

What Does The Bible Say About Hell?

The word “**Hell**” is used 54 times in the Bible. It is translated from several different words with various meanings, as indicated below:

In the Old Testament:

31 times from the Hebrew “Sheol,” which means “the grave.”

In the New Testament:

10 times from the Greek “Hades,” which means “the grave.”

12 times from the Greek “Gehenna,” which means “a place of burning.”

01 time from the Greek “Tartarus,” which means place of darkness.”

Hell, in Christian beliefs, is a place or a state in which the [souls](#) of the unsaved will suffer the consequences of [sin](#). The Christian doctrine of Hell derives from the teaching of the [New Testament](#), where Hell is typically described using the Greek words [Gehenna](#) or [Tartarus](#). Unlike [Hades](#), [Sheol](#), or [Purgatory](#) it is eternal, and those damned to Hell are without hope. In the [New Testament](#), it is described as the place or state of [punishment](#) after death or [last judgment](#) for those who have rejected Jesus.^[1] In many classical and popular depictions it is also the abode of [Satan](#) and of Demons.^[2]

Hell is generally defined as the eternal fate of unrepentant sinners after this life.^[3] Hell's character is inferred from biblical teaching, which has often been understood literally.^[3] Souls are said to pass into Hell by God's irrevocable judgment, either immediately after death ([particular judgment](#)) or in the [general judgment](#).^[3] Modern theologians generally describe Hell as the logical consequence of the soul using its free will to reject the will of God.^[3] It is considered compatible with God's justice and mercy because God will not interfere with the soul's free choice.^[3]

Only in the King James Version of the bible is the word "Hell" used to translate certain words, such as [sheol](#) (Hebrew) and both [hades](#) and [Gehenna](#)(Greek). All other translations reserve Hell only for use when [Gehenna](#) is mentioned. It is generally agreed that both [sheol](#) and [hades](#) do not typically refer to the place of eternal punishment, but to the [underworld](#) or temporary abode of the dead.^[4]

“**Sheol**” - (Heb., “the all-demanding world” = Gr. *Hades*, “the unknown region”), the invisible world of departed souls.

“Hades”

1. The unseen world, sometimes translated hell

General references:

[Mat 10:28](#); [Mat 11:23](#); [Mat 16:18](#); [Luk 10:15](#); [Luk 16:23](#); [Act 2:27](#); [Act 2:31](#); [Rev 1:18](#); [Rev 6:8](#); [Rev 20:13-14](#)

2. The realm, or state of the dead

General references:

[2Sa 22:6](#); [Job 26:5](#); [Psa 6:5](#); [Psa 17:15](#); [Psa 30:9](#); [Psa 49:15](#); [Psa 86:13](#); [Psa 88:10-12](#); [Psa 115:17](#); [Psa 116:3](#); [Pro 15:24](#); [Pro 21:16](#); [Pro 27:20](#); [Ecc 9:4-6](#); [Isa 5:14](#); [Jon 2:2](#); [Luk 23:42-43](#); [Joh 8:22](#); [2Co 12:4](#)

Immortality; Paradise; Heaven, The Future Dwelling Place of the Righteous; Spirit; Wicked, Punishment of

“**Gehenna**” – (gē-hen´a) Gehenna is a transliteration from the Aramaic form of the Hebrew *gē-hinnōm*, “valley of Hinnom.” This latter form, however, is rare in the Old Testament, the prevailing name being “the valley of the son of Hinnom.” Septuagint usually translates; where it transliterates the form is different from Gehenna and varies. In the New Testament the correct form is *Geénna* with the accent on the penult, not *Géenná*. There is no reason to assume that Hinnom is other than a plain patronymic, although it has been proposed to find in it the corruption of the name of an idol (*EB*, II, 2071). In the New Testament (King James Version margin) Gehenna occurs in [Mat 5:22](#), [Mat 5:29](#), [Mat 5:30](#); [Mat 10:28](#); [Mat 18:9](#); [Mat 23:15](#), [Mat 23:33](#); [Mar 9:43](#), [Mar 9:15](#), [Mar 9:47](#); [Luk 12:5](#); [Jam 3:6](#). In all of these it designates the place of eternal punishment of the wicked, generally in connection with the final judgment. It is associated with fire as the source of torment. Both body and soul are cast into it. This is not to be explained on the principle that the New Testament speaks metaphorically of the state after death in terms of the body; it presupposes the resurrection. In the King James Version and the Revised Version (British and American) Gehenna is rendered by “hell” (see ESCHATOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT). That “the valley of Hinnom” became the technical designation for the place of final punishment was due to two causes. In the first place the valley had been the seat of the idolatrous worship of Molech, to whom children were immolated by fire ([2Ch 28:3](#); [2Ch 33:6](#)). Secondly, on account of these practices the place was defiled by King Josiah ([2Ki 23:10](#)), and became in consequence associated in prophecy with the judgment to be visited upon the people ([Jer 7:32](#)). The fact, also, that the city's offal was collected there may have helped to render the name synonymous with extreme defilement. Topographically the identification of the valley of Hinnom is still uncertain. It has been in turn identified with the depression on the western and southern side of Jerusalem, with the middle valley, and with the valley to the E. Compare *EB*, II, 2071; *DCG*, I, 636; *RE*³, VI.

“Tartarus”

Tartarus in Roman mythology

In Roman mythology, Tartarus is the place where sinners are sent. [Virgil](#) describes it in the [Aeneid](#) as a gigantic place, surrounded by the flaming river [Phlegethon](#) and triple walls to prevent sinners from escaping from it. It is guarded by a [hydra](#) with fifty black gaping jaws, which sits at a screeching gate protected by columns of solid [adamantine](#), a substance akin to diamond - so hard that nothing will cut through it. Inside, there is a castle with wide walls, and a tall iron turret. [Tisiphone](#), one of the [Erinyes](#) who represents revenge, stands guard sleepless at the top of this turret lashing a whip. There is a pit inside which is said to extend down into the earth twice as far as the distance from the lands of the living to [Olympus](#). At the bottom of

this pit lie the [Titans](#), the twin sons of [Aloeus](#), and many other sinners. Still more sinners are contained inside Tartarus, with punishments similar to those of Greek myth.

New Testament

The term "Tartarus" is found in the [Bible](#) in 2 Peter 2:4 "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but threw them down into Tartarus and delivered them to be kept in chains..." Some translations render the word as "hell" but the original Greek states the place to be Tartarus.

In Luke 8:31, the Legion of demons begs Jesus not to send them to the Abyss. "The Beast" of Revelation, will come up out of the Abyss (Revelation 11:7; 17:8). Satan will be thrown into the Abyss for 1000 years (Revelation 20:3).

The term "Hades" appears in the religious texts of [New Testament](#) times as a translation of the [Old Testament Sheol](#).

In most English Bibles, the word Tartarus is simply translated as [Hell](#), even though early Christian writers usually used the term [Gehenna](#), the [Hinnom Valley](#), to mean hell.^{[[citation needed](#)]} In some sense, this dark place matches the term's traditional meaning, a dark pit in which the Supreme God has cast his spirit enemies. However, it is separate from the [Lake of Fire](#) which is the place of eternal fiery punishment that most people think of when they think of "Hell". This is evidenced in Revelation 20, where [Satan](#) is released from the Abyss (v. 3) and later thrown in the "Lake of Burning Fire" (v. 10), where he will be "tormented day and night forever and ever".

Hell

Hell. In the Old Testament, this is the word generally, and unfortunately, used by our translators to render the Hebrew, **Sheol**. It really means *the place of the dead, the unseen world*, without deciding whether it be the place of misery or of happiness.

It is clear that in many passages of the Old Testament, **Sheol** can only mean *"the grave"*, and is rendered thus in the Authorized Version; see, for example,

Genesis 37:35 *And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him.*

Genesis 42:38 *And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.*

1Samuel 2:6 *The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.*

Job 14:13 *O that thou wouldst hide me in the grave, that thou wouldst keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldst appoint me a set time, and remember me!*

In other passages, however, it seems to involve a notion of *punishment*, and is therefore rendered in the Authorized Version by the word "*hell*". But in many cases, this translation misleads the reader.

Hell in the New Testament

The [New Testament](#) depicts "Hell", the place of eternal punishment, in a variety of ways. The most common term used for "Hell" in the original Greek is γέεννα (*gehenna*), a direct loan of Hebrew *ge-hinnom*. The term is, however, found almost exclusively in the [synoptic gospels](#).^{[8][9][10]} *Gehenna* is most frequently described as a place of fiery torment (e.g. Matthew 5:22, 18:8-9; Mark 9:43-49) although other passages mention darkness and "weeping and gnashing of teeth" (e.g. Matthew 8:12; 22:13).^[9]

Besides this teaching in the synoptic gospels, the concept of Hell is found in other parts of the NT when the term *gehenna* (translated as *Hell* in all English translations of the bible) is not used. The [Johannine writings](#) refer to the destiny of the wicked in terms of "perishing", "death" and "condemnation" or "judgment". [St. Paul](#) speaks of "wrath" and "everlasting destruction" (cf. Romans 2:7-9; 2 Thessalonians 1:9), while the [general epistles](#) use a range of terms and images including "raging fire" (Hebrews 10:27), "destruction" (2 Peter 3:7), "eternal fire" (Jude 7) and "blackest darkness" (Jude 13). Most biblical scholars believe this to be a symbol of eternal separation from God and God's presence. The [book of Revelation](#) contains the image of a "[lake of fire](#)" and "burning sulphur" where "the devil, [the beast](#), and [false prophets](#)" will be "tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10) along with those who worship the beast or receive [its mark](#) (Revelation 14:11).^[11]

The [New Testament](#) also uses the Greek word *hades*, usually to refer to the temporary abode of the dead (e.g. Acts 2:31; Revelation 20:13).^[6] Only one passage describes *hades* as a place of torment, the parable of [Lazarus and Dives](#) ([Luke 16:19-31](#)). Jesus here depicts a wicked man suffering fiery torment in *hades*, which is contrasted with the [bosom of Abraham](#), and explains that it is impossible to cross over from one location to the other. Some scholars believe that this parable reflects the [intertestamental](#) Jewish view of *hades* (or *sheol*) as containing separate divisions for the wicked and righteous.^{[6][11]} In [Revelation 20:13-14](#) *hades* is itself thrown into the "lake of fire" after being emptied of the dead.

In the New Testament, "*hell*" is the translation of two words, **Hades** and **Gehenna**. The word **Hades**, like **Sheol** sometimes means merely "*the grave*".

Act 2:31 *He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.*

1Corinthians 15:55 *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

Revelations 20:13 *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the*

dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 *And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*

15 *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

In general **Hell** refers to "*the unseen world*". It is in this sense that the creeds say of our Lord, "He went down into hell," meaning *the state of the dead in general*, without any restriction of happiness or misery.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, **Hades** is used of a place of torment,

Matthew 11:23 *And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.*

Luke 16:23 *And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.*

2Peter 2:4 *For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;*

5 *And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;*

6 *And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly;*

7 *And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked:*

8 *(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;)*

9 *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished:*

10 *But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.*

11 *Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.*

Consequently, it has been the prevalent, almost the universal, notion that **Hades** is an *intermediate state* between death and resurrection, divided into two parts; one the abode of the blest and the other of the lost.

It is used eleven times in the New Testament, and only once translated "grave".

1Corinthians 15:55 *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?*

56 *The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.*

57 *But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

58 *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

The word most frequently used, (occurring twelve times), in the New Testament for *the place of future punishment* is **Gehenna** or *Gehenna of fire*. This was originally *the valley of Hinnom*, south of Jerusalem, where the filth and dead animals of the city were cast out and burned; a fit symbol of the wicked and their destruction.

Hinnom (Hin'nom - lamentation)

Valley of **Hinnom** otherwise called, "the valley of the son" or "children of Hinnom," a deep and narrow ravine, with steep, rocky sides, to the south and west of Jerusalem, separating Mount Zion to the north from the "hill of evil counsel, " and the sloping rocky plateau of the "plain of Rephaim" to the south. The earliest mention of the valley of Hinnom is in;

Joshua 15:8 *And the border went up by the valley of the son of Hinnom unto the south side of the Jebusite; the same is Jerusalem: and the border went up to the top of the mountain that lieth before the valley of Hinnom westward, which is at the end of the valley of the giants northward:*

Joshua 18:16 *And the border came down to the end of the mountain that lieth before the valley of the son of Hinnom, and which is in the valley of the giants on the north, and descended to the valley of Hinnom, to the side of Jebusi on the south, and descended to Enrogel,*

This is also where the boundary line between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin is described as passing along the bed of the ravine.

On the southern brow, overlooking the valley at its eastern extremity, Solomon erected high places for Molech;

1Kings 11:7 *Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon.*

, whose horrid rites were revived, from time to time, in the same vicinity. The later idolatrous kings, Ahaz and Manasseh, made their children "pass through the fire," in this valley;

2Kings 16:3 *But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel.*

2Chronicles 28:3 *But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel.*

2Chronicles 33:6 *And he caused his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom: also he observed times, and used enchantments, and used witchcraft, and dealt with a familiar spirit, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger.*

, and the fiendish custom of infant sacrifice to the fire-gods seems to have been kept up in *Tophet*, which was another name for this place.

To put an end to these abominations, the place was polluted by Josiah, who renders it ceremonially unclean, by spreading over it human bones and other corruptions in;

2Kings 23:10 *And he defiled Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.*

2Kings 23:13 *And the high places that were before Jerusalem, which were on the right hand of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had builded for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Zidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of the Moabites, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon, did the king defile.*

14 *And he brake in pieces the images, and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men.*

2Chronicles 34:4-5 *And they brake down the altars of Baalim in his presence; and the images, that were on high above them, he cut down; and the groves, and the carved images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strowed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them.*

5 *And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and cleansed Judah and Jerusalem.*

, from which time, it appears to have become the common cesspool of the city, into which sewage was conducted, to be carried off by the waters of the Kidron. From its ceremonial defilement, and from the detested and abominable fire of Molech, if not from the supposed ever-burning funeral piles, the later Jews applied the name of this valley -- *Ge Hinnom, Gehenna. (land of Hinnom)* -- to denote the place of eternal torment. In this sense, the word is used by our Lord.

Matthew 5:29 *And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.*

Matthew 10:28 *And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*

Matthew 23:15 *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*

Mark 9:43 *And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:*

44 *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

45 *And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:*

46 *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

47 *And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:*

48 *Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

Luke 12:5 *But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.*