

The trouble with “Hell”

The word “Hell” appears twenty-three times in the King James version of the New Testament. [[See *twenty-three instances in the KJV*](#)] The problem with this is, it is a translation of three very different meaning words in the original Greek text with a single English word, “Hell.” Two of the Greek words “*Hades*” and “*Gehenna*” appear in all but one of the verses (2 Peter 2:4). “*Hades*” and “*Gehenna*” are used in two very different ways. To translate these two different words with one word causes many to merge and confuse the original meanings.

The Greek word “Hades” in the New Testament corresponds with the use of the Hebrew word “Sheol” in the Old Testament. Sheol means where the dead reside and is often translated “the grave.” This is not a specific grave or graves but the grave in a general sense or even figuratively (representing where the dead reside). For the Greeks, Hades was not only the grave but also an unseen underworld in the depths of the earth where the souls of the dead resided in a conscious state.

The most common Greek word translated “Hell” in the New Testament is “Gehenna.” Jesus said, “Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body but not the soul but rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Gehenna.” [[see *Matthew 10:28*](#)] Gehenna was the name a real geographical place, a narrow valley south of Jerusalem in Israel. In Hebrew it was called the valley of Hinnom (which means lamentation or weeping). Gehenna was also the location of Jerusalem's garbage dump where its waste was burned with fire in the time of Jesus. It was an apt illustration for a place of weeping where both the body and soul of the wicked are destroyed by fire as a result of God's judgment. “Gehenna” was used as a metonym, so instead of being the actual name of the place Jesus was referring to, it was the name of a place that was associated in meaning with the place he was really talking about. Just as the real place “Wall Street” is often used as a metonym to describe the entire U.S financial and banking system.