

“Is There a Specific Reference to Heaven or Hell in the OT?”

Is there any specific reference to Heaven or Hell in the Old Testament or did this notion emerge solely as a result of the Persians' Zoroastrian influence on the Jews?

The OT contains numerous references to heaven. Many of these refer to the physical heavens (Gen. 1:1, Psalm 19:1, etc.). Nevertheless, there do also seem to be a number of references to heaven as the dwelling place of God (1 Kings 8:30, Psalm 11:4, etc.).

As for the term “hell,” it depends on which English translation you consult. The KJV, for instance, translates the Hebrew term “Sheol” as “hell.” The NASB, on the other hand, simply renders this term “Sheol.” The NIV translates this term in a variety of ways: the grave, death, the depths, etc., depending on the context. Strictly speaking, sheol (the Hebrew term) does not refer to hell in my judgment. It might refer to Hades (i.e., a temporary place of punishment for the unrighteous dead between death and resurrection) in some contexts. But hell, as I understand it, is properly understood as the second death, the Lake of Fire, the place of eternal punishment. And this is not true of either Sheol or Hades (see Revelation 20:13-15). Thus, the Hebrew term Sheol can, in certain contexts, be used in a manner similar to the NT term Hades (e.g. Job 26:6; etc.), but I personally don't think it refers to hell (strictly speaking).

I do not think it's necessary to suppose that Zoroastrianism was solely responsible for the NT doctrines of heaven and hell. In the first place, the OT does refer to heaven as the dwelling place of God, distinct from the physical universe.

For another, the OT concept of Sheol is often used to refer to the place of the dead (i.e., the place of the dead between death and resurrection). This actually parallels the NT doctrines of Abraham's Bosom or Paradise and Hades (see Luke 16:19-31). In the OT, Sheol was apparently a place for both the righteous and unrighteous dead. It may have been a place of rest for the righteous and a place of torment for the unrighteous. However, in the course of progressive revelation, we have been given a clearer vision of the afterlife (including the eternal state) in the NT. Thus, I think this can be easily explained in terms of progressive revelation, rather than as borrowing from Zoroastrianism.

In case you're interested, I have written a [previous reply about Zoroastrianism](#). Although this reply is attempting to answer some questions other than what you've asked about, it may nonetheless be of benefit to you.

I hope this helps.

Sincerely in Christ,

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“If Judged at Death, Why Judged Later?”

I found your article on [what happens at death](#). My question is, if we are judged at death immediately, why do we say the in the creeds that at the second coming Jesus will judge the quick (living) and the dead since the dead have already been judged? Anxious to hear back from you. Thanks.

Thanks for your letter. There is what some have called a “judgment of faith” which takes place immediately at death and a “judgment of works” which takes place at some time afterward.

The “judgment of faith” may be in view in Hebrews 9:27. A good biblical example is the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Notice that the rich man finds himself in “Hades” after death, while Lazarus is in Paradise. This judgment is based on one’s relationship with the Lord and has nothing to do with works per se.

However, the Bible also speaks of a “judgment of works.” For unbelievers, this judgment will apparently take place just prior to the creation of the new heavens and new earth (see Rev. 20:11 – 21:1). Notice that even death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire at this time (Rev. 20:14). In other words, “Hades” (where the rich man went at death) is not to be equated with the lake of fire (which is where unbelievers will spend eternity after the Great White Throne judgment).

Believers will also experience a “judgment of works” at the judgment seat of Christ (see 1 Cor. 3:10-15). This judgment does not determine whether the person is saved or not, for this judgment only includes those who are already saved. It rather determines whether one will receive eternal rewards or not. Apparently, some believers will not receive any rewards (1 Cor. 3:15). Theologians do not agree on precisely when this judgment will take place. But most believe that it follows the initial “judgment of faith” at some later time. It certainly occurs before the creation of the new heavens and new earth (where resurrected believers will spend eternity in joyful fellowship with God and one another).

Hope this helps clear up some of the confusion.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

