

The Lake of Fire is the Second Death

20: 14-15

DIG: What is Sh'ol? What happens to it? How is Sh'ol different than the lake of fire? Why are people thrown into the lake of fire? How long will they be there? How can anyone escape the lake of fire? What does Jesus call it?

REFLECT: How can you or your loved ones avoid the second death and the lake of fire? If someone deliberately keeps on sinning after they have received the knowledge of the truth, what is left for them?

The evidence is indisputable, the verdict given and justice will finally be carried out. Just as there is a **second** and higher life in heaven for the faithful, there is also a **second** and deeper **death** in **the lake of fire** for the wicked. Because of that higher life in heaven, there is no more **death**; accordingly, after **the deeper death** in **the lake of fire**, there will be no more life. So the **lake of fire** not only represents the punishment of the enemies of righteousness but also their full and final defeat.⁴⁶⁸

Then **death** itself and **Sh'ol** with all the wicked dead will be **thrown into the lake of fire** (20:14a) where the antichrist, the false prophet (19:20) and Satan (20:10) were already in agony. The word **Sh'ol** is used eleven times and is to be distinguished from the word *Gehenna*, which refers to the final **hell**, or **the lake of fire**. *Gehenna* is the New Covenant word for the Valley of Ben Hinnom located southwest of Jerusalem. (also called **Topeth**, see the commentary on **Jeremiah Cf - They Will Bury the Dead in Topheth**). In the TaNaKh, idolatrous Israelites burned their children in **the fire** there as sacrifices to false gods (**Jeremiah 19:2-6**). In **Jesus'** day, it was the site of Jerusalem's garbage dump. The fires kept burning day and night, giving off foul-smelling smoke. Sometimes bodies of criminals were dumped there to burn in the flames. Thus, the Valley of Ben Hinnom was a fitting picture of eternal hell (**Matthew 5:22, 29-30, 10:28; 18:9, 23:15 and 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5**).⁴⁶⁹ **Yeshua** called it **the outer darkness** (Mt 8:12; 22:13; 25:30 KJV), and is symbolic of something much worse than the burning **fire** of *Gehenna*. It is the eternal, absolute separation from **God**, for death apart from **Christ** means separation.⁴⁷⁰

Throughout the pages of the TaNaKh, both the righteous and the unrighteous were said to go to a place called **Sh'ol** in Hebrew and **Hades** in Greek. While the Levitical sacrifices *covered* their sins it did not *remove* their sins (**Hebrews 10:4**). Only the death of **Messiah** could do that. So while the sacrificial system was sufficient to temporarily cover their sins, it was not able to get them into heaven. So all who died, both the righteous and the

unrighteous, went to a place known as **Sh'ol**. It had two compartments (**Luke 16:19-31**), one was a place of torment for the wicked and the other, known as **Abraham's side**, was a place of comfort, also called **paradise (23:43)**. But it was not heaven. The two sides could communicate with each other, but they were separated by an immense gulf that made it impossible to cross over to the other side. When the righteous of the TaNaKh died, their bodies went into the ground, but their souls would go to **Abraham's side** or **paradise**. On the other hand, when unbelievers died, their bodies went in the ground, but their souls would be tormented on the unrighteous side of **Sh'ol**.

When **Jesus** died, **He** not only paid the price for all future sins, but **He** also paid the price for all past sins (**Romans 3:25; Hebrews 9:15**). Therefore, the sins of the righteous of the TaNaKh were removed. While the body of **Yeshua** remained in the tomb, **His** soul went down to **Sh'ol**, announcing that **He** had redeemed, or bought back, the souls of all the righteous of the TaNaKh. Then, when **Messiah** arose from the dead, the righteous of the TaNaKh were removed from **paradise** and brought to heaven (**Ephesians 4:8-10**). Consequently, the righteous side of **Sh'ol** is no long occupied.

Sh'ol is temporary, but **the lake of fire** will be permanent. I was once the foreman of a jury that sent a twenty-nine-year-old man to prison for rape. He was sentenced to thirty years, with five counts of special circumstances, adding five years for each count. Instead of serving fifty-five years he will probably serve half that time if he behaves himself. But the incarceration in **the lake of fire** is eternal, and eternal is a long, long time.

The lake of fire is the second death (20:14b). This will be the end of the first **death** - physical **death**. This is the good news for believers, but horrible news for the lost. When they are raised from the dead they will want to die physically, but they will have new resurrected bodies that cannot be destroyed in **the lake of fire**. As a result, their suffering will be eternal. When the earth is destroyed, people will be in one of two places: the New Jerusalem, or **the lake of fire**.⁴⁷¹

Death will be finally removed from the scene for believers. No longer will it be said: **In Adam all die (First Corinthians 15:22)**. **Death** is personified because it is man's greatest enemy. In the TaNaKh we read: **I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction (Hosea 13:14)**. And in the B'rit Chadashah, Rabbi Sha'ul writes: **The last enemy to be destroyed is death . . . Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting (First Corinthians 15:26 and 55)**. In both instances, **God the Holy Spirit** emphasizes through the human writers, that **Jesus** has overcome **the grave** and because **He** has overcome the grave, we, through **Him**, can also conquer **death**.

Today, when unbelievers die, their bodies are buried in the ground and their soul goes to hell. However, when believers die, their bodies are also buried in the ground, but their souls immediately go to heaven to be with **the Lord (Second Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23)**.

When the first resurrection occurs, the bodies of believers will be resurrected and reunited with their souls. This will happen at the Rapture for the New Covenant saints, and after the Second Coming (see **Ey - The Seventy-Five Day Interval**), for the righteous of the TaNaKh and the Tribulation Martyrs. When the second resurrection occurs, the bodies of the unbelievers will be resurrected and reunited with their souls from **Hades**.⁴⁷²

If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he or she was thrown into the lake of fire (20:15). Because the lost will have their names blotted out of the book of life (Psalm 69:28; Exodus 32:30-32), an awful blank spot will be left in the book where their name should have been. Then they will be worthy of judgment and thrown into the lake of fire. But everyone whose name is found written in the book of life - will be delivered (Dani'el 12:1). Jesus said it this way: He who overcomes will be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels (3:5).

There is only one way to avoid the terrifying reality of **Sh'ol**. Those who confess their sins and ask **God** to forgive them on the basis of **Messiah's** substitutionary death on their behalf will be delivered from **His eternal wrath (Romans 5:9; First Thessalonians 1:10, 5:9)**. For those who refuse to repent, however, the grave warning expressed by the writer to the Hebrews will apply: **If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the Torah died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the New Covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Holy Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said: It is mine to avenge, I will repay, and again, "ADONAI, will judge His people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:26-31).**⁴⁷³