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THE BIBLICAL UNDERWORLD ABOUT PURGATORY: SHEOL – A NEW APPROACH

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Abstract

»He punishes us; then he shows us mercy. He sends us down to the world of the dead, then he brings us up from the grave« (Tob 13:2). The Old and New Testament theology of Sheol (hereinafter *šeođl*) follows the logical sequence of human life and death. Man enters *šeođl* as he has built himself during his lifetime. In other words, in *šeođl* the basic human determination and nature does not change. It cannot happen in *šeođl* that a righteous person turns into a wicked and a wicked person becomes a righteous. However, the key characteristic of *šeođl* is not the immutability of the basic position but the impossibility of expressing praise to God. This virtue characterizes the life of a righteous person who glorifies God with his righteousness. Therefore, the righteous man by his nature does not belong to that place because the one who praised and blessed God during his life cannot stop glorifying him even in *šeođl*. The wicked man, however, who does not glorify God during his lifetime is suited to the postmortem environment of *šeođl* in which God's name is not invoked. Thus we come to the conclusion that *šeođl* belongs exclusively to sinners, or to those who do not praise God. The theology of *šeođl* reached its peak in the teaching that *šeođl* is not the eternal abode of the righteous. The righteous indeed descends to *šeođl* but his soul does neither rot there nor does he become a part of the impersonal contents of *šeođl*. Since it cannot remain in *šeođl*, the justified soul after freeing itself from its habits that led it to sin during its life and having risen in holiness, rises to the heights and it is God himself who delivers it and who rewards it with a happy eternity. Therefore, for the dominant biblical theology it is not questionable that the righteous will see the face of God but what privileges one over the other is the time of stay in the place of the dead, i.e. *šeođl*. The elaborate Christian theology calls that time of souls' stay in the place of the dead the purgatory.

Keywords: hell, purgatory, retribution, Sheol/ *šeođl*.

Introduction¹

Unlike the Mesopotamian culture which burned its dead or the Egyptian culture which mummified them, the Canaanite tradition developed the custom of burying its dead and – by the same analogy – elaborated the belief about the afterlife: If the lifeless body goes to the ground then the soul goes with the body. So, Hebrew tradition too placed the dead in their natural environment which is again the earth or underground. Since the theology of retribution prevails in the Old Testament, the theology of the afterlife fell under its jurisdiction. In other words, Semitic thought reduced most of the theological content to concrete and visible earthly reality.²

There are at least four chronological stages of the Old Testament understanding of retribution. It is first of all the primitive theology of retribution, the temple theology of retribution, then the Deuteronomistic theology of retribution, and finally the rabbinic theology of retribution.³ Primitive theology of retribution reduces all human holiness and sinfulness to earthly life. According to it, man lives blamelessly in order to be happy and carefree on earth. The primitive theology of retribution would be associated with the time before the First Temple in which meritorious deeds mark both the righteous and the sinner. Accordingly, everyone, both the righteous and the sinners, natives and foreigners, after death go to the immovable *š^{eo}l* because during their lifetime everyone received a deserved reward or punishment for themselves.⁴ The temple theology of retribution begins with the time of the kingdom of Israel and is closely related to the priestly temple service. The old pagan custom of propitiating the deity by burning a sacrifice to him was elaborated down to the smallest detail in the temple priestly tradition. Temple theology of retribution is not as much concerned with the problem of sin as with the theology of ritual sacrifice.⁵ The sinner is primarily rid of ritual impurity through ritual cleans-

¹ Part of this article without a critical apparatus was published under: Dubravko TURALIJA, Spokojni i nasilni, privremeni i trajni *š^{eo}l*, in: *Vjesnik Đakovačko osječke nadbiskupije* 10 (2019), 2-6.

² For a broader understanding see: Walter REBELL, Tod, in: Helmut BURKHARDT et al. (ed.), *Das Grosse Bibellexikon*, vol. 3, Wuppertal, 1990, 1578-1579.

³ For a broader understanding see: Edward BEECHER, History of Opinions on the Scriptural Doctrine of Retribution, in: <https://www.tentmaker.org/books/DoctrineOfRetribution.html> (24/10/2023); Cf. Dermot COX, As Water split on the Ground (Death in the Old Testament), in: *Studia misionalia* 31 (1982) 1, 1-17.

⁴ On the apocalyptic elements of the journey of the soul after death see: Richard BAUCKHAM, Early Jewish Visions of Hell, in: *The Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990) 2, 355-385.

⁵ Cf. Lesley R. DIFRANSICO, *Washing Away Sin. An Old Testament Metaphor and Its Influence* (doc. diss.), Wahington D.C., 2014, 26-30.

ing. Thus, the temple theology of retribution overshadowed personal sin and paid attention to ritual cleansing so that the believer, above all, could participate in religious acts. Only with the later Deuteronomistic theology of retribution, along with impurity, sin and punishment already emphasized, did the theology of repentance and forgiveness gain more and more importance. The Deuteronomistic theology, along with the principle of God's punishment, also developed the principle of God's forgiveness according to the widely accepted Deuteronomistic key: people sin, God punishes them, people repent, God forgives them.⁶ The Deuteronomistic theology was fully developed in the pre-Christian Maccabean, or Rabbinic-Pharisaic theology, according to which faith in the resurrection of the righteous soul and the destruction of the sinful, redirected the rite of purification from a social to a personal cursor (cf. 2 Macc 12:38-45).⁷ The offering of the sacrifice is still crucial – not only for the sake of ritual purity – but also for the sake of justice and the forgiveness of sins so that the soul can be resurrected.

So what rabbinic theology especially elaborated is the diaphragm between the life of the righteous and the life of the wicked as well as the death of the righteous and the death of the wicked (cf. Prov 10:2; 11:19). As much as these two natures are contradictory and untouchable during life, they remain contradictory and untouchable even after death. The rabbinic school thus develops the theology of the resurrection of the soul (not the body), but again bases it on the Old Testament theology of *š'êôl*, i.e. the place of the dead.⁸ Of course, with this theology, there were still those who contradicted that there is no resurrection and that all human actions are compensated by temporal retribution (cf. Mk 12:18-27).⁹ But, for the dominant Old Testament theologians, it was not in doubt that the righteous would see the face of God, but what privileged one over the other was the time spent in the place of the dead, i.e. *š'êôl* (cf. 49:12).

The Old Testament theology of *š'êôl* does not directly speak of purgatory, but separating the temporary stay in *š'êôl* from its permanent abode it indirectly teaches that there is a place where the souls of the righteous »stay« and enter the *š'êôl* process of transformation for eternal resurrection. The theology

⁶ Cf. Rudolf SMEND, *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments. Zweite, durchgesehene und ergänzte Auflage*, Stuttgart, 1981., 110-116; Herrie. F. VAN ROOY, A New Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible, in: *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 30 (2004) 2, 139-150.

⁷ Cf. Dubravko TURALIJA, Krivnja, kajanje i pomirenje u konceptualnoj perspektivi Svetoga pisma i kršćanskih denominacija, in: *Diacovensia* 24 (2016) 4, 521-537, here: 521-523.

⁸ Cf. Rudolf PESCH, *Das Markusevangelium*, Vol. 2, Freiburg, 1977, 229-236.

⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

of purgatory is actually a progressive theology of the *š^eôl* which gained additional momentum in Christian theology but which still has not reached its essential theological height.

1. Etymology of the word *š^eôl*

Before we deal with the close link between the word *š^eôl* and the personal name Shaul, it is unusual that the closest Old Testament term to the Croatian word »pakao«, i.e. hell, is the Hebrew word *לִאֲוִיִּם* (*š^eôl*), which also has its own defective scriptum *לִאֲוִיִּם* (*š^eôl*).¹⁰ The already visible alternative in the Hebrew spelling indicates its historical far-reaching but also permanent theological burden. The etymological meaning of the word *š^eôl* has diverged over the centuries. Delitzsch's¹¹, as well as Baumgartner's¹² or Frankenberg's¹³ interpretations that the word is linked to underworld is unlikely because the old Greek term *Hadēs* had already been theologically processed concept of the complex Greek underground world. An even more radical option is the one advocated by Mansi¹⁴, Ewald¹⁵ and Oesterley¹⁶ that the *š^eôl* is an unchanging state of the hell.¹⁷

If we look at the lexicon of the word *לִאֲוִיִּם* (*š^eôl*) and the personal name *שָׁאוּל* (*šā'ûl*), we will notice that the words are spelled the same »š^ev|« but pronounced differently. Apparently, due to their similarity, they are often confused with each other. The biblical text itself assures us of this because wherever the name of King Shaul *שָׁאוּל* (*šā'ûl*) is mentioned the word *לִאֲוִיִּם* (*š^eôl*) is omitted. The biblical writer, even where the term *š^eôl* was necessary (eg.

¹⁰ In this sense, Shaul Bar is right when he states that the very term *š^eôl* concerns »bad death«. See: Shaul BAR, *Grave Matters: Sheol in the Hebrew Bible*, in: *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 43 (2015), 3, 145-152., here 151.

¹¹ Cf. Ludwig Wächter, *לִאֲוִיִּם*, in: G. Johannes Botterweck (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of Old Testament*, Vol 4, Grand Rapids 2004, 239-249.

¹² Cf. Antoine J. BAUMGARTNER, *Étude critique sur l'état du texte du Livre des proverbes. D'après les principales traductions anciennes*, Leipzig, 1890, 222.

¹³ Cf. Wilhelm FRANKENBERG – Carl SIEGFRIED, *Die Sprüche, Prediger und Hohes Lied übersetzt und erklärt: Handkommentar zum Alten Testament: In Verbindung mit anderen Fachgelehrten. II. Abtheilung, Die Poetischen Bücher 3*, Göttingen, 1898, 162.

¹⁴ Cf. Horst SEEBASS, *שָׁאוּל*, in: G. Johannes BOTTERWECK, et al. (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol 9, Grand Rapids, 1998, 519.

¹⁵ Cf. Heinrich EWALD, *Die Salômonischen Schriften, Die Dichter des Alten Bundes*, Vol. 2, Göttingen, 1867, 257.

¹⁶ Cf. William O. E. OESTERLEY, *The Book of Proverbs. With Introduction and Notes*, London, 1929, 275.

¹⁷ For other theories, see: Ruth ROSENBERG, *The Concept of Biblical Sheol within the Context of ANE Belief* (Doc. Diss.), Harvard, 1980, 19-100.; Philip JOHNSTON, *The Underworld and the Dead in the Old Testament*, in: *Tyndale Bulletin* 45 (1994) 2, 415-419.

Shaul's calling of the deceased Samuel »from below« in 1 Sam 28), deliberately omits that word so as not to allude to the king's name Šā'ûl. Consequently, throughout 43 biblical chapters, i.e. from the first mention of the name Šā'ûl in 1 Sam 9:2 until his death in 2 Sam 21:14, the word š'ê'ôl is not mentioned anywhere.¹⁸ It is also interesting to note that the royal books of the Chronicles do not contain the word š'ê'ôl at all. All this leads us to the conclusion that the word š'ê'ôl is in a very close lexical relationship with the name Šā'ûl. Therefore, we come to the conclusion that the common root of both words would be the Hebrew לֶאֱשׁוּ (š'ôl) meaning »to search«, »to call«, »to lure«.¹⁹ Therefore, š'ê'ôl would, etymologically, originally mean »calling« or »enticing«. What calls out to man and entices him is actually his death. Accordingly, the Hebrew term š'ê'ôl is closely related not to the underworld but to death because it is death that beckons to š'ê'ôl. Later biblical material, as well as its Midrashic analysis, indicate that it is about luring, where š'ê'ôl is compared with the expression עֲלֻקָּה (cālūqâ), i.e. a leech that lures a man with its tentacles and sucks a man into its entrails (cf. Prov 30:15).²⁰

The Septuagint translates the Hebrew term לֶאֱשׁוּ (š'ê'ôl) with already existing Greek term ἄδης (hadēs), meaning »place of spirits« or »place of the dead«.²¹ The Vulgate translated the Hebrew term similarly as the noun »infernus« or »underworld«. The Aramaic Targums follow the Hebrew root with slightly different phonetics שְׁיַוּל (š'yuwl), as does the Syriac Bible, so-called The Peshitta: ܫܝܘܠ (š'yuwl), meaning »underworld«. Bridges translates the same Hebrew word as »grave«²², while Müntinghe uses the German term »das Schattenreich« or

¹⁸ Instead of the word š'ê'ôl the biblical writer also uses the mythical name *belijaal* in 2 Sam 22:5-6. For this, see: John A. EMERTON, Sheol and the Sons of Belial, in: *Vetus Testamentum* 63 (2013) 10, 109-112. Scott B. Noegel believes and explains that the noun »earth« in Genesis 1:1 could mean š'ê'ôl, i.e. the underworld. See: Scott B. NOEGEL, God Of Heaven And Sheol: The »Unearthing« Of Creation, in: *Hebrew Studies* 58 (2017) 2, 119-144.

¹⁹ William Foxwell Albright translates the same root לֶאֱשׁוּ (š'ôl) as »place of determination«. See: William Foxwell ALBRIGHT, The Etymology of Se'ol, in: *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 34 (1917-1918) 1, 209-210. For other opinions, see: Ludwig KÖHLER, Problems in the Study of the Language of the Old Testament, in: *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956) 1, 3-24.; Leonhard WÄCHTER, שְׁיַוּל (š'ê'ôl), in: Johannes BOTTERWECK et al. (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol 14, Grand Rapids – Cambridge, 2004, 239-248.

²⁰ Cf. Dubravko TURALIJA, *This Is Not How To Do It*, Sarajevo, 2019, 187-188.; Antonio RODRÍGUEZ CARMONA, Concepto de »muerte« en el Targum Palestinense del Pentateuco, in: *Estudios bíblicos* 41 (1983) 1-2, 107-136.

²¹ Cf. Henry G. LIDDELL – Robert SCOTT, *Greek-English Lexicon: With a Revised Supplement*, Oxford, 1996, 21.

²² Cf. Charles BRIDGES, *An Exposition of the Book of Proverbs*, New York, 1850, 442.; About š'ê'ôl as a grave and an unfortunate fate in general, see: Shaul BAR, Grave Matters: Sheol

the kingdom of shadows.²³ Doederlein, instead, reads the word *šəʾôl* as »das Totenreich« or the kingdom of the dead.²⁴

In the Croatian language, the word »pakao« comes from the root »pak« meaning »pitch«. ²⁵ Hence comes the word »paklina«, i.e. burning pitch or boiling tar but also the noun »paklenica«, i.e. a place of burning. Seemingly, etymologically unrelated entities: *šəʾôl*, »place that entices« and »pakao«, »place of impersonal content«, are actually very related. In the following text it will be elaborated that the Hebrew word *šəʾôl* is not only a place where mortal souls go but also a melting pot of souls into impersonal content. The Croatian word »pakao« theologically leans on the Hebrew word *šəʾôl* which denotes a place where certain contents are burned, melted and where everything becomes monolithic and impersonal (cf. Ps 49:15).

2. Two entrances to the *šəʾôl*

The *šəʾôl*'s theology developed progressively throughout Israel's long history. From the most primitive motionless »bed of the dead«, through Job and Kohelet's filter which is the only one that correctly distinguishes righteousness and evil to the one with two entrances that separates good from evil souls.²⁶

What does that *šəʾôl* look like? The Semites also came to this conclusion by analogy: Just as the ancients built their forts with mainly eastern and western gates so they observed the *šəʾôl*. The eastern gate of the Semitic cities was to the sun. The most important buildings with the richest population were located on that side. The western side of the city is regularly in the shade so its architecture is less attractive than the eastern side. In this context, the east side of Jerusalem is also the side of the Temple, the side of the king, the side that overlooks the Kidron valley and the side that brings messianic hope.²⁷ In contrast to it, the western side is directed towards the Hinnom or Ge-hinnom

in the Hebrew Bible, 145-152.

²³ Cf. Hermann MÜNTINGHE, *Die Sprüche Salomo's*, Frankfurt am Main, 1800, 59.

²⁴ Cf. Johann Ch. DOEDERLEIN, *Sprüche Salomons. Neu übersetzt mit kurzen erläuternden Anmerkungen*, Nürnberg und Altdorf, 1786, 190. For a wider context see: Eugen J. PEN-TIUC, 'Renewed By Blood': Sheol's Quest In 2 Baruch 56:6, in: *Revue biblique* 114 (2007) 4, 535-564.; Aron PINKER, Sheol, in: *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 23 (1995) 3, 168-179.

²⁵ Cf. Petar SKOK, *Etimologijski rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, 2, Zagreb, 1972, 588.

²⁶ For the broader context of Job's and Kohelet's views on *šəʾôl*, see: Dubravko TURALIJA, Koheletov hevelizam u odnosu na oprost i pomirenje, in: Zorica MAROS – Darko TOMAŠEVIĆ (ed.), *Oprost i pomirenje. Krilatice lišene sadržaja*, Sarajevo – Zagreb, 2018, 103-123. On the relationship between water and *šəʾôl*, see: Dominic RUDMAN, The Use of Water Imagery in Descriptions of Sheol, in: *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 113 (2001) 2, 240-244.

²⁷ Cf. Kurt HENNING (ed.), *Jerusalem Bibellexikon*, Neuhausen-Stuttgart, 1990, 399-409.

valley where the city's garbage and dead animals – later the corpses of executed criminals – were originally dumped.²⁸ Consequently, *š'əḥl* would also have two entrances which the New Testament compares to two sides – the right and the left (cf. Mt 25:34).²⁹ One entrance – which is narrower (cf. Lk 13:23-24) – goes down the natural way when a person, having lived out his days, is naturally directed towards death, i.e. *š'əḥl*. Others, however, are not descended naturally but forcibly. It is a wide entrance through which God precipitates into the underworld (cf. Mt 7:13-14). Thus, although according to biblical tradition, everyone goes to *š'əḥl*, not everyone goes to it by the same path and in the same way (cf. Ps 89:48). There are two ways of entering the *š'əḥl*: The first is natural and peaceful. The second is unnatural and violent. How does the first and how does the second entrance to *š'əḥl* work?

2.1. Peaceful or temporary *š'əḥl*

The natural descent into *š'əḥl* is the path of those who calmly enter the underworld (cf. Job 21:13). The only person who can be peaceful is the one who does not set foot on the path of sinners (cf. Ps 1:1), but the path of the righteous (cf. Ps 33:1). Therefore, the natural path to *š'əḥl* belongs to the righteous. In Genesis 37:35, the forefather Jacob wants to go down to *š'əḥl* for his son Joseph, whom he mourns inconsolably. It is about the old man's descent into the underworld which he still hopes for and wishes for. However, certain conditions in life can accelerate this process (cf. Gen 44:29). In a similar way, righteous Job also dreams of his peaceful descent into *š'əḥl* (cf. Job 7:9; 17:13), asking God not to throw him into it like an evildoer but to hide him in it. The verb *כָּפַן* (*cḥpn*) – »to hide«, additionally clarifies the Old Testament principle of natural descent into the *š'əḥl*. Therefore, the righteous man's life ends with a peaceful descent into the underworld (cf. Isa 38:10) but what awaits him there?

2.1.1. The elaborate theology of the peaceful *š'əḥl*

The detailing of the natural or peaceful *š'əḥl* begins with the historical books, i.e. with Deuteronomistic theology.³⁰ Over time, the theological doctrine came to the view that God does not treat equally those who descended into *š'əḥl*

²⁸ Cf. *ibid*, 344, 354-355.

²⁹ For a rabbinical comparison, see: Eliezer GINSBURG – Yosef WEINBERGER, *Mishlei, Proverbs. A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources*, Vol. 2, Brooklyn (N.Y.), 2007, 615.; 629-630.; Horst SEEBASS, 512, *שְׁחַל*.

³⁰ Cf. Dubravko TURALIJA, *Krivnja, kajanje i pomirenje u konceptualnoj perspektivi Svetoga pisma i kršćanskih denominacija*, 521-522.

by natural means and those who got there by force (cf. 1 Sam 2:6). In David's will to his son Solomon this was additionally clarified. David advises Solomon not to allow the privileged Joab, who caused David many evils (cf. 2 Sam 3:26; 18:14; 19:6) to go down peacefully into the š^eôl but that it must be a violent way in order to satisfy justice (cf. 1 Kgs 2:6,9). The old man's peaceful descent into the š^eôl faithfully outlined the life of a righteous man who is prepared for his death (cf. Tob 11:9). However, the theology of š^eôl went a step further: Man enters š^eôl as he was during his life and remains like that in it (cf. Ps 6:6; 16:10). It means that in š^eôl humans do not change their position and nature that has built during their lifetime (cf. Wis 1:14). It is not possible in š^eôl for the righteous to be joined to the wicked and that the wicked person turns into the righteous. However, the key characteristic of š^eôl is not the immutability of the status but the inability to express praise and honor to God (cf. Ps 30:4). In addition, there is no reasoning, knowledge, and especially no wisdom in the š^eôl (cf. Eccl 9:10). These principles characterize the life of a righteous person who finds God through wisdom and who glorifies him with his righteousness. Thus, the righteous man by his nature does not even belong to the place of š^eôl. In other words, he who praised and blessed God during his life cannot stop glorifying him even in š^eôl (cf. Ps 6:6). The ungodly, who does not glorify God during his life, corresponds to the posthumous š^eôl environment in which God's name is not mentioned (cf. Ps 6:6; 34:18). Hence, we come to the conclusion that š^eôl belongs exclusively to sinners or to those who do not praise God (cf. Ps 16:10). The prophet Joel 2:32 as well as the New Testament Epistle to the Romans 10:13 are on the same track according to which those who – both during life and after death – call on the name of God are saved in turn. With this, the theology of š^eôl reached its peak in the teaching that š^eôl is not the eternal abode of the righteous (cf. Wis 2:1).³¹ The righteous man indeed descends to the š^eôl but his soul does neither rot there nor does he become a part of the impersonal content of the š^eôl (cf. Prov 1:12). Since it cannot remain in š^eôl (cf. Ps 49:16), the justified soul rises to the heights (cf. Wis 16:13) and it is God himself who rescues it and rewards it with a happy eternity (cf. Wis 16:13).

2.1.2. Characteristics of the peaceful i.e. temporary š^eôl

Š^eôl is a difficult state that the righteous cannot bear and to which he does not belong (cf. Song 8:6; Sir 9:12). This is why š^eôl, in the context of the righteous, is

³¹ Cf. Jeremy CORLEY, *Afterlife Hope before the New Testament. A Descriptive Survey*, in: *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association 41-42 (2018-2019)*, 1-24, here 19-21.

described not as a deep place where the wicked sinks and from which he cannot come out (cf. Ps 86:13) but as an entrance, as a door to the underworld, as a reception from which the righteous hopes for deliverance (cf. Isa 38:10; Wis 16:13; Sir 51:6). There, at the *š^eôl* entrance, are the beds of the righteous (cf. Ps 88:6). Hence they cry out and God hears them (cf. Ps 34:18; 77:2; 139:8). In this sense, there are two key delusions of the ungodly with which he is tempted. The first is that the underworld rules the earth (cf. Wis 1:14). The second is that everyone ends up the same way (cf. Wis 2:1). Both, the first and second deceptions, are directed against God and his righteous ones. God is, namely, the omnipresent ruler (cf. Ps 139:8) and the only one who raises the dead from death and the underworld (cf. Sir 48:5).

Š^eôl is, in the narrower meaning of the word, connected with the noun מָוֶת (*māveṭ*) – »death« (cf. Ps 22:16; Prov 5:5; 7:25). Like *š^eôl* also *māveṭ* can be natural which prepares the righteous for the underworld (cf. Gen 25:8; Ps 48:15; Sir 17:1) but also violent which jumps and surprises the sinner (cf. Ps 55:16). Both *š^eôl* and *māveṭ* are the destroyers of human existence (cf. Isa 28:15,18) which God himself opposes (cf. Deut 32:39). As a result, although inevitable for man, death is not a divine property and therefore neither permanent nor absolute. Its relativity depends on the intensity of trust in God (cf. Gen 3:14-24; Eccl 3:11; 5:6). The greater is the righteous' trust in God, the more insignificant is death because it is not the final human determinant (cf. Wis 1:13). And death, as well as *š^eôl*, causes fear and uncertainty in man (cf. Ps 18:5; 33:19; 55:4) which, again, can only be overcome by trusting in God (cf. Ps 23:4; 56:14; 102:20). The fear of the Lord plays an important role because it frees the righteous from the fear of death (cf. Prov. 14:27). While the righteous appeal to life, the wicked entice death with their actions (cf. Wis 1:16; 2:24; Sir 14:12). Man chooses life or death (cf. Deut 30:19; Sir 15:17). Opting for life, the righteous is delivered from the underworld of *š^eôl*, where death reigns, by God's direct action (cf. Isa 9:2). God's final victory over death also rests on the same trail (cf. Isa 25:8; 28:18).³²

Peaceful *š^eôl* is, therefore the limited stay of the righteous' soul, which descends to the underworld along its natural life path, which stops at its entrance and which from there awaits deliverance into eternal life (cf. Prov 15:24; Jonah 2:3).

³² For more on death in the Old Testament, see: Dermot COX, *As Water split on the Ground (Death in the Old Testament)*, 1-17; Christopher B. HAYS, *The Covenant with Mut. A New Interpretation of Isaiah 28:1-22*, in: *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010) 2, 212-240.

2.2. Violent or permanent *š^eôl*

In contrast to the natural path through which man walks in *š^eôl*, there is another, i.e. violent, which throws man or plunges him into the underworld by force. Already in Genesis 44:29, Jacob warns his sons that, if they treat Benjamin as they did Joseph, his soul »will descend with evil into *š^eôl*«. In other words, Israel's descent will no longer be natural but a violent journey into the underworld which entails negative consequences (cf. Gen 44:31). Similarly, the earth that opened before Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16:19 is God's punishment, according to which a person does not die as he should but dies differently. Both biblical texts indicate that it is not the same to descend into *š^eôl* by natural or violent means. The righteous descends into *š^eôl*, while the sinner is thrown to it (cf. 1 Sam 2:6), where *š^eôl* swallows him up (cf. Job 26:6). The sinner is called, enticed (cf. Prov 5:5) and dragged into its depths (cf. Sir 21:10). In this context, he is compared to a harlot who deceives, seduces and leads to sin and destruction (cf. Prov 7:27). Since God is not praised in *š^eôl*, it also becomes a natural environment for evildoers (cf. Ps 31:18) but again the environment in which they do not rest like the righteous but in which, like a herd, they are herded (cf. Ps 49:15). Only there they get their bed of rot and ruin (cf. Ps 88:6) and the blanket of wormholes and destruction (cf. Isa 14:11).

God is the one who casts into *š^eôl* (cf. 1 Sam 2:6) where man falls as if into an abyss, i.e. into an area with no exit (cf. Isa 14:15). God plunges man into *š^eôl* because of iniquity (cf. Isa 57:9; Ezek 31:16). And whoever plunges into the depths of *š^eôl* does not rely on God for help anymore (cf. Isa 38:18). In addition to the fact that God destroys the evildoer, *š^eôl* himself can open itself before the evildoer and shut him up in its abysses (cf. Num 16:30). *Š^eôl* is the one who crumbles the sinner, crushes his bones and melts his soul into the faceless contents of the underworld (cf. Prov 1:12). God, before whose eyes *š^eôl* is revealed (cf. Job 26:6), punishes the sinner who despised and rejected him (cf. Ps 107:10-11).

2.2.1. Elaborate theology of violent *š^eôl*

Just as wisdom and prudence lead to righteousness, pride leads to *š^eôl* (cf. Isa 14:11). While the righteous soul is saved from *š^eôl*, the sinner's, like a shadow, remains in its depths (cf. Prov 9:18; Is 14:9). Although the word רֵפְאִים (*reḫā'im*) in Proverbs 9:18 and 14:9 means »deep« or »abyss«,³³ this is probably not about

³³ Cf. Miriam von NORDHEIM-DIEHL, *Wer herrscht in der Scheol? Eine Untersuchung zu Jes 14,9*, in: *Biblische Notizen* 143 (2009), 81-91.; Rüdiger LIWAK, רֵפְאִים (*reḫā'im*), in: Jo-

a place, but about a state of darkness in which the subjects do not recognize each other because they all look the same, i.e. they have the same silhouettes or shadows. By shaking $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$, one wakes up those shadows that are activated in order to attract sinful natures (cf. Isa 14:9). The prophet Ezekiel calls the endless deep chasm of $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$ בֹּרַחַ (bôr), meaning »chasm«, »pit« (cf. Ezek 31:16), while the Book of Proverbs (cf. Prov 15:11) additionally addresses it as אֲבַדֹּן (ʾăbaddôn) or »a place of destruction«,³⁴ but a clearer meaning would be the »place of melting«, i.e. the place of fusion of souls into an impersonal creation, where personality loses all its independence and merges into a collective multitude (see further the term »legion« in Mk 5:9). Since it is impersonal, such a place is inherently insatiable (cf. Prov 27:20) but also unexplored (cf. Prov 15:11). This is why it is depicted as a capsule of death that opposes the mother's womb from which life is born (cf. Prov 30:16a). Coming out of the womb, i.e. the capsule of life, man lives until he enters the capsule of death from which there is no way out for the sinner (cf. Prov 30:16b). While the righteous is born to a new and eternal life, the ungodly becomes the faceless shadow of $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$ (cf. 2 Macc 7:14).³⁵

2.2.2. Characteristics of violent, i.e., permanent $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$

In contrast to the temporary and peaceful $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$ from which the righteous awaits his deliverance, the violent $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$ is deep, permanent and unattainable (cf. Job 11:8). In addition, it is active like a living being that moves and trembles (cf. Num 16:30; Prov 27:20), who entices (cf. Prov 5:5) devours and swallows souls (cf. Job 24:19). And just as man can turn to God, he can also turn to the $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$ (cf. Ps 9:18; Hos 7:16). The verb form יָשַׁב (jāšûb) from the verb שָׁב (šûb) justifies it theologically (cf. Ps 51:15; 85:9; Jer 31:8). $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$, therefore, has its mouth (cf. Ps 141:7), its claws (cf. Ps 49:16), its hands with which it grabs the sinner (cf. Ps 89:49) with which it swallows him in its throat and with which it melts him in its insatiable stomach of $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$ (cf. Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5). And although it is a whip

hannes BOTTERWECK et al. (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol 13, Grand Rapids – Cambridge, 2004, 602-614.; Crawford H. TOY, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, Edinburgh, 1899, 191.

³⁴ Cf. Benedikt OTZEN, אֲבַדֹּן perish, destroy, in: Johannes BOTTERWECK – Helmer RINGGREN (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol 1, Grand Rapids, 1977, 19-23.

³⁵ The nature of the $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$ in the Song of Songs 8:6 is compared to jealousy. Jealousy is a mixture of feelings of anger, sadness, remorse and disgust. This is exactly what $\check{s}^{\circ}\delta l$ represents for the sinner: a place of insecurity, fear and anxiety. Cf. George W. E. NICKELSBURG, *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism and Early Christianity*, Cambridge (MA), 2006, 36-37.

that breaks and crushes (cf. Isa 28:15,18), it is in God's power (cf. Deut 32:21) and at his will it moves, opens and closes (cf. Job 26:6).

3. Še'ôl in the New Testament

The Hebrew term še'ôl in the New Testament refers to its depths. The fall of the Galilean cities into še'ôl (cf. Mt 11:23; Lk 10:15) is actually the driving of the wicked into the deepest depths from which there is no way out (cf. 1 Sam 2:6; Is 57:9). The New Testament calls those deep depths of še'ôl γέεννα (*geenna*), i.e. the place into which God himself plunges wicked and from which there is no return (cf. Mt 5:22; 29; 23:33).³⁶ The Greek word *geenna* corresponds to the Hebrew גהנום (*gehennôm*), and denotes the place where it is happening אבדון (ʾāḇaddôn), i.e. the process of fusion of souls or destruction of its identity (cf. Job 31:12), turning it into רפאים (reḫā'im) or impersonal content (cf. Ps 88:11; Prov 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; see also: Prov 14:9; 17, 5; 26:14, 19). That melting pot of *gehenna* (cf. Mt 10:28) is described in a special way in the Greek term λεγιών (*legiōn*) – »legion« (cf. Mk 5:9; Lk 8:30) which denotes a set of fused impersonal spirits that the Old Testament theology rightly calls it »shadows« (cf. Isa 14:9).³⁷

In addition to the Semitic term *gehenna*, the New Testament knows another borrowed Greek word, which corresponds to the Semitic one. It is about τάρταρος (*tartarô*) with the meaning »place of torment«.³⁸ The Second Epistle of Peter (cf. 2 Pt 2:4) uses this term as a synonym of the Hebrew compound *gehennôm*. And the Book of Revelation has its own term for the Hebrew loanword *gehennôm* (cf. Rev 20:14). With the expression ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός (*hē limnē tū pūros*) or »fiery abyss«, the holy writer in Rev 20 points out the deepest space of še'ôl, i.e. *gehenna* or »hell«. The New Testament *geenna*, as well as the Greek term *tartarô* and the expression *hē limnē tū pūros* correspond to the Hebrew terms reḫā'im (cf. Isa 14:9), bôr (cf. Ezek 31:16) and ʾāḇaddôn (cf. Prov 15:11) which are Old Testament names not only for the spiritual depths but also for the processes in which souls are transformed into impersonal shadows (cf. Mk 9:43, 45, 47; Lk 12:5).

³⁶ Cf. Nick WYATT, *The Concept and Purpose of Hell. Its Nature and Development in West Semitic Thought*, in: *Numen* 56 (2009) 2, 161-184.; Nathan EUBANK, *Prison, Penance or Purgatory. The Interpretation of Matthew 5.25-6 and Parallels*, in: *New Testament Studies* 64 (2018) 2, 162-177.

³⁷ For more detailed definitions of the term *gehennôm*, see: Lloyd R. BAILEY, *Gehenna. The Topography of Hell*, in: *The Biblical Archaeologist* 49 (1986), 3, 187-191.

³⁸ Cf. Henry G. LIDDELL – Robert SCOTT, *Greek-English Lexicon. With a Revised Supplement*, 1759.

Hell in New Testament literature is actually the deepest part of *š^eôl* that Jesus calls *geenna*, i.e. a place from which there is no deliverance (cf. Mt 5:30). Just as the Old Testament, *š^eôl* in the New Testament knows two entrances or sides through one of which righteous descends and through the other one plunges the wicked (cf. Mt 25:31-46): those on the left go into the melting fire that destroys souls into an unrecognizable impersonal content (cf. Mt 25:41), and those on the right pass into the kingdom of life (cf. Mt 25:34).

3.1. *Š^eôl as purgatory in the New Testament*

As an alternative to the Hebrew word for the underworld, the Greek language of the New Testament took its already existing mythological term ᾗδης (*hadēs*) which in the theological context nevertheless corresponds in detail, not to the classical Greek, but to the biblical matrix of the word *š^eôl*. Unlike the Old Testament theology, according to which all people go to *š^eôl*, both the righteous and the sinful with the fact that the righteous do not remain in it, the New Testament theology further specifies that the righteous do not, by their very nature, belong to that place (cf. Acts 2:27). The parable of the righteous Lazarus and the wicked master explains this in more details (cf. Lk 16:19-31). Both die, Lazarus and the rich man, but the soul of the righteous is delivered to God (cf. Lk 16:22), while the wicked one is buried in the *š^eôl* (cf. Lk 16:23). The Greek term ἀποφέρω (*apoferō*) – »to deliver« (Lk 16:22) also means to release from prison (cf. Mk 15:1) or to move from one place to another (cf. Acts 19:12). All three possibilities of the verb *apoferō* see a path, i.e. the process of leaving one and arriving in another environment. Jesus begins the story of the rich man of Lazarus without mentioning the name of the sinner, because he no longer exists in the reality of *š^eôl*. Unlike him, Lazarus remains Lazarus even after death. The eschatological death of Lazarus is described as a process, as a peaceful transition from death to life, as a rite, as a liturgy, as a celebration (cf. Lk 16:22), while the death of the rich man is highly dramatized but also crucial in »Lazarus' eschatology« because the word is exclusively given to the fallen sinner for the first time. He is actually given an exceptional chance which would be one of the descriptive definitions of purgatory. However, the rich man, even then looking only at himself, does not turn to God, does not invoke his name to have mercy on him and forgive his sins – because he did not do that even in his lifetime (cf. Jo 2:32; Rom 10:13) – rather, as much as he is sank in his wickedness, he asks God for water to drink (cf. Lk 16:24) and thus returns to his original habits even in *š^eôl*.

3.1.1. Purgatory as a seminary of souls

Jesus, building his Church on Peter (cf. Mt 16:18), mentions the *š^eôl*'s gate.³⁹ Although by its nature it is closed, and it can be opened only by God (cf. Deut 32:21; Job 26:6; Ps 30:4; Is 5:14) who brings out and delivers the souls of believers from it (cf. Act 2:27; see: Ps 16:10). Jesus is the owner of the key to the gate of *š^eôl* (cf. Rev 1:18). Thus, what God does in the Old Testament (cf. Ps 30:4; 86:13; 139:8; Hos 13:14; Am 9:2; Jonah 2:3), that is what Christ does in the New (cf. Rev 1:18).⁴⁰ His »descent over *š^eôl*« denotes the opening of that gate on which souls knock and invoke the name of God to save them.⁴¹ This is why the theology of the *š^eôl*'s gate in the New Testament is closely related to the theology of the resurrection, according to which there is a process from weakness to strength, from shame to glory, from flaw to perfection, from natural to spiritual and from corruptible to incorruptible life (cf. 1 Cor 15: 12-44).⁴² Unlike the Old Testament theology, which from primitive retribution through temple ritual theology to the Maccabean and Pharisaic theology of *š^eôl* does not go beyond the theology of the resurrection, the New Testament theology of the *š^eôl*'s gate goes a step further transferring the consequence of sin to its cause. This is clearly shown by Jesus' parable about the accused and his accuser (cf. Mt 5:25-26), where the expression »while you are still on the way« represents not a sin, but sinful tendencies, and the judge and jailer represent the court and purgatory.⁴³ In addition, Jesus' comparison of the good and the bad tree which bears fruit according to its fundamental determination (cf. Lk 6:43-49)⁴⁴ also clearly indicates that the theology of holiness and sin has been transferred to the theology of holy or sinful habit. Jesus also calls such theology the theology of the heart.⁴⁵ »Out of the abundance of the heart of a person the mouth speaks«, because what is inside cleans and defiles a person and makes him righteous or sinful (cf. Mk 7:20). Relying on the New Testament relationship between sin

³⁹ Cf. Joel MARCUS, *The Gates of Hades and the Keys of the Kingdom* (Matt 16:18-19), in: *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988) 3, 443-455.

⁴⁰ Cf. Juliana CLAASSENS, *Finding Words in the Belly of Sheol. Reading Jonah's Lament in Contexts of Individual and Collective Trauma*, *Religions* 13 (2022) 91, in: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020091> (24/10/2023).

⁴¹ Cf. Henry G. LIDDELL – Robert SCOTT, *A Greek-English Lexicon With a Revised Supplement*, Oxford, 1996, 226.

⁴² Cf. Barbara ALAND et al. (ed.), *The UBS Greek New Testament. Reader's Edition with Textual Notes*, Stuttgart, 2010, 473-474.

⁴³ Cf. Rinaldo FABRIS, *Matteo*, Roma, 1982, 127-132.

⁴⁴ Cf. Josef ERNST, *Il Vangelo secondo Luca I*, Brescia, 1990, 320-324.

⁴⁵ Cf. Dubravko TURALIJA, »Pokušaj novoga pristupa biblijskome srcu kao jedinoj ljudskoj bateriji«, in: *Vrhbosnensia* 2 (2018), 281-304.

and sinful habit, purgatory would look like seminary of eternal life where the believer, like a seed, ripens until he »bears fruit in perseverance« i.e. until he acquires holy habits that permanently make him holy (cf. Lk 9:10-17).

3.1.2. Purgatory as a sanatorium of souls

The New Testament parable of the narrow and wide gates is also part of the theology of purgatory (cf. Mt 7:13-14; Lk 13:23-24). The narrow gate represents the path of the saints, the wide gate the path of the sinners. Nevertheless, when Jesus says »with men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible« (cf. Mk 10:27), then he alludes again and again to the process through which even sinners are saved. We could call this process Paul's »fire« (cf. 1 Cor 3:13-17) which in Semitic culture represents a conflagration that often burns vegetation during drought in order to consequently create better conditions for a new crop. Here, the purgatory is again reminiscent of a sanatorium, which, like any health resort, is not only multi-useful but also life-saving. In a similar way, Heb 12:29 uses the allusion of fire and vegetation. Green and juicy grass cannot be consumed by fire but dry leaves and macchia can. In other words, when the Epistle to the Hebrews calls God »a consuming fire« (Heb 3:18) it does not mean the one who destroys but the one who purifies human inclinations. Those human habits that leave behind maturity and freshness are also valid for eternity and those that are dry and lifeless are burned and cleaned so that new vegetation of righteousness can grow (cf. 1 Cor 3:12-13). With fire comes gold or silver as a frequent Semitic comparison of purification (cf. Sir 2:1-6; Mal 3:3; Heb 3:18) and it is again an image of purgatory through which the believer gets rid of his impurities and evil tendencies.

Conclusion: Sin and sinfulness

There are many theological beliefs about purgatory. While Protestant theologians refute them, Catholic theologians question them more and more. However, it is clear to both of them that the ultimate problem in the afterlife is not sin, because it is erased in turn by the sacrament of confession or by Christ's grace. The ultimate problem for Christians are sinful habits that confession cannot erase and whose unchanged state remains even after death. And although in the afterlife the sinful habit is not active (cf. Eccl 9:10), the sinful inclination remains. That is why one confesses in the penitence of the sacrament and at the same time has to say: «... I firmly resolve to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin«, i.e. that I will wean myself from sinful habits. Wean-

ing oneself from evil tendencies is not an easy process. Because of that many believers, satisfied with the confession, leave this world cleansed of sin, but still trapped by their sinful habits. And since sin is not the cause but the consequence of a sinful inclination, therefore the inclination to sin is the cause of sin. This is why the rule was stated that »whosoever thinks of sin, has already sinned« (Mt 5:27). Jesus himself classifies human sinful inclinations. Those that are purely physical are regularly at the bottom of his scale because with the perishable body the sinful tendencies of the body also perish (cf. Lk 7:47; Jn 8:11). It seems that the biggest problem are those sinful inclinations that Jesus enumerates through Pharisaic hypocrisy, vanity and arrogance, taste of influence and power, greed and selfishness, contempt and scandal (cf. Mt 9; Lk 13; 14). Jesus puts all these tendencies at the top of his scale sorting them through his famous »woe« (cf. Mt 23; Lk 11).

Therefore, in the first instance, of course, not in the only one, purgatory would denote a seminary for the soul whose sanctifying acts are not permanent. The parable of the sower in the Gospel of Matthew 13 deliberately illuminates this. This is supported by Jesus' key ultimatum to »become like children«, that is, to remain in the constant process of maturing and building as believers (cf. Mt 18:1-5). At the same time, the key word is not only the will and decision but faith and love: the more love – the more forgiveness, the stronger the faith – the brighter the holiness. In all of this, love plays the most responsible role. It is not an easy journey from impermanence to perseverance and from forgiveness to holiness and in that process love is proven the most. Jesus himself, standing between the Pharisee and the harlot, said: »he who is forgiven little, loves little« (Lk 7:47). Alternatively, purgatory would be a healing place or a place of renunciation of sinful inclinations. And just as medical sanatoriums in principle obtain successful results in getting rid of various addictions and habits – because if they were ineffective they would not even exist – so the purgatory is an even more effective sanatorium for sinful acquired habits. After they have completely healed, those sinful scars are transformed by the face into the image of God, i.e. the holiness that is the only one worthy of looking at the eternal Saint.

Prayers for the dead presuppose purgatory (cf. 2 Macc 12:42–45; CCC 1030). In addition to Mass intentions and prayers, the Church also offered other ways of praying for the souls in purgatory.⁴⁶ Purgatory, therefore, along with

⁴⁶ Cf. John E. THIEL, Time, Judgment, And Competitive Spirituality. A Reading of the Development of the Doctrine of Purgatory, in: *Theological Studies* 69 (2009) 4, 741-785.

its other known and unknown properties, is not a moment but a process of close connection with God through sacrifices, blessings and gratitude. It paves the way for the soul that is in the process of purification, weaning and maturation so that in the end – having acquired holy habits – it could glorify God eternally.

Sažetak

BIBLIJSKO PODZEMLJE O ČISTILIŠTU: ŠEOL – NOVI PRISTUP

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»Jahve kažnjava i prašta, dovodi u podzemlje (šeol) i odande izvodi« (Tob 13,2). Starozavjetna i novozavjetna teologija šeola (dalje: šeol) prati logičan slijed ljudskog življenja i umiranja. Čovjek ulazi u šeol onakav kakav se izgradio za života, što znači da se u šeolu temeljno ljudsko opredjeljenje i narav ne mijenjaju. U šeolu se ne može dogoditi prevrat u smislu da se pravednik prometne u bezbožnika, a bezakonik u pravednika. Ipak, ključna karakteristika šeola nije nepromjenjivost zauzetog položaja, nego nemogućnost iskazivanja hvale Bogu. Ta pak vlastitost karakterizira pravednikov život koji svojom pravednošću veliča Boga. Stoga, pravedniku po svojoj naravi to mjesto ne pripada jer onaj koji je za života hvalio i blagoslivljao Jahvu ne može ga prestati veličati ni u šeolu. Bezbožniku, međutim, koji za života nije veličao Jahvu, odgovara poslijesmrtni šeolski ambijent, u kojem se ne zaviđa Božje ime. Tako dolazimo do zaključka da šeol pripada isključivo grešnicima, odnosno onima koji ne slave Jahvu. Time je teologija šeola dosegla svoj vrhunac u nauku da šeol nije vječno prebivalište pravednika. Pravednik doduše silazi do šeola, ali mu tamo ne trune duša niti postaje dio bezličnog šeolskog sadržaja. Budući da ne može ostati u šeolu, opravdana se duša, kad se oslobodi svojih navika koje su je za života navodile na grijeh i kad se ustali u svetosti, uzdiže u visine, a sam Bog je taj koji ju izbaavlja i koji ju nagrađuje sretnom vječnošću. Za dominantnu biblijsku teologiju nije upitno da će pravednici gledati lice Božje, nego ono što privilegira jedne naspram drugih jest vrijeme boravka u mjestu mrtvih, tj. šeolu. Razrađena kršćanska teologija to vrijeme boravka duša u mjestu mrtvih naziva čistilištem.

Ključne riječi: čistilište, pakao, retribucija, šeol/šeol.

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