

## Redeemer C.S.I. Church Kansas Bible study

**Bible study Ezekiel chapter 31(continuation) on 12/26/2024 (7 P.m. to 8 P.m.)**  
**Rev. SureshKumar Nelson**

### **Sheol [\[N\]](#) [\[E\]](#)**

*Old Testament.* The Hebrew word *seol* [[l/a.v](#)], "Sheol, " refers to the grave or the abode of the dead ( [Psalms 88:3](#) [Psalms 88:5](#) ). Through much of the Old Testament period, it was believed that all went one place, whether human or animal ( [Psalms 49:12](#) [Psalms 49:14](#) [Psalms 49:20](#) ), whether righteous or wicked ( [Eccl 9:2-3](#) ). No one could avoid Sheol ( [Psalm 49:9](#) ; [89:48](#) ), which was thought to be down in the lowest parts of the earth ( [Deut 32:22](#) ; [1 Sam 28:11-15](#) ; [Job 26:5](#) ; [Psalm 86:13](#) ; [Isa 7:11](#) ; [Ezekiel 31:14-16](#)[Ezekiel 31:18](#) ).

Unlike this world, Sheol is devoid of love, hate, envy, work, thought, knowledge, and wisdom ( [Ecclesiastes 9:6](#) [Ecclesiastes 9:10](#) ). Descriptions are bleak: There is no light ( [Job 10:21-22](#) ; [17:13](#) ; [Psalms 88:6](#)[Psalms 88:12](#) ; [143:3](#) ), no remembrance ( [Psalm 6:5](#) ; [88:12](#) ; [Eccl 9:5](#) ), no praise of God ( [Psalm 6:5](#) ; [30:9](#) ; [88:10-12](#) ; [115:17](#) ; [Isa 38:18](#) ) — in fact, no sound at all ( [Psalm 94:17](#) ; [115:17](#) ). Its inhabitants are weak, trembling shades ( [Job 26:5](#) ; [Psalm 88:10-12](#) ; [Isa 14:9-10](#) ) who can never hope to escape from its gates ( [Job 10:21](#) ; [17:13-16](#) ; [Isa 38:10](#) ). Sheol is like a ravenous beast that swallows the living without being sated ( [Prov 1:12](#) ; [27:20](#) ; [Isa 5:14](#) ). Some thought the dead were cut off from God ( [Psalm 88:3-5](#) ; [Isa 38:11](#) ); while others believed that God's presence reached even to Sheol ( [Psalm 139:8](#) ).

Toward the end of the Old Testament, God revealed that there will be a resurrection of the dead ( [Isa 26:19](#) ). Sheol will devour no longer; instead God will swallow up Death ( [Isa 25:8](#) ). The faithful will be rewarded with everlasting life while the rest will experience eternal contempt ( [Dan 12:2](#) ). This theology developed further in the intertestamental period.

*The New Testament.* By the time of Jesus, it was common for Jews to believe that the righteous dead go to a place of comfort while the wicked go to Hades ("Hades" normally translates "Sheol" in the LXX), a place of torment ( [Luke 16:22-23](#) ). Similarly, in Christianity, believers who die go immediately to be with the Lord ( [2 Cor 5:8](#) ; [Php 1:23](#) ). Hades is a hostile place whose gates cannot prevail against the

church ( [Matt 16:18](#) ). In fact, Jesus himself holds the keys of Death and Hades ( [Rev 1:18](#) ). Death and Hades will ultimately relinquish their dead and be cast into the lake of fire ( [Rev 20:13-14](#) ).

The fact that theology develops within the Old Testament and between the Old Testament and the New Testament does not mean that the Bible is contradictory or contains errors. It only indicates progressive revelation, that God revealed more of himself and his plan of salvation as time went on. That some Old Testament saints believed in Sheol, while the New Testament teaches clearly about heaven and hell, is no more of a problem than that the Old Testament contains a system of atonement by animal sacrifice now made obsolete in Christ ( [Heb 10:4-10](#) ) or that the Old Testament teaches God is one ( [Deut 6:4](#) ) while the New Testament reveals a Trinity.

### **Sheol [\[N\]](#) [\[B\]](#)**

(Heb., "the all-demanding world" = Gr. Hades, "the unknown region"), the invisible world of departed souls. (See HELL .)

### **[International Standard Bible Encyclopedia - Sheol](#)**

#### **SHEOL**

she'-ol (she'ol):

1. The Name
2. The Abode of the Dead
  - (1) Not a State of Unconsciousness
  - (2) Not Removed from God's Jurisdiction
  - (3) Relation to Immortality
3. Post-canonical Period

#### **1. The Name:**

This word is often translated in the King James Version "grave" (e.g. [Genesis 37:35](#); [1 Samuel 2:6](#); [Job 7:9](#); [14:13](#); [Psalms 6:5](#); [49:14](#); [Isaiah 14:11](#), etc.) or "hell" (e.g. [Deuteronomy 32:22](#); [Psalms 9:17](#); [18:5](#); [Isaiah 14:9](#); [Amos 9:2](#), etc.);

in 3 places by "pit" ([Numbers 16:30,33](#); [Job 17:16](#)). It means really the unseen world, the state or abode of the dead, and is the equivalent of the Greek Hades, by which word it is translated in Septuagint. The English Revisers have acted somewhat inconsistently in leaving "grave" or "pit" in the historical books and putting "Sheol" in the margin, while substituting "Sheol" in the poetical writings, and putting "grave" in the margin ("hell" is retained in [Isaiah 14](#)). Compare their "Preface." The American Revisers more properly use "Sheol" throughout. The etymology of the word is uncertain. A favorite derivation is from sha'al, "to ask" (compare [Proverbs 1:12](#); [27:20](#); [30:15,16](#); [Isaiah 5:14](#); [Habakkuk 2:5](#)); others prefer the sha'al, "to be hollow." The Babylonians are said to have a similar word Sualu, though this is questioned by some.

## **2. The Abode of the Dead:**

Into Sheol, when life is ended, the dead are gathered in their tribes and families. Hence, the expression frequently occurring in the Pentateuch, "to be gathered to one's people," "to go to one's fathers," etc. ([Genesis 15:15](#); [25:8,17](#); [49:33](#); [Numbers 20:24,28](#); [31:2](#); [Deuteronomy 32:50](#); [34:5](#)). It is figured as an under-world ([Isaiah 44:23](#); [Ezekiel 26:20](#), etc.), and is described by other terms, as "the pit" ([Job 33:24](#); [Psalms 28:1](#); [30:3](#); [Proverbs 1:12](#); [Isaiah 38:18](#), etc.), ABADDON (which see) or Destruction ([Job 26:6](#); [28:22](#); [Proverbs 15:11](#)), the place of "silence" ([Psalms 94:17](#); [115:17](#)), "the land of darkness and the shadow of death" ([Job 10:21](#)). It is, as the antithesis of the living condition, the synonym for everything that is gloomy, inert, insubstantial (the abode of Rephaim, "shades," [Job 26:5](#); [Proverbs 2:18](#); [21:16](#); [Isaiah 14:9](#); [26:14](#)). It is a "land of forgetfulness," where God's "wonders" are unknown ([Psalms 88:10-12](#)). There is no remembrance or praise of God ([Psalms 6:5](#); [88:12](#); [115:17](#), etc.). In its darkness, stillness, powerlessness, lack of knowledge and inactivity, it is a true abode of death (see DEATH); hence, is regarded by the living with shrinking, horror and dismay ([Psalms 39:13](#); [Isaiah 38:17-19](#)), though to the weary and troubled it may present the aspect of a welcome rest or sleep ([Job 3:17-22](#); [14:12](#)). The Greek idea of Hades was not dissimilar.

### **(1) Not a State of Unconsciousness.**

Yet it would be a mistake to infer, because of these strong and sometimes poetically heightened contrasts to the world of the living, that Sheol was conceived of as

absolutely a place without consciousness, or some dim remembrance of the world above. This is not the case. Necromancy rested on the idea that there was some communication between the world above and the world below ([Deuteronomy 18:11](#)); a Samuel could be summoned from the dead ([1 Samuel 28:11-15](#)); Sheol from beneath was stirred at the descent of the king of Babylon ([Isaiah 14:9](#)). The state is rather that of slumbrous semi-consciousness and enfeebled existence from which in a partial way the spirit might temporarily be aroused. Such conceptions, it need hardly be said, did not rest on revelation, but were rather the natural ideas formed of the future state, in contrast with life in the body, in the absence of revelation.

## **(2) Not Removed from God's Jurisdiction.**

It would be yet more erroneous to speak with Dr. Charles (Eschatology, 35) of Sheol as a region "quite independent of Yahwe, and outside the sphere of His rule." "Sheol is naked before God," says Job, "and Abaddon hath no covering" ([Job 26:6](#)). "If I make my bed in Sheol," says the Psalmist, "behold thou art there" ([Psalms 139:8](#)). The wrath of Yahweh burns unto the lowest Sheol ([Deuteronomy 32:22](#)). As a rule there is little sense of moral distinctions in the Old Testament representations of Sheol, yet possibly these are not altogether wanting (on the above and others points in theology of Sheol).

See ESCHATOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

## **(3) Relation to Immortality.**

To apprehend fully the Old Testament conception of Sheol one must view it in its relation to the idea of death as something unnatural and abnormal for man; a result of sin. The believer's hope for the future, so far as this had place, was not prolonged existence in Sheol, but deliverance from it and restoration to new life in God's presence ([Job 14:13-15](#); [19:25-27](#); [Psalms 16:10,11](#); [17:15](#); [49:15](#); [73:24-26](#); see IMMORTALITY; ESCHATOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT; RESURRECTION). Dr. Charles probably goes too far in thinking of Sheol in Psalms 49 and 73 as "the future abode of the wicked only; heaven as that of the righteous" (op. cit., 74); but different destinies are clearly indicated.

## **3. Post-canonical Period:**

There is no doubt, at all events, that in the postcanonical Jewish literature (the Apocrypha and apocalyptic writings) a very considerable development is manifest in the idea of Sheol. Distinction between good and bad in Israel is emphasized; Sheol becomes for certain classes an intermediate state between death and resurrection; for the wicked and for Gentiles it is nearly a synonym for Gehenna (hell). For the various views, with relevant literature on the whole subject, see ESCHATOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT; also DEATH; HADES; HELL, etc.

### **1. Meaning and Nature of Sheol**

Sheol is a complex term in the Bible, encompassing various nuances. It is the Hebrew word used to describe the realm of the dead, often thought of as an underworld or grave. Key characteristics include:

- **Universal Destination:** Both the righteous and the wicked were believed to go to Sheol after death (Job 3:11-19).
- **A Place of Shadowy Existence:** Sheol is not depicted as a place of torment (like later notions of hell) but as a realm devoid of joy, light, or consciousness (Ecclesiastes 9:5-10).
- **God's Sovereignty:** Even in Sheol, God's presence and power are acknowledged (Psalm 139:8).

### **2. Biblical Context and Use of the Word "Sheol"**

Sheol appears around 65 times in the Hebrew Bible. Its translation varies based on the Bible version:

- **KJV and NKJV:** Often translated as "hell" or "grave."
- **NIV and ESV:** Usually translated as "grave" or "realm of the dead."
- **NASB:** Sometimes left untranslated as "Sheol."

### **3. Sheol in Relation to the Righteous and Wicked**

- **For the Righteous:**
  - The righteous viewed Sheol as a temporary state where God could rescue or redeem them (Psalm 16:10).

- They often expressed hope in God’s power to deliver them from Sheol (Hosea 13:14).
- For example, Jacob mourned the death of Joseph and anticipated going to Sheol in grief (Genesis 37:35).
- For the Wicked:
  - The wicked were described as being “brought down” to Sheol (Psalm 9:17, Proverbs 15:24).
  - Sheol could signify judgment or separation from God for the ungodly.

#### **4. God’s Power Over Sheol**

The Old Testament emphasizes that Sheol is not beyond God’s reach:

- God can deliver individuals from Sheol (Psalm 49:15, 86:13).
- God’s presence extends to Sheol, affirming His omnipresence and sovereignty (Psalm 139:8).

#### **5. Evolution of the Concept of Sheol**

In early Jewish thought, Sheol was a neutral place, but over time, the concept developed:

- Pre-Exilic View: Sheol was a shadowy, silent realm of the dead.
- Post-Exilic View: Greater emphasis emerged on resurrection and judgment, possibly influenced by contact with Persian ideas during the Exile.
- Later Jewish Thought (Intertestamental Period): Sheol became more associated with separate destinies for the righteous and wicked, aligning with the idea of paradise (for the righteous) and torment (for the wicked).

#### **6. Sheol and the New Testament Connection**

The New Testament often uses the Greek word Hades to translate Sheol. Key distinctions emerge:

- Hades as Temporary: Hades is a temporary holding place for the dead until final judgment (Revelation 20:13-14).

- Introduction of Gehenna: The New Testament distinguishes Hades from Gehenna, a term used for eternal punishment or hell.

- Christ's Victory Over Sheol/Hades: Jesus is depicted as having authority over death and Hades (Revelation 1:18). His resurrection signifies triumph over the power of Sheol (1 Corinthians 15:55).

#### **a. Sheol as a Common Destiny for All**

- Job 3:11-19: Job describes Sheol as a place where the great and small rest together.

- Ecclesiastes 9:10: "For there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol."

#### **b. Sheol and the Righteous**

- Psalm 49:15: "But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me."

- Hosea 13:14: "I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol."

#### **c. Sheol and the Wicked**

- Psalm 9:17: "The wicked shall return to Sheol, all the nations that forget God."

- Isaiah 14:11-15: Describes the fall of the proud to Sheol.

#### **d. God's Sovereignty Over Sheol**

- Psalm 139:8: "If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!"

- 1 Samuel 2:6: "The Lord kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up."

In summary, Sheol represents the Hebrew Bible's concept of the afterlife, distinct from later Christian ideas of heaven and hell. It is a shadowy, neutral realm where all dead go, though it evolves into a more nuanced understanding by introducing resurrection and judgment themes. In the New Testament, the concept transitions into a clearer distinction between the righteous and the wicked, with Sheol often associated with Hades. This reflects the Bible's growing revelation about death, resurrection, and eternal life.