

Gehinnom
Valley of Hinnom



A photo of Gehenna at Jerusalem

Many Bibles render the Hebrew words Sheol, Gehenna and Hades as “Hell”. What are the accurate translations?

The following is an actual discussion about this issue.

BA: “Hell” translates the Greek word “hades”, not “Gehenna”.

XX: Please present evidence from an expert on your claim about the translation. I want quotes, citations, and links.

BA—*“Gehenna . . . It is place where the wicked are destroyed body and soul, which perhaps echos the idea of annihilation (Mt 10:28). . . . These passages suggest the apocalyptic imagery of other NT passages is to be taken for what is, imagery, and not as strictly literal theological affirmation”*—Dictionary of the Bible, pp 299-300, by John L McKenzie, S. J.

“Sheol . . . Sheol is death . . . In the NT Sheol (Gk hades) appears in several forms . . . Sheol/Hades is replaced by death . . . Hades as a destructive power follows death . . . Hades is the agent of destruction”—Ibid. pp 800-801

“If your hand makes you sin, cut it off. Better that you should be maimed but obtain eternal life, rather than keep both hands and go to Gey-Hinnom, to the unquenchable fire! And if your foot makes you sin, cut it off! Better that you should be lame but obtain eternal life, rather than keep both feet and be thrown into Gey-Hinnom! And if your eye makes you sin, pluck it out! Better that you should be one-eyed but enter the Kingdom of God, rather than keep both eyes and be thrown into Gey-Hinnom”—Mark 9:43,45,47,48 Jewish New Testament

Jesus is obviously using figures of speech in this account.

Why are verses 44 and 46 omitted in this and most modern translations?

“These verses, lacking in some important early manuscripts, are here omitted as scribal additions. They simply repeat Mk 9:48 itself a modified citation of Is 66:24”—NAB note on Mark 9:44,46

Notice the cross-reference back to Isaiah 66:24. Why? Let’s see:

“They shall go out out and see the corpses of the people who rebelled against me; For their worm shall not die, their fire shall die, their fire shall not be extinguished; and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh”—Isaiah 66:24 NAB

“God’s enemies lay dead outside the walls of the New Jerusalem; just as in the past, corpses, filth and refuse lay in the Valley of Hinnom (Gehenna) outside the city; cf. 34:1-4; 2 Kgs 23:10”—NAB note on Isaiah 66:24

This is the background to the cross-reference (**Isaiah 66:24**) of **Mark 9:43-48**.

Concerning “Gehinnom,” the Jewish commentator David Kimhi (1160?-1235?), in his comment on **Psalm 27:13**, gives the following historical information: “And it is a place in the land adjoining Jerusalem, and it is a loathsome place, and they throw there unclean things

and carcasses. Also there was a continual fire there to burn the unclean things and the bones of the carcasses. Hence, the judgment of the wicked ones is called parabolically Gehinnom."

BA—"Hades" does not appear in the Greek text at **Matthew 10:28**. The original Greek is accurately translated, **"be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna" (Matthew 10:28 NAB)**. The NIV mistranslates "Gehenna" as "hell".

Notice that even the "soul" is destroyed in Gehenna, clearly picturing eternal destruction.

XX: Here is another one: "41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." **Mat 13:41-42 NIV**

BA—Just as the "wheat" and the "weeds" are symbolic in this parable, so is the "fire". Many things in parables are word pictures, illustrations.

XX: And here is another one: "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" **Mat 25:41 NIV**

BA—How can immaterial spirits ("the devil and his angels") burn?—They can't!

XX: And here is another one: "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." **Mat 25:46 NIV**

BA—Yes, **"they will be punished with everlasting destruction " (2 Thessalonians 1:9 NIV)**, not eternal life in fire.

The Hebrew words Sheol, Gehenna and Hades are not accurately rendered as "Hell", but are more accurately transliterated as Sheol, Gehenna and Hades. Only Gehenna means eternal destruction. Sheol and Hades simply mean death.