

Why Did God Not Warn Of Hell In The Old Testament?

If eternal torment in a place of suffering called "hell" is the destination of all those who reject God, then why did God never mention that fact in the entire Old Testament?

The Old Testament period covers approximately 4,000 years. Yet God never uttered a word about people going to a hell of torment after death for all that time.

Are we to believe that God is so callous that He did not care and would not warn the people of this disastrous consequence of not doing His will? Or could our modern idea of "hell" possibly be just a tradition invented by man?

You may think hell is mentioned in the Old Testament. But that is only because the King James Version (KJV) sometimes translates Sheol as hell. The KJV translated Sheol as grave 31 times, hell 31 times, and pit 3 times in the Old Testament. Clearly, even the KJV translators did not believe Sheol meant hell in the modern sense.¹

Recent translations remedy this error. Modern translations never translate Sheol, or any other word in the Old Testament, as "hell." (The one exception is the New King James, whose stated goal was to simply update the KJV while conforming as closely as possible to it.)

In fairness to the KJV translators, the meaning of the word "hell" has changed in the last four centuries. Previously, it could mean any place that was covered or hidden. Today, hell has no such meaning. That is why modern translations never use "hell" even once in translating the entire Old Testament.

Even those who teach an eternal hell of torment for all unbelievers have to admit the Old Testament is silent on the issue. To maintain their position they have to teach that Jesus introduced this new revelation. (And this is all based on their supposition that Jesus did not use Gehenna in a literal sense, meaning the valley of Hinnom, but as a place of torment in the afterlife.) They may try to read back into the Old Testament some ideas that hint at some indication of hell. But any honest person will have to admit the Old Testament does not teach it.

If God is like Jesus of Nazareth, and Scripture says He is, it is simply inconceivable that God would fail to warn people of hell during the entire Old Testament period – if hell is a place of punishment by never-ending torment in fire.

¹ See Words Translated As Hell chapter for more information.