in Psalm 30. In this psalm David is simply expressing thanks because God delivered him from death. He knew that, if he died, his soul would go to *sheol* as indicated in verse 3:

PSALM 30:3 (NRSV)

O LORD, you brought up my soul from sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

The text showcases a form of Hebrew poetry called synonymous parallelism wherein the second part of the verse simply repeats and enforces the thought of the first. We’ve already seen examples of this type of poetry (Psalm 6:5 & Isaiah 38:18) and will continue to as our study progresses.

With this understanding, notice that *sheol* is spoken of as synonymous with “the Pit.” Since *sheol* is described as “the Pit” we will naturally gain better insight into the nature of *sheol* by simply deciphering what “the Pit” means.

The Hebrew word for “the Pit” is *bowr* (*bore*) which literally refers to a hole or pit in the ground; it is used 71 times in the bible. The setting in which *bowr* is used determines, of course, what specific type of hole or pit and, consequently, which English word is used to translate it. For instance, 26 times *bowr* is used in reference to a ‘cistern’ (e.g. Genesis 37:22,24,28,29), nine times in reference to a ‘well’ (e.g. 1 Chronicles 11:17-18), five times in reference to a ‘dungeon’ (e.g. Genesis 40:15; 41:14), once to a ‘quarry’ (Isaiah 51:1) and once it’s even translated as ‘death’ (Proverbs 28:17).¹ Why “death”? No doubt because *bowr*, a hole in the ground, is what a grave actually is; and grave, of course, signifies death – the utter absence of life.

What is God trying to tell us in His Word by likening *sheol* to *bowr*, a pit? Obviously that *sheol* is like a vast common pit or grave where un-regenerated souls are held captive after physical death and before resurrection.

Interestingly, since one of the definitions of *bowr* is ‘well,’ *sheol* could properly be described as “the well of souls.”

Most of us have probably heard this phrase. “The Well of Souls” is an actual subterranean chamber beneath the Dome of the Rock in the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Jews believe it is where Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac. The popular 1981 film *Raiders of the Lost Ark* depicted the Well of Souls as the hiding spot of the Ark of the Covenant but placed it as a lost chamber in Tanis, Egypt, rather than in a cave in the Temple Mount. In Judeo-Christian mythology “the Well of Souls” is a place in the spiritual realm where the souls of those yet to be born are stored; this was portrayed in the 1988 film *The Seventh Sign*.

Yet, from a purely biblical standpoint, the Well of Souls is *sheol*, the pit where un-regenerated souls are held intermediate between physical death and resurrection. Like the subterranean chamber beneath the Dome of the Rock, *sheol* is a *dungeon* – a dungeon where souls are held captive after death. This explains why *bowr* is translated as “dungeon” in reference to *sheol* in this passage from Isaiah:

¹ These figures are from the New International Version.

ISAIAH 24:21-22 (NASB)

So it will happen in that day, that the LORD will punish the host of heaven, on high, and the kings of the earth, on earth. (22) And they will be gathered together like prisoners in the dungeon (*bowr*), and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be punished.

The passage is referring to the day when God's cataclysmic wrath will be poured out upon the whole earth; this occurs right before the establishment of the millennial reign of Christ. Because of God's judgments billions of people will die and every unsaved soul will be confined to *sheol* "like prisoners in the dungeon." Only "after many days," that is, after the thousand-year reign of Christ will these souls be resurrected to face judgment and suffer the eternal punishment of the second death (see Revelation 20:5,13-15).

Incidentally, observe how verse 22 makes it clear that these unsaved souls will not be punished until after they are resurrected from *sheol* and judged; this is further evidence which disproves the view that unsaved souls are punished with conscious torment while captive in *sheol*. The only punishment experienced in *sheol* is death itself, the utter absence of life or being. This stands to reason since it is in harmony with the biblical axiom that **death** is the wages of sin.

The important point of this passage, for the purposes of our subject, is that verse 22 likens *sheol* to a gloomy dungeon or prison where souls are confined. No wonder David praised and thanked God for delivering him from this death condition. Obviously David didn't share the view of some people today that righteous souls in *sheol* were in some type of "paradise" hanging out with Father Abraham. No, this is a false religious myth! *Sheol* is a dungeon, a prison – a common pit of death where all un-regenerated souls are confined until their appointed resurrection.

The only soul that can escape this dungeon-like pit of death is the soul that is born again and thus *possesses* eternal life (John 3:36; 5:24; 1 John 3:14,14). This is only possible because "Christ Jesus... has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Timothy 1:10). The gospel or "good news" refers to all the benefits available to humankind as a result of Jesus' sacrificial death, burial and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-3); aside from reconciliation with God, the main benefit of this gospel is, of course, eternal life. Until Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, eternal life or immortality was not available and that's why in Old Testament times, before the ascension of Christ, both righteous and unrighteous souls had to go to *sheol* after physical decease. When Jesus ascended, however, he set the captive righteous souls free (Ephesians 4:8)!

It was necessary here to go into a bit of detail about *bowr* "the Pit" so that now, whenever it pops up in our study, we'll understand precisely what it means.

Incidentally, I find it interesting that the original definition of 'hell' – "to conceal or cover" – is in harmony with the biblical description of *sheol* as "the Pit." The Old English 'hell' was originally used as a translation *sheol* because it properly gave the image of souls consigned and concealed in a pit in the netherworld until their resurrection on judgment day. Unfortunately, the definition of 'hell' has taken on a completely different meaning since that time, i.e. perpetually writhing in torment in some devil-ruled torture chamber.

Let's now return our attention to Psalm 30: At the end of this psalm David plainly reveals the state that his soul would have been in if God had not delivered him from death:

PSALM 30:11-12 (NRSV)

You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, (12) so that my soul may praise you and not be silent.

David is just praising God here because he knew that, had he died, his soul would have been silent in *sheol*. He well knew that a person cannot praise God or tell of His faithfulness in *sheol*, as indicated in verse 9, because *sheol* is a “land of silence.”

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Sheol: A Condition of the Soul (Mind)

Let’s return to Psalm 30:3 to observe another important fact about *sheol*:

PSALM 30:3 (NRSV)

O LORD, you brought up my soul from *sheol*, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

David was so close to death that God, in a sense, “restored” him to life by saving him from *sheol*, which is where his **soul** would have gone had he physically died.

“Soul” in this context refers to his very being or mind, the actual essence or qualities that mark him as an individual human creation of God. This is supported by the second part of the verse that speaks of “those” who actually died and consequently went to *sheol*, the Pit. Notice that he doesn’t say “those whose bodies have gone down to the Pit” or “those whose breath of life has gone down to the Pit.” That’s because a person’s body does not go to *sheol* when s/he dies; a lifeless body is placed in a grave or tomb. Neither does the breath of life, the spirit, go to *sheol* when a person dies; this animating life-force simply returns to God from whence it came, as detailed in Part II. No, *sheol* is the holding place of a person’s very life essence or being, the part that possesses volition, emotion and intellect; in other words, *sheol* is the condition to which the human soul or **mind** enters after physical death.

This is supported by a verse examined in the previous chapter:

ECCLESIASTES 9:10 (NRSV)

Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge in *sheol*, to which you are going.

Notice that the text plainly states that **you** are going to *sheol* (that is, anyone who has not been spiritually regenerated through Christ, which included *everyone* in Old Testament times). *Sheol* is the housing place of people’s very being after physical death, the part that marks them as an individual creation of God, the part of them that thinks, reasons, chooses and feels; hence, *sheol* is the condition that the **mind** enters when the body dies. As shown in Part II “mind” is the Greek word *nous* (*nooce*) and refers to that central part of human nature that decides, thinks and feels. We could put it this way: Your mind is you and you are your mind.

The human body separate from mind and spirit is just a slab of flesh; it goes to the grave at the time of death. The human spirit separate from mind and body is simply a breath of life, an animating life-force, not a personality. This breath of life comes from the Creator and gives life to our very being, our soul, our mind – our personhood. When a person dies this breath of life, or spirit, simply returns to God who gave it (that it, *if* one is spiritually un-regenerated through Christ). The soul separate from body and spirit goes to *sheol*.

Simply put, *sheol* is a condition of the human soul, the disembodied mind.

If any of this is difficult to understand, please refer to Part II: The Nature of Human Beings, which biblically addresses the subject in detail.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Sheol: A Place Where Sheep Go?

Let's now turn to another very enlightening psalm passage written by the sons of Korah:

PSALM 49:13-15 (NRSV)

Such is the fate of the foolhardy, the end of those who are pleased with their lot. (14) Like sheep they are appointed for *sheol*; death shall be their shepherd; straight to the grave they descend, and their form shall waste away; *sheol* shall be their home. (15) But God will ransom my soul from the power of *sheol*, for he will receive me.

Verse 14 refers to those who trust in themselves rather than God; verse 13 describes these people as the "foolhardy." A 'fool' in the bible is synonymous with a wicked person since the term "fool" denotes someone who is morally deficient, that is, someone who rejects God's existence, wisdom & discipline and embraces evil desires (see Proverbs 1:7; 5:22-23 and Psalm 14:1).

Since this text is definitely referring to ungodly people you would think that the King James translators would have translated *sheol* as "hell," which would be in line with their policy of translating *sheol* as "hell" when the passage refers to wicked people and as "grave" when it refers to righteous people. Yet, notice how the King James bible renders verse 14:

PSALM 49:14 (KJV)

Like sheep they are laid in the grave (*sheol*); death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling.

The passage is contextually referring to ungodly people yet the King James translators chose **not** to render *sheol* as "hell" as was their usual practice. Why? Obviously because it was impossible for them to do so since the verse plainly states that wicked people are appointed for *sheol* **like SHEEP!** And *everyone* knows that sheep don't go to a place of conscious torture when they die; the very idea is absurd. You don't have to be a scholar to realize this. Hence, despite the translators desire to render *sheol* as "hell," as was their standard practice, they had no choice but to translate it as "the grave" in this particular case.

This text coincides with Jeremiah 12:3, which also likens ungodly people to sheep that are to be slaughtered: "Drag them off like sheep to be **butchered!** Set them apart for the day of **slaughter.**" Note clearly that it says they are to be butchered and slaughtered (which is in harmony with the biblical fact that "the wages of sin is death"), not tortured in some fiery nether realm until their resurrection thousands of years hence, as religionists ludicrously teach.

At this point, two questions crop up: Do sheep really go to *sheol* as Psalm 49:14 implies? And, if so, does this mean they have souls since, biblically speaking, *sheol* is the "world of the dead" wherein dead souls are specifically laid to rest after physical death?

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Do Animals Have Souls? Do They Go to Sheol When They Die?

The answer to both these questions, believe it or not, is *yes*. Sheep and other animals are described in terms of being “living souls” in the bible and, when they die, their non-physical essence is indeed laid to rest in *sheol*. This may, admittedly, sound odd at first but let’s observe what the God-breathed scriptures have to say on the subject. Some of the following biblical information has already been offered in Part I and, in detail, in Part II, but it’s necessary here for us to brush up on this material in order to properly address these questions.

The word “soul” in the bible is translated from the Hebrew word *nephesh* (*neh-fesh*), which corresponds to the Greek *psuche* (*soo-khay*).¹ The creation text, Genesis 2:7, states that God breathed into the body of the first man the breath of life and he “became a living soul.” This passage plainly shows that human beings **are** “living souls.” This explains why redeemed people who physically die during the future tribulation period are described as conscious living “souls” in heaven in Revelation 6:9-10. It’s obvious in Genesis 2:7 that what makes people *living* souls as opposed to *dead* souls is God’s breath of life. Without this breath of life the human soul is a *dead* soul. This is where the concept of *sheol* comes into play: When a person physically dies the bible teaches that the breath of life (i.e. spirit) returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:6-7; Job 34:14-15; Psalm 146:3-4). What happens to a soul when God’s breath of life returns to Him and the soul is no longer a *living* soul? In other words, where are *dead* souls laid to rest? In *sheol*, of course! Remember, as Greek and Hebrew scholar James Strong defined it, *sheol* is “the world of the dead.” It’s not the world of the living, the world of conscious beings; no, it’s the world of the *dead*. And souls that are no longer animated by God’s spiritual breath of life are *dead*. That’s why they are placed in *sheol*, because *sheol* is the world of the dead.

We know from the scriptures that every human soul will ultimately be resurrected from *sheol*. Righteous Old Testament saints were likely resurrected when Jesus ascended, as shown in Ephesians 4:8. Everyone else will ultimately be resurrected at the time of the great white throne judgment, which will take place immediately following the millennial reign of Christ on earth; this resurrection includes every unredeemed soul that’s ever existed throughout history. Christians don’t have to worry about going to *sheol*, of course, because they’ve been spiritually born-again of the imperishable seed of Christ and possess eternal life in their spirits; hence, when authentic Christians physically die they are ushered into the presence of the LORD as plainly shown in the aforementioned Revelation 6:9-10, as well as Philippians 1:20-24 and other texts (which we’ll examine in detail in Chapter X) – death holds no black pall over the blood-washed, spiritually re-born Christian for to “be with Christ... is better by far”!

Why am I emphasizing all this? Because it’s important here to understand that *sheol* is the holding place of dead souls. It is where God stores the soulish remains or spiritual DNA, if you will, of every human being that has ever existed. This is perhaps necessary so that every person can be resurrected at the appropriate time. This is, incidentally, what makes the “second death” so horrifying: Everyone will ultimately be resurrected from *sheol* but no one will ever be resurrected from the lake of fire, which *is* the second death according to Revelation 20:14-15. This “second death,” as shown in Part I, is an “everlasting destruction” so utterly complete and final that no one will ever be resurrected from it; it is literally a *total obliteration* of soul and body where one’s spiritual DNA is wiped out of existence.

Incidentally, the fact that everyone will ultimately be resurrected from *sheol*, which is the first death, but no one will ever be resurrected from the second death explains why souls in *sheol* are repeatedly described as “sleeping.” People who suffer the first death are, in a sense, “sleeping” because they will one day be “awoken,” that is, resurrected. By contrast, those who suffer the second death are never described as sleeping because they will never be “awoken” or resurrected. In other words, the first death is temporary, but the second death is everlasting – there is no hope of resurrection from the second death. We’ll look at this matter further in the next chapter.

¹ Compare Genesis 2:7 with 1 Corinthians 15:45 for verification.

With the understanding of the above scriptural facts, let's return to the question of whether or not animals have souls and whether or not they go to *sheol* when they physically die. The bible describes animals in terms of being "living souls" just as well as humans. The Hebrew and Greek words for soul – *nephesh* and *psuche* – are repeatedly used in reference to animals in the bible. For example:

GENESIS 2:19 (NRSV)

So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every *living creature* (*nephesh*), that was it's name.

We see here that land animals and birds are described in the bible as "living creatures." As you can see, the word "creature" in this passage is *nephesh*, the Hebrew word for "soul." Water animals are also described in the bible as "living creatures" (Genesis 1:20-21); this includes Revelation 8:9 where the Greek word for "soul" – *psuche* – is used. My point is that animals are described in the God-breathed scriptures as "living souls" just as people are. The reason most people don't realize this is because English translations generally don't translate *nephesh* and *psuche* as "soul" when the text refers to animals, as shown above in Genesis 2:19.

Why would bible translators refuse to translate *nephesh* and *psuche* as "soul" when the terms apply to animals? No doubt because they wanted to draw a distinction between animals and human beings; after all people are created in the image of God, beasts are not. Yet the original God-breathed scriptures used the very same Hebrew and Greek word for both, shouldn't we? If God Himself doesn't have a problem with this, why should we?

The *real* reason translators refrain from translating *nephesh* and *psuche* as "soul" when these words apply to animals is that doing such would not be supportive of the doctrine of the "immortal soul." As detailed in Chapter Four of Part I, this doctrine maintains that souls, once created, can never be de-created – even incorrigibly sinful souls worthy of eternal death. Hence, the immortal soul doctrine is one of the chief pillars for the eternal torture doctrine. This pillar would be damaged, of course, if people discovered that animals are described in the bible as "living souls" just as well as people; after all, even the uneducated public would likely question the notion that animals possess immortal souls. To solve this dilemma, English bible translators decided to translate *nephesh* and *psuche* as "creature(s)" or "thing(s)" when the terms apply to beasts. This is another prime example of religionists attempting to cover-up the scriptural truth in order to perpetuate false beliefs.

The King James translators were so careful in this matter that only in one scriptural passage is *nephesh* translated as "soul" in reference to animals; and the only reason they did so in this specific case was because of the peculiar wording of the passage. Witness:

NUMBERS 31:28 (KJV)

And levy a tribute unto the LORD of the men of war which went out to battle: one soul (*nephesh*) of five hundred, both of the persons, and of the beeves (oxen), and of the asses, and of the sheep."

As you can see, "soul" (*nephesh*) in this verse applies *equally* to people, oxen, donkeys and sheep; the translators couldn't very well render it as "creatures" or "things" since the list includes people as well as animals. They therefore had no other choice but to translate *nephesh* as "soul." (Let's remember that the King James Version is a word-for-word translation so the translators couldn't very well omit the word).

At this point an obvious question crops up: If both humans and animals are described as "living souls" in the bible, what is the essential difference between them? The difference is that

human beings are created in the very image of God (Genesis 1:27), whereas animals are not. This not only means that people have the same general form of God (head, face, torso, legs, arms¹), but that human beings possess a spiritual dimension to their make-up that is aware of God & the spiritual realm, and Christians even possess the capacity to know and commune with God because of spiritual re-birth through Christ. Animals, of course, lack these characteristics. Yes, they have a spirit but only in the sense of a “breath of life,” an animating spiritual life-force of the Almighty. Animals are, of course, awesome creations of God, but they are on a far lower spiritual plane than people. They are instinct-oriented and therefore lack any consciousness of good or evil and have very limited reasoning capabilities. They don’t have a God-consciousness (spirit) or a sin-consciousness (flesh). Many of them can be trained to respond to certain words and do various tasks or tricks, but that’s about it. Animals cannot build cities, learn languages, understand algebra, create and appreciate art or worship God. Human beings, on the other hand, are souls of the highest order and that’s why God gave humankind authority over *all* animals (see Genesis 1:28 and 9:2-3). This is evidenced by the fact that people have zoos for animals and not vice versa.

Okay, so it is clear in the bible that animals are “souls,” but does this mean that their soulish essence goes to *sheol* when they die? Evidently, according to Psalm 49:14:

PSALM 49:14 (NRSV)

Like sheep they (the foolhardy) are appointed for *sheol*;

The Psalmist is essentially saying that fools under Old Covenant law will prematurely die just as surely as sheep slated to be slaughtered. Note that the Psalmist plainly states sheep “are appointed for *sheol*.” There’s no reason we shouldn’t take this statement literally: When sheep die their souls go to *sheol*. Remember, *sheol* is simply “the world of the dead” or “well of souls” – the space in the spiritual realm where dead souls are stored. Is there any reason why God wouldn’t store the soulish remains of animals there as well as humans? Where else would He store them? Especially considering the strong possibility that God will resurrect some or all of them in the age to come. (See the section in Appendix B *Will there be animals in the new heavens and new earth?*). We would simply assume the likelihood that there is a *separate* compartment in *sheol* for animal souls, just as pet cemeteries are separate from human cemeteries in our physical world.

Incidentally, the fact the bible teaches that dead animal souls go to *sheol* when they die is further proof that *sheol* is not a burial plot in the ground because sheep and other animals are not ordinarily thus buried. The Hebrew word *qeber* denotes the physical grave where bodies are buried; whereas *sheol*, once again, refers to the ‘graveyard’ in the spirit realm where dead souls are housed.

“God Will Ransom My Soul from the Power of Sheol”

Let’s look again at the very last verse of the Psalm 49 passage quoted earlier:

PSALM 49:15

But God will ransom my soul from the power of *sheol*, for he will receive me.”

¹ Don’t believe for a second that God is some formless cloud being. Yes, He is spiritual in nature, as Jesus said (John 4:24), but the bible repeatedly indicates that He definitely has a central presence that is human-like in form (e.g.). Some may respond: “But isn’t He omnipresent?” Yes, He is omnipresent in the sense that he knows what’s going on everywhere at the same time and can do innumerable things simultaneously, but this does *not* mean His being lacks a central presence or form.

First of all, notice that *sheol* is spoken of as a condition of the soul, which was emphasized earlier in this chapter. A person's body doesn't go to *sheol* when s/he dies, nor does the breath of life (spirit), which simply returns to God who gave it; no, *sheol* refers exclusively to the condition of un-regenerated **souls** after physical death.

Secondly, like Job, this Psalmist believed that his non-physical essence would go to *sheol* when he died, but, also like Job, he believed God would ultimately ransom his soul from there. 'Ransom' literally means "the redeeming of a captive." When did God eventually redeem the souls of righteous Old Testament saints, including the writer of this psalm, from captivity to *sheol*? And with what did He redeem them? The answers are obvious: God redeemed them by the blood of Jesus Christ when he was crucified for the sins of humanity. When Jesus later ascended he rescued the righteous captives of *sheol*, including this psalmist, by resurrecting them and bringing them to heaven where they were "received" by the Father, as the above verse indicates.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

CHAPTER FOUR

***SHEOL* IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

Part II

Continuing our study of *sheol* in the book of Psalms, let's consider a very interesting question:

Did David Pray for His Ex-Friend to Go to a Hellish Torture Chamber?

Notice David's statement in this passage:

PSALM 55:15 (KJV)

**Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell
(*sheol*): for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.**

David is indeed referring to his enemies in this text, yet it's interesting to note that one of these enemies was once a very close friend of his. This is revealed in the preceding passages, verses 12-14 (as well as verses 20-21). At one time David had shared "sweet fellowship" with this person, but by the time of the writing of this psalm it appears that this one-time close friend had turned against him.

Supposing that the "hell" mentioned in the text is a netherworld of conscious torment for wicked souls many have no doubt wondered how David, "a man after God's own heart," could pray for his enemies – including a former close friend – to go to such a place. But when we realize that *sheol*, the word translated as "hell" here, refers to the graveyard of *dead* souls and, hence, the state of death itself, then all is clear, for David's prayer is in harmony with the law of God which plainly states that the "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

As a godly king of Judah, David knew God's Word promised that his enemies would be defeated & destroyed (Leviticus 26:8; Deuteronomy 28:7) and he was praying in accordance with these promises. True, he was obviously very torn-up inside because one of these enemies was once a dear friend, but this ex-friend and the others were trying to assassinate him, the righteous king of Judah, and David felt he had no other recourse.

This passage illustrates that a proper, biblical understanding of *sheol* clears up texts that present serious problems to those who adhere to the view that *sheol* is a torture chamber.

"Who Can Live and Never See Death? Who Can Escape the Power of Sheol?"

Let's observe what Ethan the Ezrahite had to say about *sheol*:

PSALM 89:48 (NRSV)

**Who can live and never see death? Who can escape the power of
sheol?**

Here it is as plain as language can state that death and *sheol* are synonymous terms; in other words, the only thing souls going to *sheol* will experience is death itself, the utter absence of conscious existence. The obvious implication of both questions is that, apart from Christ's

redemption, *everyone* who lives will ultimately die and go to *sheol*, the death state of the soul. Solomon also declared this:

ECCLESIASTES 7:2b

... for death is the destiny of everyman; the living should take this to heart.

Both of these texts were, of course, written during the Old Testament era *before* Jesus' sacrifice for humanity was made; hence, no one living at this time had redemption from sin, regardless of whether or not they had a covenant with God, like the Israelites. Before Christ's death and resurrection *no one* could escape the power of *sheol*, whether moral, immoral or anywhere in between.

The *good news* is that this is no longer the case ever since Christ died for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (Romans 4:25). Jesus "poured out his soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12 KJV) so that we don't have to. As it is written: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16 NRSV). You see, in order for the world – that is, all humankind – to be set free from death, someone innocent of sin and thus not worthy of death, had to die in our place. This is exactly what Jesus Christ did. So now when a born-again believer in Christ physically dies, his or her soul does not die, that is, go to *sheol*, but rather goes straight to heaven. As it is written: "...to be absent from the body (is) to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8 KJV). Of course, this is only the intermediate state of the Christian soul; ultimately, the believer will receive a new glorified, spiritual, imperishable body at the bodily resurrection of the saints, called the first resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:42-43; Revelation 20:4-6).

I realize we've already gone over this information in this study so why am I emphasizing it again here? Simply to properly answer Ethan's question: "Who can live and not see death? Who can escape the power of *sheol*?" The answer is the Christian who has accepted God's sacrifice for humanity's sins, Jesus Christ; such believers literally *possess* eternal life in their spirits through spiritual rebirth (John 3:3,6,36), so even when they physically die *sheol* has no power over them – *hallelujah!*

"If I Make My Bed in Sheol, You Are There"

Let's examine another Psalm passage that mentions *sheol*; this one's by David:

PSALM 139:7-8 (NRSV)

Where can I go from your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? (8) If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in *sheol*, you are there.

To properly understand what David is saying here we must consider the gist of the entire psalm (remember, "context is king"). In Psalm 139 David is completely awestruck as he contemplates God's omnipresence and omniscience – that is, God being everywhere at the same time¹ and knowing everything. David humbly realizes that he himself is finite while God, the Almighty Creator, is infinite. This awareness overwhelms him so much that he even states, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain" (verse 6).

¹ See the footnote on page 21.

So, David's words in verses 7-8 above are simply a poetic way of describing God's omnipresence. Where can David go that God isn't? The obvious answer is nowhere. Note how the New International Version renders this passage:

PSALM 139:7-8

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? (8) If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths (*sheol*), you are there.

The NIV is a thought-for-thought translation and, as you can see, *sheol* is rendered as "depths." According to the NIV translators the thought of the passage is that, whether David goes far out into the universe or to the lowest depths of the earth, God is there. The translators evidently didn't believe David was being very literal about the usage of *sheol* here; he was just making a point in an poetic manner.

Yet, I don't believe there's any reason we shouldn't take *sheol* literally in this passage. God is everywhere. If David goes to heaven or to "the heavens," the furthest reaches of the universe, God is there. If he makes his bed in *sheol*, the LORD is there as well. God's central presence isn't, of course, in *sheol* (He's on his throne in heaven), but He is completely aware at all times of *sheol* and of every dead soul housed there.

Notice David's wording "make my bed in *sheol*;" this is important to understanding the nature of the intermediate state for the unredeemed soul. David obviously believed that if he were to go to *sheol* he'd essentially be in bed there or, we could say, asleep. This is in harmony with the repeated descriptions of souls in *sheol* as "sleeping;" for example, Job's statements as covered in Chapter Two.

Of course, souls in *sheol* are not literally slumbering there, they're dead. So the only "sleep" they experience is the sleep of death.

This explains why David stated in Psalm 6:5 that souls in *sheol* cannot remember or praise God even though God is present there (due to His omnipresent nature as noted above):

PSALM 6:5 (NRSV)

For in death there is no remembrance of you; in *sheol* who can give you praise?

This is a rhetorical question; the answer is obvious within the question itself. If God is present in *sheol*, why are souls held there unable to either remember or praise Him? Obviously because they're *dead*, they lack conscious existence. They're "asleep" in death. This is in complete harmony with the idea that *sheol* is "the world of the dead;" it's not the world of the living, it's the world of the dead.

"Sleeping" in Sheol

As seen in Chapter Two, Job plainly described the intermediate state in terms of sleep:

JOB 3:11-14

**"Why did I not perish at birth and die as I came from the womb?
(12) Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed?
(13) For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be *asleep* and at rest
(14) with kings and counselors of the earth who built for themselves places now lying in ruins,"**

Let's keep in mind that this passage pertains to the time before redemption was provided for humanity through Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, hence, everyone shared the same fate when they physically died; *no one* could escape the power of *sheol* back then. With this understanding, note how Job describes the condition he would experience if he had died at birth: He says that he would be "*lying down* in peace... *asleep* and *at rest*" with other people that died long before him.

Those that advocate that *sheol* is a place of conscious existence would argue that Job is referring to his **body** sleeping in the literal grave and not to the **soul** sleeping in *sheol*. Yet, notice that Job doesn't say his *body* would be asleep; he plainly states "I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest." Let's remember that, from a purely biblical standpoint, the Judeo-Christian perspective is focused on the inner man, not the body. The apostle Paul even stated that an improper focus on outward appearance rather than the heart is "worldly" (2 Corinthians 5:12-17); in other words, doing such is the carnal or "human point of view" (NRSV), not the godly or divine point of view. Also, consider Jesus' statement that we are not to fear people who can only kill the body, but not the soul; rather, we are to fear God Himself who is able to utterly destroy both body and soul in the lake of fire (Matthew 10:28). You see, a true man or woman of God's outlook is geared toward the heart not the body; and, remember, Job was the most righteous man of God on the face of the earth during his time (Job 1: 1,3,8).

But let's consider, for the sake of argument, the possibility that Job was, in fact, referring to his body when he stated that he'd be asleep if he died at birth; and, by contrast, his soul would be fully conscious in *sheol*. Let's read the passage as if this were so:

JOB 3:11-14 (*altered* to fit the view that *sheol* is a place of conscious existence)

"Why did I not perish at birth and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest with kings and counselors of the earth who built for themselves places now lying in ruins. (I'm, of course, referring to my body here. My soul, my *real* self, would be fully conscious in *sheol* joyously hanging out with Father Abraham)."

Is this what Job really meant to say? Of course not. As you can see, altering the passage to fit the beliefs of those who contend *sheol* is a place of conscious existence renders it completely absurd.

Let's observe a few other bible texts that describe the intermediate state of unredeemed souls in terms of sleeping:

PSALM 13:3 (NRSV)

Consider and answer me, O LORD, my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death.

David's life was in mortal danger here; if God didn't save him he was going to die. Notice plainly how he describes the death condition he would experience if the LORD didn't deliver him: "I will sleep the sleep of death." Like Job, above, he wasn't absurdly referring to his body here; he says "I will sleep the sleep of death" not "my body will sleep the sleep of death while I will go to *sheol* and enjoy fellowship with Father Abraham."

Let's observe two cases where Jesus Christ himself described the intermediate state in terms of "sleep:"

MATTHEW 9:18-19; 23-26

... a ruler came and knelt before him (Jesus) and said, “My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.” (19) Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.

(23) When Jesus entered the ruler’s house and saw the flute players and noisy crowd, (24) he said, “Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. (25) After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. (26) News of this spread through all that region.

Why did the people laugh when Jesus stated that the girl was “asleep”? Obviously because she was literally *dead*. She was indeed dead but Jesus Christ described her condition as sleeping. Why? Because her soul was in *sheol* sleeping the sleep of death and he had come to “awaken” her back to life in her physical body on this earth.

This next passage involves the case of Lazarus’ death and subsequent resurrection by Jesus. The Lord is speaking at the start of the text:

JOHN 11:11-13

“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”(12) His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” (13) Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. (14) So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, (15) and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. Let us go to him.”

As you can see, Jesus states that Lazarus had “fallen asleep” and that he needs to go to him in order to “wake him up,” meaning resurrect him. But his disciples mistook the Lord, thinking he was talking about natural sleep. That’s when Jesus plainly told them Lazarus had actually *died*. Verse 13 plainly reveals that Jesus was speaking of Lazarus’ death when he said he had “fallen asleep” in verse 11.

All I want to stress and prove in this section is that the bible repeatedly describes the intermediate state of the spiritually dead soul in terms of “sleeping.” As shown above, both the Old and New Testaments teach this. Even Jesus Christ himself, the living Word of God, plainly described it as such.

What can we deduce from this? Simply that when an unredeemed person dies, according to the bible, his/her soul enters into the sleep of death. Again, this is not literal sleeping; it’s “the sleep of death” as David described it above in Psalm 13:3.

Most of us have heard the evangelistic declaration: “If you die today you’re either going to *wake up* in heaven or hell!” Yet, if unredeemed souls are *asleep* in death in *sheol* until their resurrection to face God’s judgment (Revelation 20:11:15), this slogan is only right on the first account. After all, souls can’t very well “wake up” in hell (i.e. *sheol*) if they’re sleeping the sleep of death. Jesus and the apostles never used inaccurate pronouncements like this in their evangelistic efforts, why should we? If you’re a Christian, let’s strive to be *faithful* to biblical truth!

Why are Souls in Sheol Referred to as “Sleeping”?

If souls in *sheol* are dead, why are they repeatedly described as “sleeping” in the bible? All who go to *sheol* are, in fact, dead and have ceased to exist in the sense of conscious existence, but the bible refers to them as “sleeping” because they will all one day be awoken or resurrected from this death. As briefly noted in the last chapter, this is what differentiates *sheol*, the first

death, from the lake of fire (*Gehenna*), which is the second death (Revelation 20:6,14; 21:8; 2:11). Everyone will be resurrected from the first death, but no one will be resurrected from the second death. This is why the second death is described as an “*eternal* punishment” (Matthew 25:46) or “*everlasting* destruction” (2 Thessalonians 1:9) because there is no hope of recovery or resurrection from it – it’s a fatal destruction of such complete and final magnitude that it lasts forever and ever.

Soul Sleep?

Many of you have no doubt heard of “soul sleep” and may be wondering if that’s what I’m talking about here. Yes and no. ‘Yes’ because advocates of soul sleep believe, as noted above, that the soul is simply “sleeping” the sleep of death during the intermediate state between death and resurrection; they don’t believe the soul is literally slumbering while awaiting resurrection. ‘No’ because most adherents of soul sleep believe that the souls of spiritually regenerated people will *also* experience this condition of soul sleep during the intermediate state. As pointed out numerous times in our study, this is simply not biblically accurate: If people are born-again of the imperishable seed of Christ and, hence, *possess* eternal life in their spirits, why would they have to suffer death when their bodies perish? This explains why the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers that being absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). We’ll look at this issue in more detail in Chapter X: *The Intermediate State of the Regenerated Soul*.

The doctrinal label “soul sleep” is a good, brief and accurate description of the intermediate state of un-regenerated souls but I never use it for two reasons: **1.)** It gives the impression to the average person that the soul is still alive and merely dozing during the intermediate state. **2.)** The label is too closely related to cultic or marginally cultic groups that I understandably don’t want to be associated with.

Some will inevitably argue: “If cultic or near-cultic organizations adhere in some form to the view that souls in *sheol* are asleep in death and therefore not conscious, does this not automatically make this belief false or, at least, questionable? If nothing else, it doesn’t look good.”

This argument has already been addressed in detail in Chapter Six of Part I, under the heading *Cults Teach Everlasting Destruction – It Just Doesn’t Look Good*, but allow me to briefly address it again here: Christians do not determine the veracity of a doctrine by whether or not an objectionable group adheres to it; they determine what is true and not true simply by finding out what the God-breathed scriptures clearly and consistently teach. If a doctrine is *not* clearly and consistently taught in the bible, it is a *false* doctrine, regardless of what respectable person or group claims otherwise. Likewise, if a doctrine *is* clearly and consistently taught in the bible then it’s a true doctrine, regardless of what questionable person or group agrees with it. This is in accordance with the theological principle of *sola scripture*, meaning “by scripture alone,” which maintains that the God-breathed Holy Scriptures are the final authority regarding every judgment of Christian doctrine and practice.

Let’s face it, we *all* agree with cultic groups on some things; for instance, many cultic or borderline cultic organizations believe that the bible is the inerrant Word of God. All authentic Christians, of course, believe this as well. Wouldn’t it be ludicrous to reject this belief simply because questionable groups agree with it?

The fact is, any person or group that steps outside of the blinding influence of religious tradition will easily be able to determine what the bible clearly and consistently teaches on *sheol* and the condition of souls held there during the intermediate state. This explains how various cultic or borderline cultic groups are able to discern the truth about the nature of *sheol*.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

CHAPTER FIVE

***SHEOL* IN PROVERBS**

and the Prophetic Books

Of the 31 chapters of the book of Proverbs, the first 29 were written by Solomon, the wisest person who's ever lived outside of Jesus Christ (1 Kings 3:12). In Chapter One of this study we saw how Solomon described the nature of *sheol* in very clear language. He said that those who die "know nothing" (Ecclesiastes 9:5) because they've gone to *sheol*, where "there is no work, or thought, or knowledge or wisdom" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

Everything Solomon says about *sheol* in the book of Proverbs is in complete harmony with this unmistakable description.

Sheol and Death: Synonymous

Take note, for instance, of the following proverbial texts and how they plainly reveal that *sheol* is synonymous with death. These first two texts poetically refer to the wicked adulteress:

PROVERBS 5:5 (NRSV)

Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path of sheol.

PROVERBS 7:27 (NRSV)

Her house is the way to sheol, going down to the chambers of death.

These passages apply to those in covenant with God under Old Testament law. They declare a sobering fact: Those who choose to commit sexual immorality with an adulteress "follow the path of *sheol*" or are on "the way to *sheol*." This is not to suggest that godly people during the Old Testament period didn't go to *sheol* when they eventually died, because we know from numerous passages that they did; these texts simply reveal that adulterers will prematurely die. This was the penalty for adultery and other critical sexual sins under the law of Moses (Leviticus 20:10-16). Even today, despite the fact that we're living during a dispensation of grace, those who choose to live sexually immoral lifestyles often suffer very serious consequences for their actions, including premature death from AIDS. Other consequences critically hamper the quality of one's life – teenage pregnancy, illegitimate children, abortion, broken relationships, divorce and a multitude of sexual diseases, many of which are incurable. Truly, sexual immorality brings *death*. Even if it doesn't literally kill you it can certainly kill the quality of your life.

This next proverbial passage personalizes folly as a wicked woman and is referring to the foolish, immoral people who choose to follow "her:"

PROVERBS 9:18 (NRSV)

But they do not know that the dead are there (in Folly's house), that her guests are in the depths of sheol.

The 9th chapter of Proverbs showcases the personal invitations of Wisdom and Folly. Those who wisely choose to enter the house of Wisdom will be rewarded with good, long lives (as verified by verses 11-12) while those who choose Folly will prematurely die.

Premature death is, of course, the gravest consequence of following folly with wild abandon. The graveyard is full of such people, so are the prisons and mental institutions. Those who merely dabble in folly here and there will suffer as well, just not as severely. This is the case even today in the age of grace.¹

Notice plainly in this text that those in *sheol* are described as “**dead**,” not roasting alive in torment. Their sinful lifestyles resulted in their deaths because “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

These next two passages equate *sheol* with *abaddon*; *abaddon* is the Hebrew word for destruction:

PROVERBS 15:11 (NRSV)

***Sheol* and *abaddon* (destruction) lie open before the LORD, how much more human hearts!**

PROVERBS 27:20 (NRSV)

***Sheol* and *abaddon* (destruction) are never satisfied, and human eyes are never satisfied.**

All I want to emphasize from these five proverbial passages is that Solomon repeatedly brings up *sheol* and repeatedly associates it with death or destruction. This is not unique to Solomon or the book of Proverbs; here are some passages from past chapters that also equate *sheol* with death:

PSALM 6:5 (NRSV)

For in death there is no remembrance of you; in *sheol* who can give you praise?

ISAIAH 18-19 (NRSV)

“For *sheol* cannot thank you, death cannot praise you; those who go down to the Pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. (19) The living, the living, they thank you as I do this day.”

PSALM 89:48 (NRSV)

Who can live and never see death? Who can escape the power of *sheol*?

¹ One may legitimately argue that righteous people who possess godly wisdom sometimes prematurely die. It is true that God occasionally calls people to be martyrs for the advancement of His kingdom, like Stephen (Acts 7); if God calls someone to do this He reveals it to his or her spirit and gives them the grace to handle it. The bible promises us 70-80 years (Psalm 90:10); anything else is a plus. Hence, except for God-ordained martyrdom, any God-fearing person who prematurely dies simply failed to win the “good fight of faith” over the Evil One who desperately desires to bring about the premature death of anyone who is a threat to his kingdom. We must understand that the devil will not appear to those he attacks as a red cartooney figure with a pitchfork. The godly Christian can easily discern an attack of the devil because every satanic attack falls within the bracket of five separate categories: 1.) Enemy attack and defeat, 2.) Financial attack (poverty), 3.) Premature death, 4) Physical illness and 5.) Mental illness, which includes depression, anxiety, fear, torment and madness. (These five types of attack should be distinguished from temptation to sin and any type of sin bondage; sin and its consequences are the simple result of a Christian falling prey to the weakness of his or her own flesh and failing to live by his/her new born-again spirit, which is indwelt by the Holy Spirit). The book of Job powerfully verifies the above data: When God gave permission to Satan to attack righteous Job, the devil attacked him in the five ways just listed. People were stirred up against Job and attacked, all his wealth was wiped out, his ten children and hundreds of his employees prematurely died, Job physically suffered painful boils from head to toe, and, lastly, Job suffered intense mental ailments – the desire to die, depression, torment and anxiety. Acts 10:38 states that Jesus “went around doing good works and healing all who were under the power of the devil.” Those “under the power of the devil” are those who have fallen prey to one or more of the five satanic attacks listed above. My point is that premature death is certainly one of the ways the enemy attacks those who are a threat to his kingdom, and God’s children *must* be diligent & vigilant and learn to fight “the good fight of faith” to have the victory over just such an attack.

There are other biblical passages that identify *sheol* with death and destruction as well, such as Job 26:6, Psalm 49:14, Hosea 13:14, Habakkuk 2:5, Revelation 6:8 and 20:14. Most of these passages consist of a form of biblical poetry known as synonymous parallelism wherein the second part of the verse simply repeats and enforces the thought of the first.

As you can plainly see, the God-breathed scriptures repeatedly equate *sheol* with death and destruction, not conscious torture. These passages were written by a *variety* of godly men separated by *many centuries* – Job, David, the Korahites, Ethan, Solomon, Hezekiah, Habakkuk and John; they all spoke *in harmony* concerning *sheol* because they all “spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21). Do you think the LORD is trying to reveal something to us about the nature of *sheol* in these many clear passages? Of course He is! Those who go to *sheol* have suffered **death**, their lives have been **destroyed**. Death simply refers to the absence of life because it is, in fact, the *opposite* of life – the state of non-being or non-existence; it does not refer to a low-quality life separate from God as proven in Chapter Six of Part I. Living a life of misery in a subterranean torture chamber is, after all, still life. *Sheol* is the “world of the **dead**” where *lifeless* souls are held captive until their resurrection. They are dead and lack consciousness; they can therefore neither remember nor praise God. How much clearer could the LORD possibly be in his Word?

“To Avoid Sheol Below”

Let’s look at another proverbial passage that mentions *sheol*:

PROVERBS 15:24 (NRSV)

For the wise the path of life leads upward in order to avoid *sheol* below.

This verse isn’t at all saying that wise people in Old Testament times (before the ascension of Christ) would go to heaven when they died. We must interpret scripture in light of scripture and we know that during the Old Testament period both the wise and foolish alike went to *sheol* when they died.

The text is simply declaring that, under the law of Moses, living a wise, godly life would guarantee a person a long, blessed life in the “land of the living” and avoid a premature trip to *sheol*. As Proverbs 4:18 puts it, “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.” Although death or *sheol* was indeed “the destiny of every man” during the Old Testament period (Ecclesiastes 7:2; Psalm 89:48), those who were wise by living according to godly wisdom would avoid *sheol* as long as possible, enjoying a full, productive life.

Observe how the passage makes it clear that *sheol* was something to be **avoided as long as possible**. This doesn’t jell with the belief that *sheol* had a separate compartment called “paradise” where Old Testament saints enjoyed sweet fellowship with Father Abraham far removed from their earthly troubles. If this were so, why would any godly person want to avoid it? Any righteous person would want to get there as soon as possible if this were true, right? This verse proves that this belief is unscriptural. *Sheol* is, in fact, the state of death. Those who go there are dead and therefore no longer exist. Their soulish *remains* are held there but their conscious life has expired. Hence, it is to be avoided, not looked forward to.

“Deliver His Soul from Sheol”

This makes sense of this proverb:

PROVERBS 23:13-14 (NASB)

Do not hold back discipline from the child, although you beat him with the rod, he will not die. (14) You shall beat him with the rod and deliver his soul from *sheol*.

The passage is simply stressing the importance of godly, loving discipline. It is by no means advocating child abuse; only a wicked heart would entertain such a perverse interpretation. In Old Testament times everyone ultimately went to *sheol* when they died, but by properly training a child to live in harmony with the laws of God, and hence acquire godly wisdom, it would guarantee the child a long, blessed life and keep him or her from the curse of premature death.

Let me use my own life as an example: I grew up in a home where there was almost zero proper parental discipline. I was consequently full of folly as I entered my teenage years because my parents failed to discipline it out of me, that is, beat it out of me.¹ This folly naturally resulted in a perpetual string of critical mishaps throughout my adolescence and young adult years. Some of these misfortunes included overdosing and almost dying on drugs, getting hit by a car and landing on my head resulting in a near-fatal head concussion, getting expelled from school for drugs, falling off a cliff during a “party” episode and ending up in a *body* cast for months, and almost successfully committing suicide. The fact that I survived those years is a miracle!

My point is that the folly I walked in was due to a lack of parental discipline and it almost resulted in my death on several occasions. So I know from experience how true this proverb is – if parents fail to drive-out folly in their children by proper discipline, folly will either severely hamper their lives or kill them.

By the age of 20 I was understandably *starved* for godly wisdom, discipline and truth! The LORD revealed Himself to me and I turned to Him in repentance through Christ. I slowly started to acquire wisdom through the study & application of His Word and the relational discipline of my Heavenly Father by the Holy Spirit. Here’s a fact: True love disciplines. Parents who fail to discipline their children are showing that they don’t really care or have the time for them. The truth is, I *longed* for true, loving discipline throughout my teen years but never received it; thankfully my Heavenly Father lovingly gave me the discipline I needed when I finally turned to Him.

Observe, incidentally, that the above proverb states that a child’s **soul** is saved from *sheol*. This is further evidence that *sheol* concerns the state of the human soul after physical death. It is not the housing abode of the spirit (i.e. breath of life) or the physical body; the spirit returns to God who gave it and the body simply returns to the dust.

Sheol is Never Satisfied

This next proverb reveals that *sheol* is never satisfied:

PROVERBS 27:20 (NASB)

***Sheol* and *abaddon* (destruction) are never satisfied, nor are the eyes of man ever satisfied.**

First of all, we see, once again, that *sheol* is associated with **destruction**. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, *Sheol* is repeatedly equated with death and destruction in the scriptures not conscious torment.

¹ Referring to proper parental discipline, Proverbs 20:30 states: “Blows and wounds cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the inmost being.”

Secondly, we observe that *sheol* is “never satisfied” just as the eyes of man are never satisfied. What’s this mean? Simply put, the desires of human nature are never satiated. People always have desires – good, bad and everything in between – and once these desires are obtained or satiated we desire even more, or something else entirely. It’s our nature as human beings; it’s how we’re wired. This is the nature of *sheol* as well.

How is *sheol* never satisfied? Well, we’ve discovered in our study that *sheol* refers to the place and condition all unredeemed souls enter after death; it is the holding place of captive souls, the graveyard of dead souls. Since unredeemed people continue to birth and die year after year, decade after decade, century after century, the “population” of *sheol* naturally keeps growing.

For a natural comparison, consider earthly graveyards where bodies are buried. Graveyards remain active for “business” until they become full of bodies. They then become historical in nature. My wife is currently the office manager of a large burial park. This graveyard has 58 acres of land that are developed for business. It has an additional 60 acres that are undeveloped. As the 58 developed acres become full they will have to expand by developing and utilizing the additional 60 acres. This particular burial park will never be “satisfied” until all 118 acres are full. *Sheol*, by contrast, has no limits to its “expansion” as unredeemed people continue birthing and dying. It is in this sense that *sheol* is never satisfied.

This next proverbial passage addresses the same point:

PROVERBS 30:15-16 (NASB)

There are three things that will not be satisfied. Four that will not say, “Enough”: *Sheol*, and the barren womb, earth that is never satisfied with water, and fire that never says, “Enough.”

Four things are listed here that are “never satisfied:” *sheol* is never satisfied with its increasing population of dead souls, the barren womb is always ready to produce another child, the earth will always drink up more water, especially desert landscapes like Palestine, and fire always keeps devouring combustible matter. Yet, none of these four items are insatiable in an absolute sense: A womb can only produce so many babies in a lifetime, the earth can only take so much water before flooding starts, fire only destroys until it is put out one way or another. Just so, *sheol* will one day **stop** receiving dead souls, and every lifeless soul resident there will be resurrected to face judgment; in fact, *sheol* itself (i.e. “*hades*”) will ultimately be thrown into the lake of fire, as shown in Revelation 20:11-15.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

CHAPTER SIX

***SHEOL* IN THE PROPHETS**

In this chapter we shall examine how *sheol* is addressed in the last section of the Old Testament, the major and minor prophetic books, which includes all the books from Isaiah to Malachi.

“Sheol has Enlarged its Appetite”

We'll start with *sheol* as used in the book of Isaiah:

ISAIAH 5:11-14 (NRSV)

Ah, you who rise early in the morning in pursuit of strong drink, who linger in the evening to be inflamed by wine, (12) whose feasts consist of lyre and harp, tambourine and flute and wine, but who do not regard the deeds of the LORD, or see the work of his hands! (13) Therefore my people go into exile without knowledge; their nobles are dying of hunger and their multitude is parched with thirst. (14) Therefore sheol has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure; the nobility of Jerusalem and her multitude go down, her throng and all who exult in her.

This passage is referring to the wicked nobles of Judah and the numerous people corrupted by their leadership. According to verses 11-12 these people had completely forsaken the LORD and had plunged into a flood of “partying” and dissipation. In fact, in chapter 3 the LORD remarked that they had become as brazenly shameless as Sodom (3:9) – that’s pretty bad! As a result of their evil deeds, God had to justly pronounce judgment on them as shown in verses 13-14 above. Many were to be taken into captivity, no longer blessed with the knowledge of God. Many more would die of hunger and thirst, while others would be slain by the sword (1:20).

Clearly, multitudes would *die* because of God’s righteous judgment. This explains why verse 14 proclaims, “...*sheol* has enlarged its appetite and opened its mouth beyond measure.”

This is obviously not a literal statement. *Sheol* is not some living entity that possesses a mouth and appetite, but God uses this metaphor to plainly illustrate that numerous people would die because of His just judgment. “The wages of sin is death” and these rebels were simply going to have to eat the fruit of their actions (after much merciful patience on the LORD’s part, I might add).

In verse 24 God uses clear metaphors to illustrate the nature of *sheol* and eternal damnation:

ISAIAH 5:24 (NRSV)

Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the straw and as dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root will become rotten (i.e. decay) and their blossom go up like dust; for they have rejected the instruction of the LORD of hosts, and have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

We know this text is referring to the death of these people because the very next verse says so (verse 25). The root that decays is probably referring to their bodies in light of verse 25 which states, “their corpses were like refuse in the streets.” But their immaterial being, their soul

that goes to *sheol*, is likened to straw devoured by fire and dry grass that goes up in flame. The example is clear: straw and grass that are set ablaze go up in smoke and cease to exist; likewise blossoms that “go up like dust” no longer exist as well. This corresponds to the nature of *sheol* because *sheol* is a condition of non-existence where dead souls are held until their resurrection on judgment day. These metaphors are applicable to both *sheol*, which is the temporary hell or first death, and the lake of fire (*Gehenna*), which is the eternal hell or “second death.”

Since Isaiah 5:14 blatantly refers to wicked people, the King James translators naturally rendered *sheol* as “hell.” They obviously did this to give the impression that wicked people go to a nether realm of conscious torment when they die. This is in contrast to Isaiah 38:10 where they render *sheol* as “the grave” because the text refers to godly king Hezekiah. Needless to say, this schizophrenic practice is a translation error of the greatest magnitude! It grieves my heart to see how the truth about *sheol* was purposefully covered up in order to support the religious myth that *sheol* (“hell”) is a nether torture chamber where undying souls suffer conscious torture without respite until their resurrection on judgment day.

Let’s observe precisely what Hezekiah said in this particular passage:

ISAIAH 38:9-12 (NASB)

A writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, after his illness and recovery:

(10) I said “In the middle of my life I am to enter the gates of *sheol*; I am to be deprived of the rest of my years.” (11) I said, “I shall not see the LORD, the LORD in the land of the living; I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world. (12) Like a shepherd’s tent my dwelling is pulled up and removed from me; as a weaver I rolled up my life. He cuts me off from the loom; from day until night Thou dost make an end of me.”

In this passage Hezekiah is praying for deliverance from a fatal illness that would cause him to die prematurely. Note, first of all, that Hezekiah clearly expected to go to *sheol* when he died – just like Jacob, Job, David, Solomon and so many other men of God in the Old Testament era. The rest of his statements are very revealing concerning the nature of *sheol*. In verse 10 he says that, if he dies and goes to *sheol*, he will “be deprived of the rest of his years.” The rest of his years of what? The rest of his years of *life!* Hezekiah knew that if he died and went to *sheol*, the spiritual graveyard of souls, he would be *dead* – he would not have life anymore; he would cease to have consciousness or feeling. That’s why, in verse 11, he speaks of life in this world as “the land of the *living*.” This is in contrast to the “land” of *sheol*, which is the “land” of the dead where lifeless souls are held until their resurrection on judgment day. Notice also, in verse 11, he makes it clear that he “shall not see the LORD” in *sheol*. This is further proof that souls held in *sheol* are dead and conscious of nothing. After all, the bible reveals God to be omnipresent; consequently, a righteous man like Hezekiah would certainly be able to sense His presence even in the nether abode of *sheol*, as long as he were alive, conscious and able. However, since souls held in *sheol* are *dead* they are unable to experience God in any sense. Because they lack conscious existence the only thing they can “experience” is death itself, utter non-being. This is why Hezekiah would “not see the LORD” in *sheol*.

In addition, notice that Hezekiah points out that he “shall look upon man no more” in *sheol*. How can this be if *sheol* was, in part, a paradise where righteous people hanged out with Father Abraham and other saints, as religionists claim. If this teaching were true then Hezekiah would be looking upon *many* people in *sheol*. Furthermore, if this teaching were true, why would Hezekiah be praying so earnestly *not* to go there? You would think that he’d want to go to such a pleasant paradise, the sooner the better. These factors all prove that this belief is unbiblical and therefore false. Hezekiah knew that he wouldn’t be seeing the LORD or anyone else in *sheol* because he fully understood that *sheol* was and is a place and condition where people only “experience” death itself. Although he knew that he’d eventually go there, as every righteous (and

unrighteous) person did when they died in Old Testament times, he wanted to avoid it as long as possible and enjoy a long, productive life in “the land of the living.”

Regarding this last point from verse 11, some may argue that Hezekiah technically stated, “I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world.” The obvious argument being that, although Hezekiah will not see people in the physical world any longer, he will definitely see multitudes of people in the paradise compartment of *sheol*. Momentarily accepting this argument, let’s read Hezekiah’s statement as if this contention were true: “I shall look on man no more among the inhabitants of the world, but – thank God – I shall look upon many people in *sheol* while socializing with Abraham and friends.” Let’s face it, this belief plainly makes an absurdity of such passages. What Hezekiah was really saying was that, because he was about to die and go to *sheol*, the graveyard of dead souls, he would no longer see and experience fellowship with his fellow human beings anymore. You see, with a proper understanding of the true nature of *sheol*, scriptural statements like this make perfect sense.

Let’s address an important question that is naturally raised in light of the fact that Hezekiah and other righteous people were destined to go to *sheol*: What benefit was there to serving God in Old Testament times if both the righteous and the unrighteous went to *sheol* when they died? First of all, those who served God were promised a full, blessed life on earth (Deuteronomy 8:1; Ezekiel 18:5-9, 14-17, 27-28), whereas those who forsook Him were risking the judgment of premature death unless, of course, they repented (Deuteronomy 8:19-20; Ezekiel 18:10-13, 18, 20, 26). Secondly, although both the righteous and the wicked went to *sheol* when they died, the righteous were promised a resurrection unto eternal life as shown in Part I (Daniel 12:2-3), whereas the wicked would only be resurrected to face divine judgment and suffer the destruction of the second death (Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:11-15; Matthew 10:28; 2 Peter 3:7).

Before the ascension of Christ every soul had to die because no ransom of innocent blood had yet been paid; thus no soul could obtain intrinsic immortality and, consequently, go to heaven at the time of physical death. In this present era redeemed men or women of God go to heaven when they physically die to bask in the presence of the LORD while awaiting their glorious bodily resurrection – death and *sheol* have zero power over blood-bought spiritually-regenerated children of the Most High God!

The Proud King of Babylon Brought Down to Sheol

Isaiah 14:1-23 addresses the LORD’s just judgment on the king of Babylon. “The wages of sin is death” and this was the Almighty’s sentence for the notorious Babylonian king. Hence, the king died and his body was not given a proper burial. The passage also shows the king’s soul going to *sheol*.

Out of the multitude of passages in the Old Testament that describe the nature of *sheol* this is the only one that advocates of eternal torture occasionally cite to support their belief. They’re not overly gung ho about it, however, since nothing is said about souls writhing in fiery torment, but they do occasionally cite it in a weak attempt to support the idea that souls in *sheol* are conscious and can talk. Let’s closely examine the passage piece by piece to see if this is so.

Verses 1-3 show that the LORD will deliver the Israelites from their Babylonian captivity and bring them back to their homeland. Starting in verse 4 we see the Israelites taunting the fallen, dead king of Babylon:

ISAIAH 14:4-8 (NRSV)

You will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon: How the oppressor has ceased! How his insolence has ceased! (5) The LORD has broken the staff of the wicked, the scepter of rulers, (6) that struck down the peoples in wrath with unceasing blows, that ruled the nations in anger with

unrelenting persecution. (7) The whole earth is at rest and quiet; they break forth into singing. (8) The cypresses exult over you, the cedars of Lebanon, saying “Since you were laid low, no one comes to cut us down.”

These verses reveal how oppressive, insolent and wicked the king of Babylon was to all the peoples and nations that surrounded him. Verses 5-6 show that the LORD Himself had broken the king’s staff and scepter; in other words, the LORD’s sentence of death brought an end to his tyrannical reign. Hence, all the peoples of the earth who were either oppressed by him or feared his possible threat are now at peace and even celebrating in song (verse 7). Verse 8 even states that the trees the king would regularly cut down for his numerous building projects would break out in exultation. Did these trees literally break out in triumphant jubilation? Of course not, this is figurative language. God is a master communicator and he uses figurative language here to make a point – the king of Babylon was so wicked that even inanimate objects would rejoice over his death!

Let’s continue with the passage:

ISAIAH 14:9-11 (NRSV)

***Sheol* beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come; it rouses the shades (the dead) to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth; it raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations. (10) All of them will speak and say to you: “You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us!” (11) Your pomp is brought down to *sheol*, and the sound of your harps; maggots are the bed beneath you and worms are your covering.**

Sheol is preparing to receive the dead soul of the Babylonian king. The dead are roused to greet the king, including those who were once mighty kings of various nations. The Hebrew word for the dead in verse 9 is *rapha* (*raw-faw'*) which, as shown above, the NRSV translates as “shades.” This word refers to the dead in the sense that they are feeble, idle and weak compared to who they were when they were alive and dwelled in “the land of the living.” Both the KJV and the NKJV translate *rapha* as “the dead” while the NASB renders it “the spirits of the dead” and the NIV as “the spirits of the departed.” Although these latter two translations use “spirits” in their multi-word definition of *rapha*, the usual Hebrew word for ‘spirit’ – *ruach* – does not appear in the text. Why do I point this out? Because when an unredeemed person dies their spirit (or breath of life) returns to God from whence it came; their dead soul goes to rest in *sheol* until their resurrection.

With that understanding, verse 10 shows these dead souls greeting the Babylonian king by informing him that, despite all his former glory and infamous power, he has now become weak like they are, signifying that human distinctions of greatness are meaningless in *sheol*, the world of the dead.

Should we take verses 9-10 literally? Did the dead souls in *sheol* really rise up to greet and mock the king of Babylon? Absolutely not. We confidently conclude this for three reasons: (1.) These people who are greeting the king are described as “dead” in verse 9. The dead are dead. Dead people are not conscious and cannot talk. (2.) The passage switches from literal language to figurative language in verse 8; this is obvious because trees don’t talk and celebrate. Verses 9-11 continue in this figurative mode. Why should we assume this? Because, once again, the dead souls housed in *sheol* are dead. Anything that is dead is not conscious and therefore cannot very well think, speak or greet; hence, the language must be figurative. (3.) We’ve examined a multitude of clear passages in our study plainly revealing that *sheol* is the nether realm of the dead, the “land of silence” where the dead know nothing and therefore cannot think or even remember God. This is verified by numerous respected men of God throughout the Old Testament and even by the LORD Himself, as we shall see in the next section on Ezekiel 32.

Scripture is not open to isolated interpretation based on personal bias (see 2 Peter 1:20-21). Scripture interprets scripture; it's an interpretational law. Consequently, verses 9-10 must be interpreted as figurative language. And please notice that, literal or not, nowhere is anyone shown writhing in fiery torment.

Verse 11 continues, showing that the Babylonian king's "pomp" has brought him the sentence of premature death. Surely "pride goeth before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18 KJV). It goes on to say that maggots will be the king's bed and worms his covering. This is insightful in multiple ways: The verse specifically refers to *sheol*, which is backed up by its mention in verse 9, so we know the text is specifically talking about the world of the dead where the soul goes after death and not to the physical grave or tomb. It is said that maggots are his bed and worms his blanket. Is this literal language? Are there literal maggots in *sheol* feeding upon dead souls? Not likely. This is more figurative language drawing a parallel to the physical grave to produce a powerful image (in the next chapter we shall examine how *sheol* and the physical grave are distinct yet parallel concepts in scripture). What's the picture we get from this image? Since maggots consume only carcasses, the image is that of *death*. It's not a pretty picture, but it's not supposed to be. Death was God's judgment on the pompous Babylonian king for death is the wages of sin.

Also note the image of maggots being *his bed* and worms *his covering*.¹ The picture is clearly that of sleeping in death, not roasting and wailing in conscious torment.

The parallel to the physical grave offers further insight. The Babylonian king was not given a proper burial like other rulers placed in personal tombs; the king's body was discarded into a big hole with other Babylonian corpses and naturally devoured by maggots. This is corroborated by verses 18-20:

ISAIAH 14:18-20 (NRSV)

All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb; (19) but you are cast out, away from your grave, like loathsome carrion, clothed with the dead, those pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the Pit, like a corpse trampled underfoot. (20) You will not be joined with them in burial because you have destroyed your land, you have killed your people.

Not being given a proper burial was the deepest degradation to the ancients. Ecclesiastes 6:3-6 shows that dying without mourners or honors was considered worse than being born dead, even if the person lives a full life and has numerous children (!). Such was the pompous Babylonian king's dishonorable and humiliating demise. Verses 18-19 show that other kings were honorably placed in tombs and "lie in glory" whereas the Babylonian king is merely tossed into a mass grave with other dead Babylonians, a meaningless, unmarked grave that people walk over with no regard.

The parallel of the soulful grave to the physical grave are shown in this passage as well. The text is clearly talking about the physical tomb and suddenly mentions that the king will be "clothed with the dead, those pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of **the Pit**, like a corpse trampled underfoot." We found out in Chapter Three that "the Pit" is another biblical term for *sheol*. Obviously the physical grave and *sheol* are distinct yet parallel concepts: Just as a body lies dead in a grave or tomb, so the soul lies dead in *sheol*. Please note the language repeatedly used to describe the people in either the physical grave or *sheol* – "carrion," "the dead" and "corpse." What's God trying to communicate to us by the usage of this language? Just as a physical grave or tomb is meant only for that which is dead, so it is with *sheol*. Souls in *sheol* are **carrion**, not living, thinking, talking people.

¹ Even though "bed" isn't in the original Hebrew text, the obvious implication of the verse is that maggots would be what he would lie on, like a mattress, which explains why the NRSV and NASB add the word "bed."

How much plainer could God be in His Word? Isaiah 14 in no way supports the idea that souls are conscious in *sheol*.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

The Fall of the King of Babylon Parallels the Fall of Lucifer

The Longest and Most Detailed Passage on Sheol

Ezekiel 32 features the longest passage on *sheol* in the bible. Chapters 31-32 of Ezekiel address God's judgment on the nation of Egypt wherein Egypt is likened to a great cedar of Lebanon that is about to be felled by the nation of Babylon and, consequently, descend into *sheol* where other nations condemned by God have descended, e.g. Assyria, Elam, Edom, etc. This passage powerfully drives home the image of *sheol* as the common soulish grave of humankind where dead souls are housed until their resurrection on judgment day. God Himself is speaking in this passage from verse 18 onward:

EZEKIEL 32:17-32 (NRSV)

In the twelfth year, in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came to me:

(18) Mortal, wail over the hordes of Egypt, and send them down, with Egypt and the daughters of majestic nations to the world below, with those who go down to the Pit, (19) "Whom do you surpass in beauty? Go down! Be laid to rest with the uncircumcised!"

(20) They shall fall among those who are killed by the sword. Egypt has been handed over to the sword; carry away both it and its hordes. (21) The mighty chiefs shall speak of them, with their helpers, out of the midst of *sheol*: They have come down, they lie still, the uncircumcised killed by the sword."

(22) Assyria is there, and all its company, their graves all around it, all of them killed, fallen by the sword. (23) Their graves are set in the uttermost parts of the Pit. Its company is all around its grave, all of them killed, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living.

(24) Elam is there, and all its hordes around its grave; all of them killed, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised into the world below who spread terror in the land of the living. They bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit. (25) They have made Elam a bed among the slain with all its hordes, their graves all around it, all of them uncircumcised killed by the sword; for terror of them was spread in the land of the living, and they bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit; they are placed among the slain.

(26) Meshech and Tubal are there, and all their multitude, their graves all around them, all of them uncircumcised, killed by the sword; for they spread terror in the land of the living. (27) And they do not lie with the fallen warriors of long ago who went down to *sheol* with their weapons of war,¹ whose swords were laid under their heads, and whose shields are upon

¹ This is an obvious improper translation of verse 27; the statement made in the negative ("they do not lie") simply makes no sense in light of its context. The New International Version properly translates it in the form of a rhetorical question as

their bones; for the terror of the warriors was in the land of the living. (28) So you shall be broken and lie among the uncircumcised, with those who are killed by the sword.

(29) Edom is there, its kings and all its princes, who for all their might are laid with those who are killed by the sword; they lie with the uncircumcised, with those who go down to the Pit.

(30) The princes of the north are there, all of them, and the Sidonians, who have gone down in shame with the slain, for all the terror that they caused by their might; they lie uncircumcised with those who are killed by the sword and bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit.

(31) When Pharaoh sees them, he will be consoled for all his hordes – Pharaoh and all his army killed by the sword, says the Lord GOD. (32) For he spread terror in the land of the living; therefore he shall be laid to rest among the uncircumcised, with those who are slain by the sword – Pharaoh and all his multitude, says the Lord GOD.

As you can see, the Pharaoh of Egypt and his army have been judged and condemned by God. What is the LORD's sentence? God states in verse 20 that "Egypt has been handed over to **the sword**" and, in verse 31, "Pharaoh and all his army **killed by the sword.**" So God's sentence is death. Is this a just sentence? Absolutely; it is in line with the biblical axiom "the wages of sin is death."

Since Egypt's sentence is death, verse 18 states that the Egyptians shall be sent down "to the world below, with those who go down to the Pit." "The Pit," or *bowr* in the Hebrew, is another term for *sheol* as detailed in Chapter Three; this synonym for *sheol* appears 4 more times in the above passage (verses 24, 25, 29 & 30), while *sheol* itself appears twice (verses 21 & 27). My point is that there is no doubt that this section of scripture is addressing the subject of *sheol*, the intermediate state of un-regenerated souls between physical decease and resurrection.

With this understanding lets work our way through the passage point by point.

Verse 18 describes *sheol* as "the world below." *Sheol* is described this way because it is part of the underworld. We'll look at this subject in detail in Chapter Seven but, briefly put, the bible speaks of three realms or universes: (1.) heaven, which is described as "the third heaven" in scripture and is where God's throne is located, (2.) the earth & physical universe, and (3.) the underworld (see Philippians 2:10 for verification). You'll note that verse 18 above describes this "world below" as "the Pit." Why? Because *sheol* is a pit or dungeon in the underworld where dead souls are housed until their resurrection. *Sheol* has levels and chambers where dead souls are "laid to rest" in an orderly fashion. Once again, we'll look at this further in Chapter Seven.

We know souls housed in *sheol* are dead because the bible repeatedly says so in numerous ways as detailed throughout this study so far. For instance, Ecclesiastes 9:5 & 10 explicitly states that "there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in *sheol*" and that the people housed there are "dead" and "know nothing."

The fact that souls in *sheol* are dead is verified in verse 19 above where it states that the Egyptians will be "**laid to rest** with the uncircumcised." Notice they will be "laid to rest," not writhe and scream in torturous torment for over a thousand years without a break as religionists ludicrously teach. No, they are simply laid to rest; this phrase is repeated in verse 32 in reference to the Pharaoh being "laid to rest" in *sheol*. The two words "laid" and "rest" used in conjunction clearly evoke the image of sleep. In addition, verse 21 states that people in *sheol* "lie still," verse 25 that Elam will be in "bed," and verses 27, 28 & 30 that those in *sheol* "lie" there. All these images clearly suggest sleep, not writhing in ongoing torment. As already detailed in our study,

such: ""Do they not lie with the other uncircumcised warriors who have fallen, who went down to the grave with their weapons of war, whose swords were placed under their heads?"

these descriptions aren't suggesting literal physical sleep, but rather the "sleep" of death itself, which all souls will be "awakened" from to face judgment.

Verse 25 flat out states that souls in *sheol* are dead: "they bear their shame with those who go down to the Pit; they are placed **among the slain.**" In other words, the newest group of souls entering *sheol* will be "placed among the slain." Souls in *sheol* are dead, they are not alive and are therefore conscious of nothing. How much clearer could God be?

Note also how verse 19 states that the Egyptians will be laid to rest "with the **uncircumcised.**" Who are the "uncircumcised"? In the bible circumcision was a sign that a person was in covenant with God under the law of Moses. The scriptures always distinguish between those who are in right-standing with God and those who are not. The "uncircumcised" spoken of in the passage did not have a contract with God and therefore were not right with Him, this would include the numerous peoples cited throughout the passage – the Assyrians, Edomites, Sidonians, etc. In other words, verse 19 is simply pointing out that the Egyptians will be laid to rest in the very same section of *sheol* that houses other uncircumcised godless people of that era.

As noted throughout our study, souls in right-standing with God also went to *sheol* at the time of death during the Old Testament period but they were not laid to rest with the uncircumcised. There was obviously a separate section of *sheol* for those in covenant with God. If this sounds strange to you, consider the fact that bodies are buried in earthly graveyards in an orderly fashion, why would we think it would be any different for dead souls in *sheol*? These righteous souls were, of course, raised to life after Jesus bought salvation for humanity and ascended to heaven. Henceforth, righteous souls no longer die and go to *sheol* because they possess eternal life.

Verse 20 states that those in *sheol* have been "**killed** by the sword" and that the Egyptians will suffer this same fate. This phrase (or similar phrasing) is used for every group mentioned in the passage. In other words, the text repeatedly emphasizes that these people are **dead**. Also notice that it states they are killed "by **the sword.**" If taken in a strictly literal sense we would have to conclude that each of these thousands upon thousands of people from varying nations perished by the stroke of a sword. Is this what happened? Of course not. Many obviously died from other methods – arrow, spear, club, fire, etc. "The sword" simply refers to the God-ordained right of a government to inflict the penalty of death on those who have committed capital crimes or those judged and condemned by God (see Romans 13:4). For instance, Ezekiel 31-32 shows that Egypt has been judged and condemned to death. Whom does God commission to carry out this sentence? Babylon, as verified in Ezekiel 32:12: " 'For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: '**The sword** of the king of Babylon will come against you [Pharaoh and his army]' .'" It's unlikely that the Pharaoh carried a sword and, even if he did, it was merely for show; so "the sword" that the king of Babylon carried was simply the authority from God to carry out His just sentence of death.

Verses 22-23 introduce a revealing concept:

EZEKIEL 32:22-23 (NRSV)

Assyria is there, and all its company, their graves all around it, all of them killed, fallen by the sword. (23) Their graves are set in the uttermost parts of the Pit. Its company is all around its grave, all of them killed, fallen by the sword, who spread terror in the land of the living.

These verses reveal that the Assyrians are in *sheol* and that they are **killed**, fallen by "the sword" of the LORD's judgment. In addition, three times the passage emphasizes that the graves of the Assyrians are in *sheol*. The words "graves" and "grave" are respectively translated from the Hebrew words *qibrah* (*kib-raw'*) and *qeburwrah* (*keb-oo-raw'*), which both refer to a literal grave or tomb. What's this mean? Simply what we've been discovering throughout this study so far – *sheol* is a graveyard in the underworld where dead souls are laid to rest until their resurrection.

Just as dead bodies are laid to rest in grave plots on earth, so dead souls are laid in grave plots in *sheol*.

Is a grave ever intended for anything other than that which is dead? Of course not. This is further definitive proof that souls in *sheol* are dead and that *sheol* itself is a soulish graveyard in the underworld, not a ludicrous, diabolical torture chamber.

Verses 24-26 likewise point out that there are “graves” in *sheol* for the people of Elam, Meshech and Tubal. Are people placed in graves for the purpose of conscious torture or simply to lie in the “sleep” of death?

Now note in verse 23 that it states the Assyrians’ graves are set “in the uttermost parts of the Pit.” This provides evidence that there are levels in *sheol* and distinctive parts. The dead souls of the Assyrians were, evidently, placed in the lowest level.

Verse 23 ends by pointing out that the Assyrians once “spread terror in the *land of the living*.” The “land of the living” obviously refers to life on earth when the Assyrians warred, conquered and ruled. This is in contrast to *sheol*, the land of the dead, where the Assyrians would spread terror no more. Why? Simply because they’re *dead*. *Sheol* is the land of the dead where “there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom.”

The very same point is made in reference to Elam, Meshech, Tubal and Egypt in verses 24, 25, 26, 27 and 32. We’ll look at this matter further in the following chapter.

As you can see, throughout this long passage God repeatedly utilizes unmistakable and vivid language to plainly show that souls in *sheol* are dead. God is without doubt a master communicator. With this understanding, verse 31 must be taken in a non-literal sense because it states that, after Pharaoh dies, he will “see” the other groups laid to rest in *sheol* and be “consoled.” This is obviously not to be taken literally. Pharaoh and his men will be dead at this point and will not be able to see anyone or anything; they’ll be laid to rest in the sleep of death just like the other groups in *sheol*. In fact, the very next verse, verse 32, emphasizes that Pharaoh is “laid to rest” in *sheol*, not alive and making observations. However, even if we were to take it literally it wouldn’t support the religious view that pagan souls are in a state of constant torment until the day of judgment. How would Pharaoh possibly be consoled by the fact that he and his army are going to join thousands upon thousands of writhing, screaming souls in perpetual agony? Do you see how incredibly unscriptural this mythical belief is?

“Progressive Revelation” on the Nature of Sheol?

The above passage from Ezekiel 32 disproves the theory that humanity had a “progressive revelation” concerning the nature of *sheol*. This theory suggests that the Hebrew understanding of *sheol* evolved over time. It is embraced by those who advocate that *sheol* is a place of conscious torture. The reason they are forced to adopt this theory is obvious: The many Old Testament passages on *sheol* that we’ve examined thus far in our study clearly reveal that *sheol* is a “Pit” in the underworld where dead souls are laid to rest in the sleep of death, a vast soulish graveyard where there is consciousness of nothing. Since they are unable to reconcile these numerous passages with their belief that *sheol* is a place of constant conscious torment they have no recourse but to completely ‘write them off’ with this theory. This is a blatant case of “taking away” from God’s Word, a practice severely condemned in the scriptures (Deuteronomy 4:2; Proverbs 30:5-6 and Revelation 22:18-19).

The reason these people are compelled to such error is because they’ve been indoctrinated that Jesus’ story of the Rich Man and Lazarus from Luke 16:19-31 is a literal teaching. Yet, if one takes this tale literally the entire rest of the bible is in error regarding the nature of *sheol*. Hence, the idea of “progressive revelation.” Aside from the obvious fact that this reasoning conflicts with the weight of scriptural testimony, there are two problems with this position: (1.) Jesus’ story of the Rich Man and Lazarus is clearly a symbolic story that was never

meant to be taken literally. We'll examine this story in detail in Chapter X where every sane, honest reader will plainly see that it would be utterly absurd to take it literally. And (2.) the idea of "progressive revelation" would suggest that humanity's awareness of the nature of *sheol* **slowly evolved** over time. Yet, if one accepts this theory, there is clearly no slow progressive revelation on the nature of *sheol* in the bible; the testimony of scripture goes from the concept of *sheol* as a nether graveyard where dead souls are conscious of nothing as they "sleep" in death, to the abrupt and completely opposite notion (based *solely* on Jesus' story) that *sheol* is a nether realm where souls are fully alive and conscious, either in a state of constant fiery torment or hanging out with Abraham in communal bliss, depending upon whether the soul is wicked or righteous respectively.

So how does Ezekiel 32:18-32 disprove this theory of "progressive revelation"? Simply because *God Himself is speaking throughout this long passage*. Throughout this study we've examined numerous passages on *sheol* that reflect what various Old Testament characters believed about the nature of the intermediate state. We've looked at Job's view, Solomon's view, David's view, Hezekiah's view and many others. All of their views coincide that *sheol* is a "Pit" in the underworld where dead souls are laid to rest in the unconscious sleep of death 'awaiting' their resurrection. One may legitimately argue that their views are the result of a limited understanding of the subject and are therefore inaccurate. Yet, one cannot make this argument concerning Ezekiel 32:18-32 because **God himself is speaking**. Does anyone ludicrously think that God had a "limited understanding" regarding the nature of *sheol*? Does anyone absurdly think that the LORD had to have a "progressive revelation" on *sheol*? Or has He always known *precisely* and *completely* everything there is to know about *sheol*? I think the answers are obvious.

The vast majority of people who believe that *sheol* is a place of conscious torment (or bliss) have never researched the subject beyond Jesus' story of The Rich Man and Lazarus. I know because I was once one of them; I therefore understand their reasoning: The story of the Rich Man and Lazarus, if taken literally, reveals that people are in a conscious state in *sheol*; and since Jesus Christ himself is speaking it's not necessary to look into the subject any further. In other words, Jesus' story tells us everything we need to know about *sheol*; who would know more about *sheol* than Jesus Christ himself?

Well, according to the bible there's only one higher than the Son, and that's God the Father, and He is speaking in Ezekiel 32:18-32 wherein He repeatedly and explicitly reveals that souls in *sheol* are "slain," "laid to rest," "lie still," in "bed" in "graves," etc. Why is it that advocates of conscious torture fail to bring up this long commentary on *sheol* by God the Father Himself in Ezekiel 32? Because it conflicts with their false religious belief, that's why.

Am I suggesting that that the Father and Son contradict each other? Absolutely not; that's an impossibility. What I am saying is that the scriptures very clearly point out that the Father is the head over the Son (1 Corinthians 11:3 & 3:23). This is explicitly stated. Hence, Jesus would never contradict the Father; in fact, he can't contradict the Father because, as he said, "I and the Father are **one**" (John 10:30). Consequently, Jesus' story of the Rich Man and Lazarus must be interpreted in light of what the entire rest of the bible teaches on the subject of *sheol*, including what the Father, who is the head, plainly taught.

"Where, O Sheol, is your Destruction?"

The Hebrew word *sheol* appears twice in the book of Hosea, both in the same verse:

HOSEA 13:14

I will ransom them from the power of the grave (*sheol*); I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave (*sheol*) is your destruction?

This text is simply God's promise that all his children shall be ransomed from *sheol* and redeemed from death. This was accomplished, of course, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ "who became a ransom for all men" (1 Timothy 2:6). Jesus took our place and died for our sins so we don't have to. Christians who are spiritually born-again of the imperishable seed of Christ *have* eternal life in their spirits. Consequently, the only death they'll undergo is physical death; and the simple reason for this is "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50). Which is fine because all those redeemed through Christ are going to ultimately receive a much better body – an imperishable, glorified, powerful, spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)! The awesome thing about this body, unlike the old one, is that it *can* inherit the kingdom of God!

We clearly see in this passage, as detailed earlier in this chapter, that *sheol* is spoken of synonymously with death and destruction. In other words, *sheol* is death and death is *sheol*. The condition of souls in *sheol* is destruction, not torture. That's why the LORD raises the question: "Where, O *sheol*, is your destruction?" and not, "Where, O *sheol*, is your fiery endless torment?" The bible is so easy to understand once one is freed up from absurd religious indoctrination!

[BACK TO TOP](#)

CHAPTER SEVEN

FURTHER SCRIPTURAL INSIGHTS into the Nature of *Sheol*

The purpose of this chapter is to examine several Old Testament passages to acquire further insights concerning the nature of *sheol*. Let's start with this scriptural fact:

Sheol is Contrasted with "the Land of the Living"

Additional proof that *sheol* is, in reality, the realm where dead souls are held awaiting their resurrection can be derived from the fact that *sheol* is often spoken of in contrast to "the land of the living." In the previous chapter we witnessed evidence of this in Hezekiah's statements from Isaiah 38:9-12. Let's look at some other biblical examples:

PSALM 116:8-9 (NASB)

For thou hast rescued my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling. (9) I shall walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

We see in this text that the LORD delivered the psalmist from a life-threatening situation. Verse 3 reveals that the psalmist was distressed and sorrowful because, as he puts it, "The cords of death encompassed me and the terrors of *sheol* came upon me." (We, once again, see evidence here that death and *sheol* are synonymous terms in the bible). Obviously the psalmist was quite concerned that he'd lose his life in this situation, but the LORD ultimately delivered him and that's why he exclaims in verse 8: "thou hast rescued my soul from death." The psalmist knew that, if he died, his soul would go to *sheol*, the world of the **dead** where *lifeless* souls experience only death (naturally). Note plainly that God saved his soul from *death*; He did not save him from fellowship with Father Abraham in the paradise compartment of *sheol*, he saved him from death. Because the LORD delivered him, he states in verse 9: "I shall walk before the LORD in the land of the living." Why does he state this? Obviously because you can't walk before the LORD in *sheol*.

Needless to say, if life in this world is "the land of the living" then it stands to reason that *sheol* is the land of the dead or "the world of the dead," as James Strong defines it, where souls suffer death itself.

David speaks of "the land of the living" in these two passages:

PSALM 27:13 (NASB)

I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

PSALM 142:5 (NASB)

I cried out to Thee, O LORD; I said, "Thou art my refuge. My portion in the land of the living."

In each of these cases David was in a life-threatening situation. If the LORD failed to come through he would have died and gone to *sheol*. As you can see, David speaks of life in this

world as “the land of the living” as opposed to the alternative – dying and going to *sheol*. Once again, if life in this world is “the land of the living” then *sheol* is obviously the land of *not*-living – the land of the dead, the realm of utter non-existence.

When his life was in danger, Jeremiah likewise used the phrase “land of the living” in this prayer:

JEREMIAH 11:18-20

Because the LORD revealed their plot to me, I knew it, for at the time he showed me what they were doing. (19) I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter; I did not realize that they had plotted against me, saying, “Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.” (20) But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

As you can see, there were people out to *kill* Jeremiah; their intent was to “*slaughter*” him and “*destroy*” his very life, thus cutting him off from “the land of the living.” These evil plotters rightly knew that if they successfully murdered Jeremiah his soul would go to *sheol*, the nether realm of *dead* souls. Since souls in *sheol* are literally *dead*, Jeremiah would be completely cut off from those who are alive in “the land of the living.”

But let’s suppose for a moment that *sheol* is a place where souls are alive and conscious as religionists contend – the wicked suffer continuous torment while the righteous blissfully enjoy paradise. Let’s reword the evil plotters words in verse 19 as if this belief were true:

“Let us physically destroy Jeremiah and cut him off from the land of the living on earth. Unfortunately his soul will immediately go to the paradise compartment of *sheol* where he’ll enjoy blissful communion with Father Abraham and other righteous saints that have passed on.”

Once again, we see that adjusting the scriptures to fit the religious belief that souls are alive in *sheol*, whether tormented or blessed, makes an absurdity of God’s Word.

The bottom line is that if souls in *sheol* are alive and conscious then *sheol* is just as much “the land of the living” as earthly life is “the land of the living.” Yet, this would make nonsense of the scriptures. Hence, if life on earth is “the land of the living” then we naturally conclude *sheol* **must** be the land of not-living, the land of the dead.

Sheol: The Soulish Grave of “All the Living”

Notice what David exclaims to God after having been rescued from a life-threatening situation:

PSALM 56:13 (NRSV)

For you have delivered my soul from death and my feet from falling so that I may walk before God in the light of life.

Obviously David knew that *sheol* was the state of death where “the dead know nothing” and where “there’s no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom” (Ecclesiastes 9:5,10). The only reason he could “walk before God in the light of life” was because God rescued his “soul from death.” He knew, as we’ve looked at before, that *sheol* is a state where you cannot remember or

praise God (Psalm 6:5). Thus, if the LORD hadn't delivered him, his soul would have dwelt in the silent darkness of non-existence.

This is the common spiritual grave of all humankind where the souls of all non-born-again people go at physical death. No one had the opportunity to be re-born spiritually and receive immortality until Jesus died and was raised. Before that all humankind went to *sheol* the "common grave." This is why, when Joshua was nearing his time of death, he said he was "about to go the way of all the earth" (Joshua 23:14). What is "the way of all the earth"? Why *sheol*, the graveyard of souls.

In complete agreement with Joshua, Job made the statement:

JOB 30:23 (NRSV)

"I know that you (God) will bring me to death, and to the house appointed for all the living"

What is "the *house* appointed for all the living"? *Sheol*, of course. Notice that Job makes it very clear that "all the living" would go there. That's why Ethan the psalmist asked the rhetorical question: "Who can live and never see death? Who can escape the power of sheol?" (Psalm 89:48).

Thus *sheol* can be described as the common grave of humankind. People's bodies may, in fact, be housed in separate, individual graves, tombs, mausoleums, or otherwise, but throughout history **all** people's souls have shared the common spiritual grave, *sheol*. We see this fact evident in Job 3:13-19 where Job said that, if he died, he would experience the sleep of death "with kings and counselors of the earth... with princes... There the wicked cease from troubling and there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners are at ease together... The small and great are there and the slaves are free from their master" (NRSV).

Job makes it clear that kings, counselors, princes, wicked people, weary people, prisoners, people of small and great social stature, and slaves will all be housed in the same condition together. Indeed, *sheol* is the common grave of every soul throughout human history, "the house appointed for all the living," as David described it above. The only people who can escape the power of *sheol* are those who have obtained immortality by being born again of the imperishable seed of Christ (1 Peter 1:23).

W.E. Vine, the Hebrew and Greek scholar, points out in his lexicon that *sheol/hades* "never denotes the grave" (286) and he's technically right if, in fact, "grave" is referring to the physical hole or tomb/mausoleum where bodies are housed. As pointed out earlier in our study, the Hebrew word *qeber* (*keh' ber*) is the biblical word used to specify this. However, although *sheol* doesn't refer to the literal physical grave where the body is buried, it can accurately be described as the grave of the soul – the common spiritual graveyard where all dead souls are housed.

We see this clearly evident in Ezekiel 31:14-18 where it states that whole nations (which are likened unto trees, e.g. "trees of Eden," "cedars of Lebanon") will go to "*sheol*, to those slain by the sword... to the earth beneath; you will **lie** in the midst of the uncircumcised with those who were slain by the sword" (verses 17-18 NASB). *Sheol* is specifically mentioned 3 times in this passage (verses 15, 16 & 17) and the context clearly states that *sheol* **is** death: "For they have all been given over to death, to the earth beneath" (verse 14 NASB). "The earth beneath" or "world below" (NRSV) is a descriptive phrase for *sheol*, which we will analyze in the next chapter. Note, incidentally that this passage describes souls as **lying** in *sheol* with other dead people. "Lie" indicates being in a horizontal or prostrate position as on a bed or the ground. The image is that of resting or sleeping, not writhing and wailing in constant fiery torment. That's because the latter notion is not biblical. And a belief that's not biblical is *false*. In other words, it's a false doctrine. It may be religious, it may be traditional in the sense that it goes back to the time of Saint Augustine, but it's false nevertheless.

In any event, my main point here is that, because of God's judgment, *whole nations* of people will go to *sheol* and lie together "in the midst of the uncircumcised." This clearly shows that *sheol* is indeed the common grave of all spiritually un-regenerated souls.

In the New International Version of the bible, which is the most popular modern translation, *sheol* is consistently translated as "the grave" in the Old Testament. At first I considered this to be an improper translation since *sheol* does not technically refer to the physical grave where bodies are housed. However, as I've studied the subject of *sheol* and discovered that it clearly refers to the common graveyard of all non-born-again souls, I've deduced that "the grave" is indeed a sound translation. (Unfortunately the NIV translators weren't consistent with their rendering of *sheol* in the New Testament where the corresponding Greek word *hades* is diversely translated as "hades," "hell," "depths" and "death").

Sheol and the Physical Grave: Distinct yet Parallel

Although the physical grave (*qeber*) and the soulish grave (*sheol*) are indeed separate terms in the bible they are often mentioned in the very same breath. Why? Obviously because the two go hand in hand – if one physically dies his/her soul goes to *sheol*; if one's soul is in *sheol* it's because s/he physically died. Simple, right? Let's look at a few examples:

In Psalm 30:3 David states, "O LORD, you brought up my soul from *sheol*, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit" (NRSV). Here, once again, David is praising God for deliverance from a life-threatening situation. On this occasion David was so close to death that he considered himself as good as dead; that's why he symbolically exclaims, "you brought up my soul from *sheol* [and] restored me to life." David obviously didn't literally die, but he came so close that he spoke as if did. Also take note that David makes it clear in this passage that *sheol* is the condition and place that souls specifically go to at physical death; this is, of course, in contrast to the physical grave where bodies are housed. Take note as well that David describes *sheol* as "the Pit."

With this understanding, notice what David goes on to say in verse 9: "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will *the dust* praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?" (NRSV). Observe how David mentions "the Pit," which is a reference to *sheol*, and then in the very next breath asks, "Will the dust praise you?" "Dust" is definitely a reference to the physical grave or tomb (*qeber*) where the body is housed because dust is what (unpreserved) bodies revert to after death. The reason David interchangeably refers to *sheol* and the physical grave here is simply because the two, although distinct, naturally go together.

We also see this in Psalm 88 where Heman prays for deliverance from a serious life-threatening situation. In verse 3 Heman states, "For my soul is full of troubles and my life draws near to *sheol*. (4) I am counted among those who go down to the Pit; I am like those who have no help, (5) like those forsaken among the dead like the slain that lie in the grave (*qeber*)" (NRSV). By saying that his "life draws near to *sheol*," Heman is simply expressing how close he is to losing his life in this situation. Now notice what Heman declares in verses 10-12:

PSALM 88:10-12 (NRSV)

"Do you (God) work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up to praise you? (11) Is your steadfast love declared in the grave (*qeber*), or your faithfulness in abaddon (destruction)? (12) Are your wonders known in darkness, or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?"

Heman specifically mentions *sheol* in verse 3 and references it as "the Pit" in verse 4. His reference to "darkness" and "the land of forgetfulness" in verse 12 are also references to *sheol*,

although they could arguably apply to the physical grave as well. In addition, he refers to *sheol* as “regions dark and deep” in verse 6. He also mentions the literal grave, *qeber*, in verses 5 and 11.

Why is this important to our subject? I just want to clearly show how *sheol* and the physical grave are sometimes spoken of in the very same breath. Although *sheol* definitely refers to the common grave where all un-regenerated souls go to and *qeber* refers to the physical grave/tomb where bodies are lain to rest, both terms are parallel and signify the same condition: DEATH, the cessation of life. *Qeber* signifies the utter absence of life in the physical realm and *sheol* denotes the utter absence of life period.

Because *sheol* and *qeber* are sometimes spoken of in the same breath some theologians have mistakenly theorized that *sheol* refers to the physical grave, at least in that particular context. Yet, *sheol* is repeatedly described in the scriptures as a place and condition where immaterial souls specifically go, not bodies. We’ve clearly seen this in our study. Hence, the idea that *sheol* refers to the physical grave must be rejected.

Our conclusion is that *sheol* and *qeber* are distinct yet parallel terms in the bible; they each have separate definitions but naturally go together. Being parallel terms they each signify the same thing – death, the absence of life. Is there any life in a physical grave? Of course not. Neither is there life in *sheol*, the soulish grave. Is a grave meant for anything other than that which is dead? Of course not. The same goes for *sheol*. Both terms, though distinct, denote the utter absence of life.

This presents a problem for the religious traditional view which teaches that *sheol/hades* is a nether realm where unredeemed souls exist in a state of conscious torment and Old Testament saints hanged out in paradise with father Abraham before the ascension of Christ. If this were so *sheol* and *qeber* couldn’t possibly be sister terms. Why? Because *qeber* would signify the utter absence of life, whereas *sheol* would refer to the express opposite – conscious life in a spiritual dimension, whether in misery or bliss. They wouldn’t be parallel terms if they both represent two completely opposite concepts.

[BACK TO TOP](#)

