

**The Theological Development of the Idea of Hell in the
Early Greek Church.
From the Beginning to Origen
(A Dogmatic Study)**

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SUMMARY

The theological development of the idea of hell in the early Greek Church to Origen is a dogmatic study examining the theological-historical movement of the idea among early theologians in the early Greek speaking Church. To begin, the study looks at the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek, establishing links from the Hebrew scriptures to the early Jewish text of the Septuagint. It can be established that the translation of Old Testament text of the Hebrew speaking Jews was considered to be a valid translation which transmitted the very real truths contained in the Hebrew Scripture. This text was then used by the early Christians and is established as the foundational and fundamental piece of literature used in common by all those who are examined in this study. The ideas contained in this early time reflect hell as subterranean place of separation from God, a place where all go after death, and of differing levels. The Hebrew term Sheol is unique in Semitic languages and is always used in conjunction with a person who has either sinned or has died in separation from God or from Israel. Sheol, translated as Hades in the Greek, is never used in association with a person of virtue and right standing who has died.

The early writings of the New Testament show a continued emphasis on hell as a place of postmortem suffering. It is made clear through the usage of the words, Hades, Gehenna, and Tartarus that hell is a place of fire and outer darkness. It is a place where those who have chosen to separate themselves from God will find themselves after death. The New Testament authors are agreed on the general terms, which it should be stressed, were not developed or

discussed within the genre of writing itself. The New Testament also alludes to hell both as a holding place for those who have died awaiting justice as well as a place created for the Devil and his angels.

The movement from the late first century into the early second century did not see any development in the idea of hell. The early writers mainly used the term in relation to Scripture and is consistently used in a way that implies that both the writer and the community to which he was writing understood what the term meant. These early authors were writing to communities to encourage right living and metanoia. The early to mid-second century sees little development in the idea of hell, mainly because the apologists were more concerned about defending Christianity than eschatology. One main idea that can be seen through development is associated with eternity. The later writers began to struggle with hell as a never-ending punishment. As time continued on the question of the meaning of the fire as purifying begins to develop.

This study has found that the idea of hell has always contained aspects of suffering, fire, and separation from God. However, the meaning of this suffering, fire, and separation has developed over the centuries leading toward an understanding of these as self-inflicted rather than inflicted by God. The attempt to understand this fire and give meaning to it resulted in lines of thinking which led toward an understanding of this fire as purification. Hell as separation from God began to open questions to the duration of this separation, as well as the possibility of movement of souls after death from the fiery underworld toward a unification with God.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lane Dowd".