

“Hell”

Greek and Hebrew words to become familiar with

Old Testament Hebrew word:

sheol = “the grave”, or “the pit”. Often used to describe the state of death; similar to the New Testament word *hades* in meaning.

New Testament words:

hades = “the grave”, or the state of death. Similar to the Old Testament word *sheol* in meaning.

Gehenna = “the valley of Hinnom”, a location outside of Jerusalem, where some will be killed, or have their bodies destroyed, by fire.

Tartarus = “a place of imprisonment for sinful angels”. Only occurrence is in 2 Peter 2:4.

English Translations

English translations of the Bible can make it difficult to understand what is said about hell.

There are some general rules, however, and it will help if you become familiar with how your translation approaches this subject.

(For translations not mentioned below, there may be notes in the Preface or in the margin.)

King James Version

In the **Old Testament**, “hell” is always a translation of the Hebrew word *sheol*, and is best translated as “the grave”, often indicating the state of death.

In the **New Testament**, “hell” is always a translation of the Greek words *hades* or *gehenna*, except for one instance in 2 Peter 2:4, where it has been translated “hell” from the Greek word *tartarus*. Notes in the margin may be of help to determine which Greek word is the original.

New King James Version

In the **Old Testament**, “hell” is always a translation of the Hebrew word *sheol*, and should be translated as “the grave” or “the pit”. Sometimes *sheol* is actually translated directly as “Sheol”; other times it is translated as “the grave”, “the pit”, etc.

In the **New Testament**, the Greek word *hades* is always translated directly as “Hades”; and “hell” is a translation of the Greek word *gehenna* (except for one instance in 2 Peter 2:4, where it has been translated “hell” from the Greek word *tartarus*).

New International Version

The word “hell” does not appear in the **Old Testament** at all. The words “the grave” and “the pit” usually will mean exactly that – grave or pit.

In the **New Testament**, the word “hell” is usually a translation of the Greek word *gehenna*, except for 2 Peter 2:4, where it is a translation of the Greek word *tartarus*. The Greek word *hades* is sometimes actually translated directly as “Hades”, and other times translated as “the depths”, “the grave”, etc. In such instances, there is often a footnote indicating that *hades* was the original Greek word.