

Sheol ... Gehenna ... Hell



Thoughts on Divine Punishment

Sheol ... Gehenna ... Hell

What awaits those who reject God?

- Scripture and the word(s).
- *Sheol* in early Hebrew understanding.
- Later Hebrew development and interpretation.
- *Gehenna* in the Christian scriptures.
- *Hades* and *Sheol*.
- Other Christian concepts and understandings.
- Punishment without place.
- “Weeping and gnashing of teeth.”
- “Eternal” fire.
- Parables of Jesus
- Later Jewish thought.
- Alternatives
- “Eternity”
- Conclusion(s)

Scripture References

From the Hebrew Scriptures:

*The Holy Scriptures According To The Masoretic Text
Jewish Publication Society of America, 1917 edition.*

From the Christian Scriptures:

New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Hell

Etymology

Origin of the Word

- *Hell* comes directly from Old English *hel*.
- In Old English *hel* is a black and fiery place of eternal torment for the damned.
- The Old Norse *hel*, from the same source as Old English *hel*, retained its earlier pagan senses as both a place and a person. As a place, *hel* is the abode of oathbreakers, other evil persons, and those unlucky enough not to have died in battle. It contrasts sharply with *Valhalla*, the hall of slain heroes.

The Old Norse *hel* is very cold.

Hel is also the name of the goddess or giantess who presides in *hel*, the half blue-black, half white daughter of Loki and the giantess Angrbotha.

- The Indo-European root behind these Germanic words is *kel*, - “to cover, conceal” (so *hell* is the “concealed place”).

Sheol

The abode of the dead ... as
an evolving concept

Sheol

Sheol: Word used within Hebrew Scriptures ~ 66 times.

Definition:

Place of departed dead in (some) ancient Israel thought, **without reference to punishments and rewards.**

The place where those who had died were believed to be congregated.

Etymology: pit, abyss.

Ancient Jewish Concepts

- Death sent one to *Sheol*, a dreary abode without any promise of renewal.
 - Retribution, or hope, is not an issue.
 - Religion is an affair of the earth, of life, where one is rewarded or punished for actions/deeds.
- God's wrath will be felt among the living ... resulting in suffering and untimely death.
 - “If these men die the common death of all men ...”
 - “... the ground did cleave asunder that was under them. And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up ...”
 - “So they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into sheol (the pit); and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the assembly.” (Num 16)

Sheol

Here the dead meet without distinction of rank or condition ... the rich and the poor, the pious and the wicked, the old and young, the master and slave.

- Existence as “mere shadow.”
- Existence without knowledge or feeling.
- Silence reigns supreme.
- Return is not expected.
- The “eternal house.”

Jewish Encyclopedia

Torah

The Torah provides no formal teaching concerning an afterlife ...

... if God did not provide this information to Moses than details concerning an afterlife should not be of concern.

Judaism is about this life ... and how to live it in accordance with God's intentions.

Rewards and Punishments

Commitment to Torah as a way to wisdom may bring distress but ultimately reward, “at the appointed time.”

- Rewards and punishments were to be realized here ... upon this earth ... during one’s own lifetime.
- Rewards ... health, long life, peace, plenty, dominion ...
- Punishments ... disease, premature death, war, famine, want, subjugation, captivity ...
- Wisdom itself is the reward of wisdom.
- The reward of a good deed is the good deed ... the punishment of sin is the sin.

Ancient Jewish Concepts

- Even in disappointment and seeming defeat, the Jew of the Diaspora must understand that the ways of the law are superior.
 - To suffer at the hands of the godless, while maintaining fidelity to the true God, is an honor.
 - Persecution (suffering) as a discipline.
- The nation overshadows the individual as the focus of God's response to goodness or sinfulness.
 - Earthly trials ... deportation ... conquest ... subjugation are *Sheol* to the Jewish people.
- With the rise of a messianic hope, came the idea that there would be a Kingdom of God on earth.

Prophecy of Ezekial

Ezekial ... 6th cent BCE prophet exiled to Babylon ... 587 BCE.

“... HaShem carried me out in a spirit, and set me down in the midst of the valley, and it was full of bones ... And He said unto me: ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’ ...

Then He said unto me: ‘Prophecy over these bones, and say unto them: O you dry bones, hear the word of HaShem: Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am HaShem.’

... there was a noise ... and the bones came together ... And I beheld, and, lo, there were sinews upon them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them.

Prophecy of Ezekial

... the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, **an exceeding great host**. Then He said unto me: 'Son of man, **these bones are the whole house of Israel** ... Behold, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, O My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel.

And I will put My spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; and you shall know that I HaShem have spoken, and performed it ...”

Interpretation:

Ezekial is specifically prophesying about an end to the Babylonian captivity ... and a restoration of the Jewish Kingdom ... Jerusalem ... and the Temple.

This is not an individual resurrection ... a promise of a heavenly reward ... but an expectation of the Messianic era and the coming of the Kingdom of God on the Earth.

Development of Thought

The **book of Job** ... perhaps the earliest written book of the scripture ... deals specifically with the issue rewards and punishments in this life.

- Job's closest "friends" "knew" that he must be a terrible sinner because of the fate that had befallen him.

“... the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine.” (18:5)

“His roots shall dry up beneath, and above shall his branch wither. His remembrance shall perish from the earth, and he shall have no name abroad. He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the world.” (18:16-18)

If you die ... before your time ... this is a punishment.

Development of Thought

But Job has a response ... from simple observation.

“Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yes, wax mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe, without fear, neither is the rod of G-d upon them.” (21:7-9)

“They spend their days in prosperity, and peacefully they go down to *sheol* (the grave). Yet they said unto G-d: ‘Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto Him?’” (21:13-15)

I see that the wicked prosper and fear nothing of God.

The Problem

The contradiction here is clear ...

- The good are obviously not always rewarded in this life ... and the persecutors of the Jewish way of life are obviously not all punished in this life.
- The promise of reward, of satisfaction, of Divine justice **must extend beyond the here and now.**

Then where exactly did the idea of rewards and punishments in this life come from ?

How did this develop ?

The Source

From the TORAH ... Deuteronomy.

“And it shall come to pass, if you shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love HaShem your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul,

that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your corn, and your wine, and your oil. And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you shall eat and be satisfied.

(Duet 11:13-15)

Rewards will be realized in the life of those who “hearken diligently unto My commandments ...”

The Source

From the TORAH ... Leviticus.

“If you walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them; then I will give your rains in their season, and the land shall yield her produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time; and you shall eat your bread until you have enough, and dwell in your land safely.

And I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid; and I will cause evil beasts to cease out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.

And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand; and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. And I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you; and will establish My covenant with you. (Lev 26:3-9)

Earthly rewards will be plentiful for those that “keep My commandments, and do them ...”

Development of Thought

- An examination of early Hebrew Wisdom Literature shows a clear development of concepts of rewards and punishments in an afterlife because the earlier belief ... by simple observation ... did not appear to be true.

“For it is easy with the Lord on the day of death to repay man according to his deeds.” (Sirach 11:26)

***The use of
Sheol
in the Hebrew Scriptures***

The abode of the dead ... not
a place of punishment.

Sheol

In Genesis (37) , when Jacob sees Joseph's coat of many colors that had been dipped in blood after Joseph had been sold into slavery by his brothers ... Jacob responds ...

“It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces.’ And Jacob rent his garments, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said: 'Nay, but I will go down to *sheol* to my son mourning.’ And his father wept for him.”

KJV ... grave

NRSV ... sheol

LXX ... hades

NKJ ... grave

NIV ... grave

JPS ... grave

Sheol

In Genesis (42), when Jacob is told by his sons who have gone off to Egypt for food ... that Benjamin must go back to Egypt with them to free Simeon ... he responds ...

“My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he only is left; if harm befall him by the way in which you go, then will you bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to *sheol*.”

KJV ... grave

NRSV ... sheol

LXX ... hades

NKJ ... grave

NIV ... grave

JPS ... grave

Sheol

In the book of Numbers (16), God becomes angry with a portion of the congregation of Israel ... and separates the people so that he may destroy the transgressors ...

“But if HaShem make a new thing, and the ground open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down alive into *sheol*, then you shall understand that these men have despised HaShem.

And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up ... and all that appertained to them, went down alive into *sheol*; and the earth closed upon them, and they perished from among the assembly.”

KJV ... pit

NKJ ... pit

NRSV ... sheol

NIV ... grave

LXX ... hades

JPS ... pit

Sheol

In the book of Deuteronomy (32), Moses counsels “all of the assembly of Israel” concerning the keeping of the Law ... just before he dies.

“And He (HaShem) said: 'I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a very forward generation, children in whom is no faithfulness. ... For a fire is kindled in My nostril, and burns unto the depths of *sheol*, and devours the earth with her produce, and sets ablaze the foundations of the mountains.’”

KJV ... pit

NKJ ... pit

NRSV ... sheol

NIV ... grave

LXX ... hades

JPS ... nether-world

Sheol

In 2 Samuel (22), David prayed to the Lord after he was delivered from the hands of his enemies.

“Praised, I cry, is HaShem, and I am saved from my enemies. For the waves of Death passed me. ... The cords of *sheol* surrounded me; the snares of Death confronted me.”

KJV ... hell

NRSV ... sheol

LXX ... hades

NKJ ... sheol

NIV ... grave

JPS ... sheol

Sheol

In prophecy of the book of Isaiah (28), the prophet speaks allegorically about the “deal” made between the rulers of the people and “death.”

“Wherefore hear the word of HaShem, you scoffers, the ballad-mongers of this people which is in Jerusalem: Because you have said: 'We have made a covenant with death, and with *sheol* are we at agreement; when the scouring scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us; for we have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood have we hid ourselves ...’”

KJV ... hell

NRSV ... sheol

LXX ... hades

NKJ ... sheol

NIV ... grave

JPS ... nether-world

Sheol

Also in the book of Isaiah (38), after an illness, during which King Hezeki'ah thought that he would die ... he writes ...

“I said: In the noontide of my days I shall go, even to the gates of *sheol*; I am deprived of the residue of my years. I said: I shall not see HaShem, even HaShem in the land of the living; I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.”

KJV ... grave

NKJ ... grave

NRSV ... sheol

NIV ... death

LXX ... hades

JPS ... nether-world

Sheol

In the book of Jonah (2), Jonah prays ...

“Then Jonah prayed unto HaShem his G-d out of the fish's belly. And he said: I called out of my affliction unto HaShem, and He answered me; out of the belly of *sheol* cried I, and You heard my voice. For You did cast me into the depth, in the heart of the seas ...”

KJV ... hell

NRSV ... sheol

LXX ... hades

NKJ ... sheol

NIV ... grave

JPS ... nether-world

Sheol

In the book of Job (11), the question is posed on how one can know the mind of God.

“Can you find out the deep things of G-d? Can you attain unto the purpose of the Almighty? It is high as heaven; what can you do? Deeper than *sheol*; what can you know?”

KJV ... hell

NRSV ... sheol

LXX ... hades

NKJ ... sheol

NIV ... grave

JPS ... nether-world

Sheol

Clearly ... the concept of **Sheol** throughout Hebrew scriptural development was simply one of an abode for the dead.

An “early death” was a punishment ... **Sheol** was not ...

Ideas of a “need” for Divine reward and punishment developed over time ... but were not necessarily tied to early concepts of **Sheol**.

Developments

- In Isaiah and Daniel we see the hope of resurrection
 - **Isaiah** (8th cent BCE) ... “your dead shall live, my dead bodies shall rise again. Awake and sing, you that dwell in dust...”
 - **Daniel** (7th cent BCE) ... “and many of those that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake: some unto everlasting life, and others to everlasting shame and contempt.”
- This all occurs on “the day of the Lord.”
- During the late Second Temple period (1st cent BCE – 1st cent CE) a major controversy between Jewish sects was concerned with the resurrection from the dead.
 - Pharisees ... believed
 - Sadducees ... rejected

Developments

During the period of the Pharisees and Sadducees, Hellenism gave rise to speculation about life after death, and brought with it beliefs which came to be discussed and considered at length in Jewish circles. Speculation reached fever pitch during time of Maccabees and became increasingly apocalyptic during Roman period.”

- “How can God's callous disregard for the righteous be justified?”
- “... it solves the eternal problem of theodicy: God's justice.”

“While rabbinic Judaism subscribed to a notion of life after death and resurrection, it tolerated a great deal of speculation concerning the particulars ...”

- “... the concept of hell was never extensively developed in Judaism.”

Rabbi Scheinerman

Rewards and Punishments in the Maccabees

Presence at God's throne ...
eternal torment

The Books of the Maccabees

Text		Vaticanus 4 th cent	Sinaiticus 4 th cent	Alexandrinus 5 th cent
1 Maccabees			X	X
2 Maccabees				X
3 Maccabees				X
4 Maccabees			X	X

Background To Conflict

- Judea comes under Seleucid control in 223 BCE.
- Antiochus III, 198 BCE, issues decrees favorable to the Jews.
- Antiochus IV (Epiphanes) becomes Seleucid emperor in 187 BCE.
 - “The Magnificent” to his friends ... “The Mad” to his enemies.
 - Claims to be the manifestation of Zeus.
 - Desires to fully Hellenize (*Hellenizo* ... to make Greek) the empire.
- Judas Maccabeus “the hammer,” the son of a priest leads a revolt against the Seleucids and defeats them.
 - In 165 BCE, Judas establishes control over Jerusalem.
 - The Temple is reconsecrated ... 164 BCE ... feast of Hanukkah.
- 4 Maccabees is an expansion of a story told in 1 Maccabees 6:18 – 7:42.

4 Maccabees

- Purpose: To present an interpretation of Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy.
 - Devout reason is sovereign over the emotions. (1:1)
- Written, 20-54 CE ... Once attributed to Josephus under the title, “On the Supremacy of Reason.”
- In the face of Jewish resistance, Antiochus sought to force all Jews “to eat defiling foods and to renounce Judaism.” (4:26)
- Eleazar, seven sons and their mother.
 - All offered life for eating pork and meat of sacrifices made to idols.
 - All willing to die ... for the Law.

4 Maccabees

- “Therefore, O children of Abraham, die nobly for your religion!” (6:22)
- “O man of blessed age and of venerable gray hair and of law-abiding life, whom the faithful seal of death has perfected!” (7:15)
- “... like our patriarchs Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, do not die to God, but live in God.” (7:19)
- For if we so die, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will welcome us, and all the fathers will praise us.” (13:14-17)

4 Maccabees

Seven brothers ... handsome ... modest ... noble ... with their aged mother.

- “... **we are ready to die** rather than transgress our ancestral commandments ...” (9:1)
- “For we, through this severe suffering and endurance, shall have the prize of virtue and **shall be with God**, for whom we suffer;
but you ... will deservedly undergo from the **divine justice eternal torment by fire.**” (9:8-9)
- “You will not escape, most abominable tyrant, the **judgments of the divine wrath.**” (9:32)

4 Maccabees

In the end ... divine justice ... punishment

- “... justice has laid up for you intense and eternal fire and tortures, and these throughout all time will never let you go.” (12:12)
- “... on you he will take vengeance both in this present life and when you are dead.” (12:18)
- “The tyrant Antiochus was both punished on earth and is being chastised after his death.” (18:5)

4 Maccabees

In the end ... divine justice ... reward

- You ... and your sons “... stand in honor before God and are firmly set in heaven with them.” (17:5)
 - “The prize was immortality in endless life.” (17:12)
 - “... they now stand before the divine throne and live through blessed eternity.” (17:18)
- “But the sons of Abraham with their victorious mother are gathered together into the chorus of the fathers, and have received pure and immortal souls from God, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (18:23-24)

Developments

This specific thread of development concerning the afterlife ... and specifically philosophical apologetics ... for and within Judaism ... ended abruptly with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.

During later rabbinic developments ... speculation began again ...

- “While rabbinic Judaism subscribed to a notion of life after death and resurrection, it tolerated a great deal of speculation concerning the particulars ...”
 - “... the concept of hell was never extensively developed in Judaism.”

Rabbi Scheinerman