

In most modern translations of verse 3 we have the Hebrew word *Sheol*, the place of the dead. It is usually pictured as an underworld, as when the spirit of Samuel rises out of the earth 1 Samuel 28. The King James Version translates the word as *hell* but Sheol does not appear as a place of torment in the Old Testament. It is simply death or the grave.

In the Septuagint *Sheol* is translated to the Greek *Hades*, the underworld in Greek mythology where all the dead go, whether virtuous or wicked. This should not be interpreted that souls are kept in some intermediate place awaiting judgment, merely that they have died.

Mythology tells of a fiery prison at the lower reaches of Hades called *Tartarus*. Peter uses this word in 2 Peter 2:4 for the hell where the rebellious angels are

imprisoned. We should note that only the words are borrowed from Greek mythology for translation purposes, not the concepts.

The word properly translated as *hell* is the Greek *gehenna*. It comes from the Hebrew for the Valley of Hinnon outside Jerusalem, the place where trash was burned. Another phrase is the *lake of fire*. In Revelation 20:14 we read of Hades being thrown into the lake of fire, showing they are not the same.

Happy places of contentment and reward are called *heaven*, the Greek word *paradise* (Luke 23:43), and *Abraham's bosom* (Luke 16:22).

[Sorry, this has little to do with Psalm 116. I just thought it might be interesting to review the Biblical words used for the afterlife.]

Questions for study and discussion:

1. Why does the Psalmist love the Lord? Why else do we love the Lord?
2. What are the circumstances of this Psalm?
3. Verse 5 says the Lord is gracious and merciful, understandable from the context, but why does it add that He is righteous?
4. What does verse 6 mean? Who are the "simple"?

5. How can we take the advice of verse 7?

6. What do verses 10 and 11 mean?

7. Can we repay our debt to the Lord? What can we give Him?

8. What does verse 15 mean, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” (Note that the same Hebrew word for “precious” is translated “precious” or “rare” 1 Samuel 3:1.)

9. Where do we see Christ in this Psalm?