

Eternal Punishment and the Old Testament
Resources: Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment, chapter two.

1. **The Old Testament teaching on sheol.**

1.1. Biblical reference for sheol. (64 references)

1.1.1. Genesis 37:35; Genesis 42:38; Genesis 44:29; Genesis 44:31; Numbers 16:30; Numbers 16:33; Deuteronomy 32:22; 1 Samuel 2:6; 2 Samuel 22:6; 1 Kings 2:6; 1 Kings 2:9; Job 7:9; Job 11:8; Job 14:13; Job 17:13; Job 17:16; Job 21:13; Job 24:19; Job 26:6; Psalm 6:5; Psalm 9:17; Psalm 16:10; Psalm 18:5; Psalm 30:3; Psalm 31:17; Psalm 49:14; Psalm 49:15; Psalm 55:15; Psalm 86:13; Psalm 88:3; Psalm 89:48; Psalm 116:3; Psalm 139:8; Psalm 141:7; Proverbs 1:12; Proverbs 5:5; Proverbs 7:27; Proverbs 9:18; Proverbs 15:11; Proverbs 15:24; Proverbs 23:14; Proverbs 27:20; Proverbs 30:16; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Song of Solomon 8:6; Isaiah 5:14; Isaiah 7:10-11; Isaiah 14:9; Isaiah 14:11; Isaiah 14:15; Isaiah 28:15; Isaiah 28:18; Isaiah 38:10; Isaiah 38:18; Isaiah 57:9; Ezekiel 31:15; Ezekiel 31:16; Ezekiel 31:17; Ezekiel 32:21; Ezekiel 32:27; Hosea 13:14; Amos 9:2; Jonah 2:2; Habakkuk 2:5.

1.2. The different translations.

1.2.1. King James Version translates the Hebrew “grave” 31 times; “hell” 31 times; and, “pit” 3 times.

1.2.2. RSV, NAS translates as “Sheol” each time.

1.2.3. NIV mostly often translates as “grave,” sometimes as death with a footnote for Sheol.

2. **What the Bible makes clear about Sheol.**

2.1. Both the godly and wicked are there.

2.1.1. Godly: Jacob, (Genesis 37:35; 42:38; 44:29, 31;) Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:10, 17-18).

2.1.2. Wicked: Korah, (Numbers 16:30); king of Babylon (Isaiah 14:9, 11, 15).

2.2. Sheol may be a place of after-life suffering.

2.2.1. Deuteronomy 32:22: “For a fire is kindled in My anger, and shall burn to the lowest hell; it shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.” NKJV

2.2.2. Psalm 49:14-15: “Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall be consumed in the grave, far from their dwelling. But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me.” NKJV

3. **The Old Testament does indicate there is suffering in the afterlife.**

3.1. **Isaiah 66:22-24**: ‘For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,’ says the LORD, ‘So shall your descendants and your name remain. 23 And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,’ says the LORD. 24 ‘And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.’ NKJV

3.1.1. The larger context begins at Isaiah 65:17-“For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.”

3.1.2. More specifically, God will enjoy those are poor and of a contrite spirit, and who tremble at God’s word, Isaiah 66:2.

3.1.2.1. However, those who reject these things will experience “delusions and fear,” Isaiah 66:4.

3.1.2.2. God will come “with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury and rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword the Lord will judge all flesh and the slain of the Lord shall be many,” Isaiah 66:15-16.

3.2. Isaiah 66:22-23 demonstrate the delight of God’s people in the “new heaven and new earth.”

- 3.3. Isaiah 66:24 show the horror of the wicked: “their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.”
- 3.3.1. Isaiah may have had in mind the “Valley of Hinnom,” Jeremiah 7:32-33.
- 3.3.1.1. Hinnom was a place of great wickedness in the Old Testament.
- 3.3.1.1.1. Human sacrifice was offered there, 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6.
- 3.3.1.1.2. Josiah desecrated Hinnom (2 Kings 23:10) but its evil reputation carried into the New Testament; Jesus would use Hinnom in the New Testament to describe hell.
- 3.3.2. In the Old Testament burning of bodies was an act of great disrespect (e.g. Joshua 7:25; Amos 2:1).
- 3.3.3. Another means of great disgrace was to leave bodies unburied for the birds and worms to eat the corpse (e.g. 2 Samuel 21:10).
- 3.3.4. In the natural realm the fire would die and birds and worms leave once the body was consumed; God says of the afterlife the worms never die nor is the fire quenched, which indicates a life that never ends from anguish.

Summation from Isaiah’s Teaching

1. There is a clear comparison between God’s people and those who are not with God.
2. The punishment described is eternal.
3. God’s nature remains the same between the Old and New Testament.
 - a. Isaiah 65:8-10—God protect and cares for His own.
 - b. Isaiah 65:16-17—The former troubles are forgotten
 - c. Isaiah 66:2—God honors humble people.
 - d. Isaiah 66:6, 14, 24—God honors His own and punishes those who are not His.
 - e. Isaiah 66:24—God punishment is eternal: The imagery cannot pertain to the natural.

4. **Daniel 12:1-3**: “At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. 2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth **shall awake**, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.”

4.1. Daniel indicates there is life after death; those dead shall awake or come again to life.

4.2. Some “awake” to **everlasting life**.

4.2.1. עוֹלָם (□*ōlām*) forever, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient, world, etc. (RSV similar in general, but substitutes “always” for “in the world” in Ps 73:12 and “eternity” for “world” in Ecc 3:11.) Probably derived from □*ālam* I, “to hide,” thus pointing to what is hidden in the distant future or in the distant past. The Ugaritic cognate is □*lm*, “eternity.” Though □*ōlām* is used more than three hundred times to indicate indefinite continuance into the very distant future, the meaning of the word is not confined to the future. There are at least twenty instances where it clearly refers to the past. Such usages generally point to something that seems long ago, but rarely if ever refer to a limitless past. None of these past references has in it the idea of endlessness or limitlessness, but each points to a time long before the immediate knowledge of those living. The LXX generally translates □*ōlām* by *aiōn* which has essentially the same range of meaning. That neither the Hebrew nor the Greek word in itself contains the idea of endlessness is shown both by the fact that they sometimes refer to events or conditions that occurred at a definite point in the past, and also by the fact that sometimes it is thought desirable to repeat the word, not merely saying “forever,” but “forever and ever.”¹

4.2.2. Some awake to “**shame**” and “**contempt**.”

4.2.2.1. The same Hebrew word used for the “everlasting” of the righteous is the same Hebrew word for “everlasting” of the unrighteous. Consequently, what one concludes about the duration of the righteous must agree with the unrighteous.

4.2.2.2. דָּרְפָה (□*erpā*) **reproach, shame**. Basically, the word means “to reproach,” with the specific connotation of casting blame or scorn on someone.

4.2.2.3. דְּרָאוֹן (□*dērā*□*ōn*) **contempt, aversion, abhorrence**, cstr. דְּרָאוֹן עוֹלָם *everlasting abhorrence* Dn 12:2²

¹Harris, R. L., Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., & Waltke, B. K. (1999, c1980). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (electronic ed.) (673). Chicago: Moody Press.

²Brown, F., Driver, S. R., & Briggs, C. A. (2000). *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*. Strong's, TWOT, and GK references Copyright 2000 by Logos Research Systems, Inc. (electronic ed.) (201). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems.