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Messianic Perspectives[®]

God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.

The background is a dramatic scene of a stone tomb entrance. A large, dark stone is rolled away from the entrance, revealing a bright, glowing light from within. The interior of the tomb is visible, showing a stone slab and a small opening. The walls are made of rough, reddish-brown stone. At the bottom of the image, there are stylized flames in shades of orange and red, suggesting a fiery descent or hell.

DID JESUS DESCEND INTO HADES?

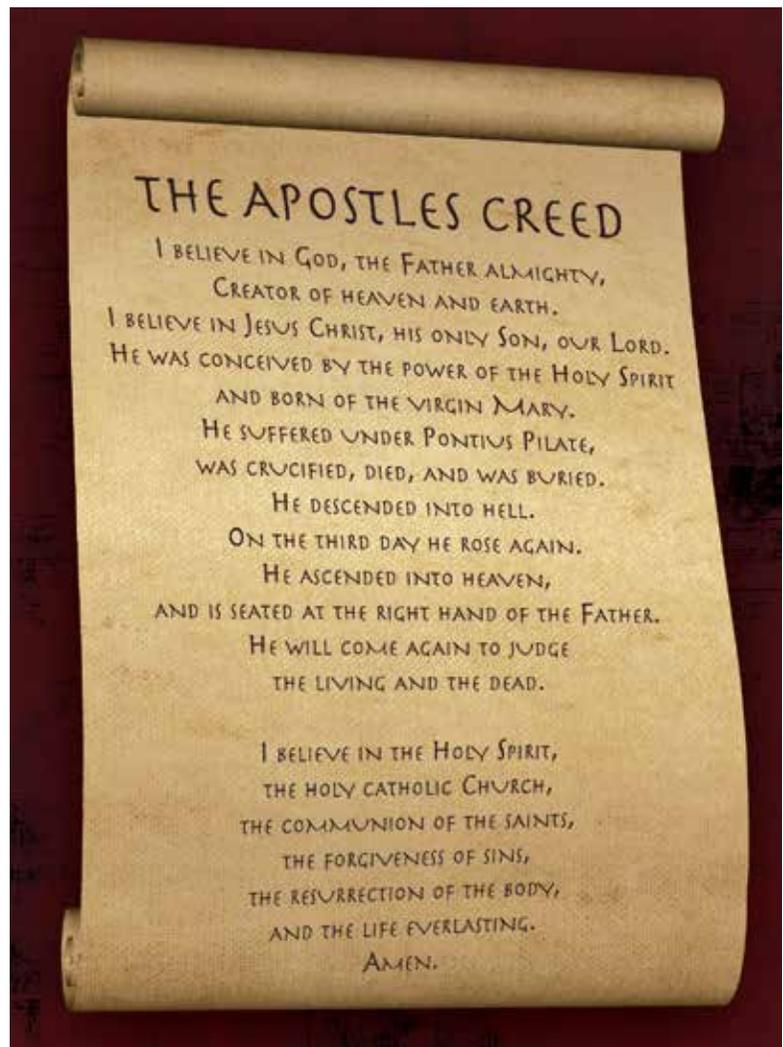
BY DR. GARY HEDRICK

The New Testament is clear: Yeshua (Jesus) was crucified, then died, and was buried—and He was resurrected three days later. That, in fact, is the core message of the Gospel.

What’s not quite so clear, however, is where His spirit went and what He was doing during those three days when His body was in the tomb.¹

We know the human spirit departs from the body at the moment of death (2 Cor. 5:6–9; James 2:26); so, when the Lord died on Calvary, His spirit left His body and didn’t return until the third day when He walked out of the tomb (Acts 10:40; 1 Cor. 15:3–4). So, the question remains: where did His spirit go during those three days when His body was lying dead in the tomb?

The Apostles’ Creed,² which is recited routinely in Anglican, Roman Catholic, and some Protestant services, offers this explanation: “[Jesus Christ] was crucified, died, and was buried. **He descended into hell;** and on the third day rose again (emphasis added).”³



As if this ominous declaration about Yeshua (Jesus) descending into Hell wasn’t already hard enough to decipher, some media preachers, particularly those in the error-infested “Word-Faith” movement, have complicated it even more by interjecting their own quirky ideas.

Some of them say, for example, that it was necessary for the Lord to descend into Hell in order to do spiritual battle with the forces of darkness and complete His work of Redemption. One TV preacher makes the Descent sound like a duel of lightsabers from a *Star Wars* episode:

The Bible indicates that for three days, Jesus went into the very depths of hell. Right into the enemy’s own territory. And He did battle with Satan face to face. Can you imagine what a showdown that was? . . . Here the two most powerful forces in the universe have come together to do battle for the first time in history. But thank God. The Bible says Satan was no match for our Champion. This was no contest. Jesus crushed Satan’s head with His foot. He bruised his head. And He once and for all, forever defeated and dethroned and demoralized our enemy.⁴

This isn’t quite right, however. Yeshua and the devil did NOT come together in Hades “to do battle for the first time in history.” Aside from the fact that there were undoubtedly ancient conflicts in Heaven before Lucifer was cast out,⁵ there was also an earthly confrontation between Yeshua and the devil—and it didn’t happen in Hades. It happened in the Judean wilderness, and it lasted for forty days and nights. And the Lord won a resounding victory (Matt. 4:1–11)!

Nonetheless, these Word-Faith folks have their own story, and they’re sticking to it. Here’s how someone else in that camp explains Jesus’ Descent into Hell:

After the crucifixion, Jesus’ body was placed in a tomb, and His Spirit went to hell. **There Jesus suffered all the torments of hell that we would have suffered.** Jesus’ submission to death was complete. He experienced it to the ultimate degree so mankind would never have to be punished (2 Corinthians 5:21; emphasis added).⁶

Again, this isn’t right. Jesus didn’t “submit” to death when He descended into Hades/Sheol—He conquered it! And nothing in Scripture says He suffered while He was there!

This teaching (that is, that Jesus had to descend into Hell in order to finish what He had started while He was suffering on the Cross) is not only biblically problematic—it’s clearly heretical. As the Son of God was about to die, He cried out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Then and there, Redemption was finished. Its price had been paid. God stamped the certificate of debt PAID IN FULL because His justice had been satisfied (Col. 2:13–14). There was nothing left for the Lord to do (redemptively, that is) when He descended into the lower parts of the earth.

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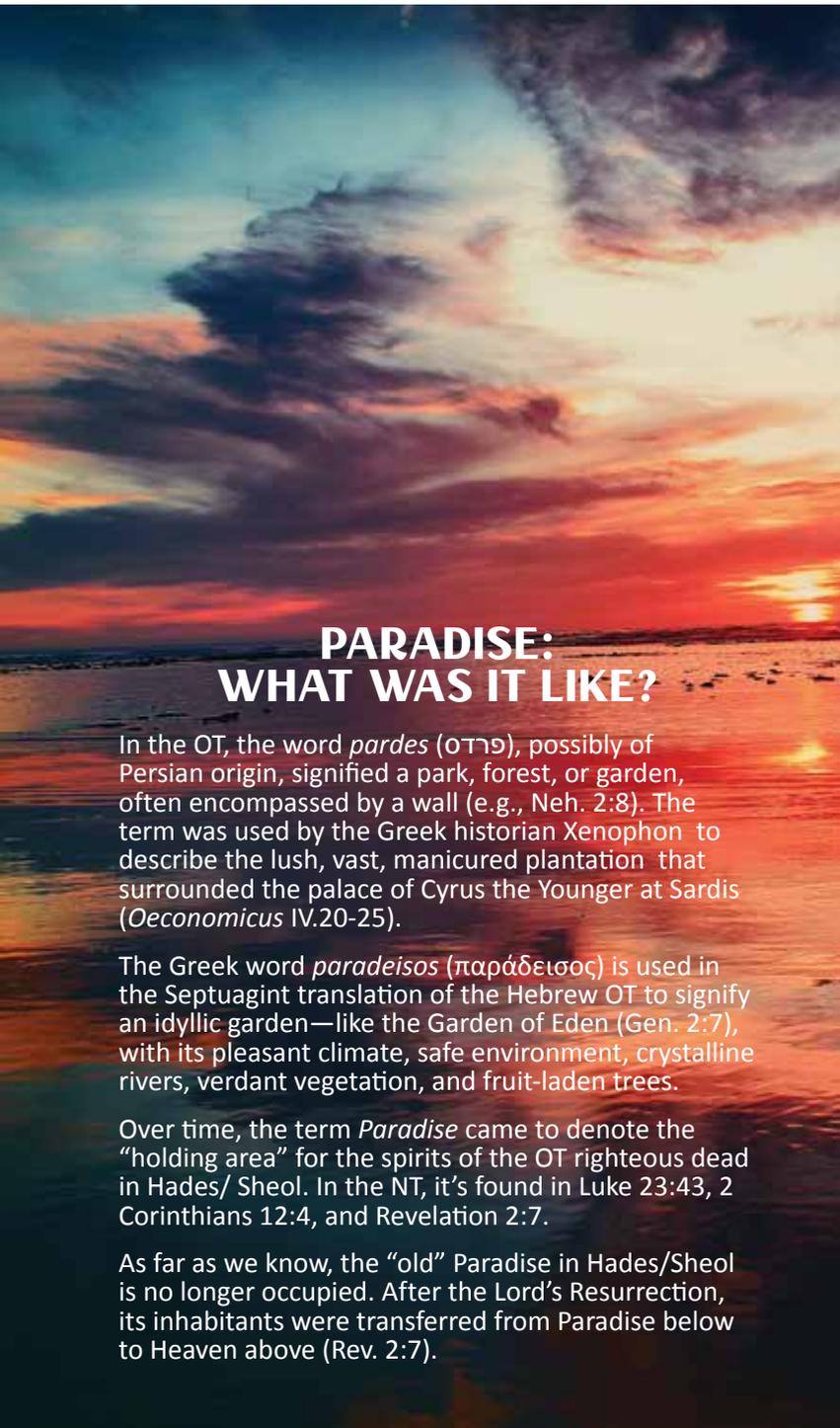


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The point here is that the Lord's descent into Hades/Sheol was not a **continuation** of His work of Redemption—it was a **consequence** of it. When those ancient victory processions took place (Eph. 4:8), it was only **after** the battle had already been won!

Our Lord did not suffer while He was in Hades/Sheol. He was no longer in pain. He wasn't tormented by the devil or by demons. On the contrary, Redemption was completed even before His body was removed from the Cross (Matt. 27:50; John 19:30; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 1:18–19). His spirit left His body, and if He indeed descended into the nether regions, like many of us believe, He entered the halls of Hades not as a victim, but as the Victor!

Another reason some Protestants are skittish about the idea of a Descent into Hades/Sheol is that Catholicism connects it with the spurious doctrines of Limbo and Purgatory.⁷ But in reality, there is no such connection.



PARADISE: WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

In the OT, the word *pardes* (פֶּרְדִּים), possibly of Persian origin, signified a park, forest, or garden, often encompassed by a wall (e.g., Neh. 2:8). The term was used by the Greek historian Xenophon to describe the lush, vast, manicured plantation that surrounded the palace of Cyrus the Younger at Sardis (*Oeconomicus* IV.20-25).

The Greek word *paradeisos* (παράδεισος) is used in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew OT to signify an idyllic garden—like the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:7), with its pleasant climate, safe environment, crystalline rivers, verdant vegetation, and fruit-laden trees.

Over time, the term *Paradise* came to denote the “holding area” for the spirits of the OT righteous dead in Hades/Sheol. In the NT, it's found in Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 12:4, and Revelation 2:7.

As far as we know, the “old” Paradise in Hades/Sheol is no longer occupied. After the Lord's Resurrection, its inhabitants were transferred from Paradise below to Heaven above (Rev. 2:7).

WHAT, EXACTLY, IS “HELL”?

Some people think the term “hell” always refers to the destiny of the wicked—but that's only partly true. The English word “hell” translates several Hebrew and Greek terms that describe **temporary** realities:

- **Hades**—The grave, the “unseen” realm of the dead (Greek)
- **Sheol**—The grave, the “unseen” realm of the dead (Hebrew)
- **Paradise/Abraham's Bosom**—The area of Hades/Sheol that serves as the temporary abode of the righteous dead (awaiting the Lord's Resurrection on the third day; Luke 16:22, Eph. 4:8–10)
- **Gehenna**—Another area of Hades/Sheol that serves as the temporary abode of the wicked dead (pending the Lake of Fire; Matt. 23:15, Luke 12:5)

Two additional names designate the respective, **eternal** destinies of the righteous and wicked dead:

- **New Jerusalem**—The permanent, eternal residence of the righteous dead (Rev. 21:2); synonymous with Heaven
- **Lake of Fire**—The permanent, eternal residence of the wicked dead (20:14–15)

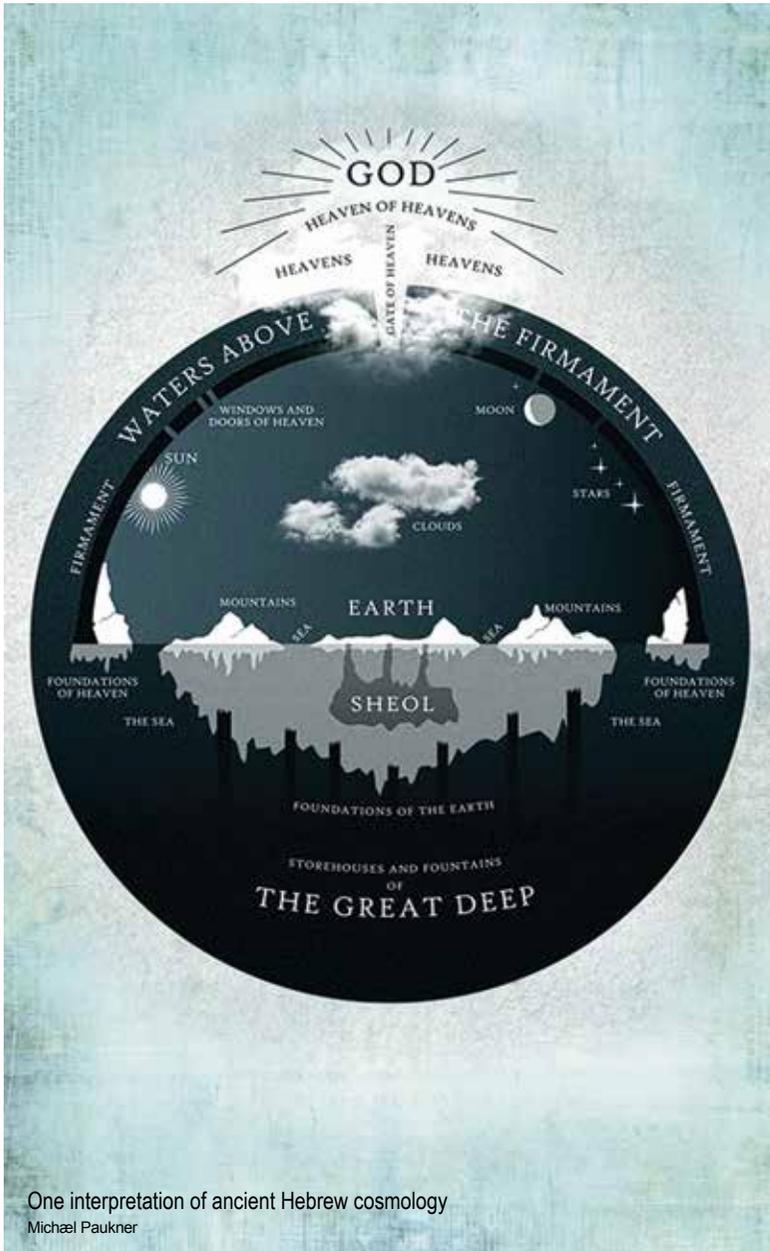
The Greek word *Hades* and the Hebrew *Sheol* mean pretty much the same thing—that is, “the grave.” They denote, literally, “the unseen world” or the realm of the dead. As we saw above, in Hades/Sheol, there are two areas: one for the OT righteous dead (**Paradise/Abraham's Bosom**) and another for the wicked dead (**Gehenna**). Many of us believe that Paradise was depopulated following Yeshua's Resurrection when the spirits of the righteous dead were ushered by Yeshua from there directly into the New Jerusalem and the Presence of God. At the end of the Millennium, Gehenna (the other area of Hades/Sheol) will be merged into the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:11–15).

Under the Old Covenant/Testament, then, the spirits of God's people who died went to join their ancestors in Paradise, an area of Hades/Sheol (i.e., the grave). There they awaited the first coming of the Messiah, who would be coming to pay the price for their Redemption. Here are some examples:

- When Abraham died, the Bible says he “was gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:8).
- A few verses later, we are told that when Ishmael died, he “was gathered to his people” (v. 17).
- When Jacob died, he was “gathered unto his fathers” (49:33).
- When Joseph died, his spirit was likewise gathered unto his fathers while his body was placed in a coffin in Egypt (50:26).
- When David died, he “rested with his fathers” (1 Kings 2:10).
- When Solomon died, he also “rested with his fathers” (1 Kings 11:43).

Once, when King David had been so ill he had thought he might die, he cried out, *O LORD, You brought my soul up from the grave [Sheol]; You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit* (Psalm 30:3).

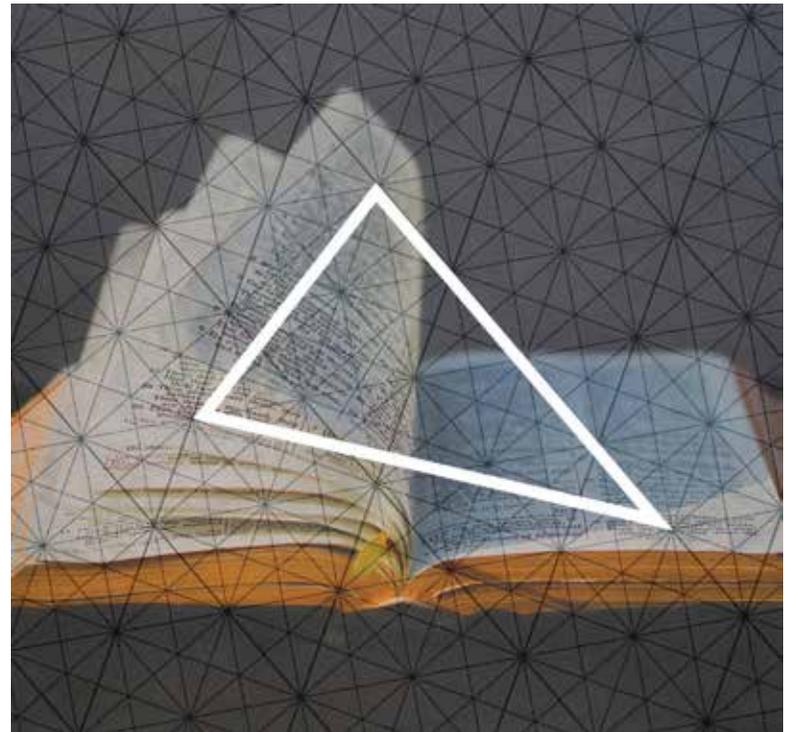
So, where is this Hades/Sheol place? The simple answer is that we don't know for sure. While the Bible consistently locates Heaven (that is, God's abode) as **up**, it portrays Hades/Sheol as **down**, evidently somewhere in the cavernous subterranean regions of the earth.⁸ Paradise was there, too—that is, somewhere down in the lower regions of the earth—until after the Messiah's Resurrection. In the Old Testament, an individual who came from Paradise (in Hades/Sheol) ascended from down below **up** to the land of the living.⁹ Now, however, someone who leaves the land of the living and goes to Paradise (the Third Heaven) ascends **upward**.



One interpretation of ancient Hebrew cosmology
Michael Paukner

We know this because the Apostle Paul said that when he himself briefly visited Paradise, “he was caught **up** into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Cor. 12:4). The Redemption that the Lord purchased with His death on Calvary has made this change of directions possible. Paradise (for God's people) is now **up** rather than **down**!

The question, then, is this: when and how did this change take place? When was the Paradise (in Hades/Sheol) transferred from **down** (in the bowels of the earth) to **up** (in Heaven above)?



TRIANGULATING THE TEXTS

There is no single passage of Scripture that answers all of our questions about these matters. The question of whether the Lord made such a descent into Hades at all, in fact, is debatable. There are alternative views about Ephesians 4:9, where it says, “He descended into the lower parts of the earth.” And if He **did** visit Hell (Hades/Sheol), why? What did He do down there for those three days? These are just a few of the questions we will address.

In order to answer these questions, we will assess and correlate a number of texts. Then we'll arrange them in the way that makes the most sense—like fitting the pieces of a puzzle together. Thirteen of the pertinent texts are below. Each one of them provides a clue about what may have happened during those three days between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, as well as during the next 40 days leading up to the Ascension. (**Bold type** indicates added emphasis in the following verses.)

1. Hosea 13:14—“*I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. **O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes.***”

The prophet Hosea puts these words in the mouth of the Messiah. Spurgeon said, “The Lord Jesus puts death to death.”¹⁰ Our Lord is the “destruction” of death and Hades/Sheol!

2. Zechariah 9:11—“*As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from **the waterless pit.***”

Approaching this with caution (to avoid reading something into the text that's not really there), one possible meaning is that the shed blood of *Adonai Yeshua HaMashiach* (the Lord Jesus Christ) would someday set prisoners free from the underworld.¹¹ It's notable that the freeing of Hades/Sheol's “prisoners” wouldn't take place until **after** the Lord's blood had been shed and the price of Redemption had been paid. Is that why Paradise—after all those many centuries of serving as a holding area for the righteous dead—wasn't emptied until after the Resurrection?

3. Matthew 12:40—*“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”*

The language here is forthright: **The Son of Man would be “in the heart of the earth” for “three days and nights.”** “Three days and nights” is an idiomatic expression signifying a full day plus portions of two others—one before and another after. It’s not necessarily a full 72 hours. It means He would be resurrected “on the third day” after His Crucifixion (Acts 10:40).¹² Prior to the Resurrection, His spirit was in Paradise (an area of Hades/Sheol) for those three days.

4. Luke 9:30–31—*“And behold [on the Mount of Transfiguration], two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.”*

The word translated “decease” (v. 31) is the Greek *exodos* (ἔξοδος), the same word used in the Septuagint (LXX) translation of the OT for Israel’s Exodus from Egypt. Moses had led a host of God’s people out of Egyptian captivity (Ex. 12:33–41); and now Yeshua would lead the OT saints out of their “bondage,” or captivity, in Paradise (Hades/Sheol) below,¹³ into Heaven above.

The *New Living Translation* (NLT) says the Lord was talking to Moses and Elijah there on the Mount “about His exodus from this world, which was about to be fulfilled in Jerusalem.” We can only imagine what Moses (the great Lawgiver and Deliverer) and Elijah (representing the prophets) spoke with the Messiah about there on the Mount of Transfiguration. Maybe they were encouraging Yeshua on behalf of the vast multitude of OT saints whose spirits had been in Paradise for centuries, but who were now excited about their impending release so they could enter directly into God’s Presence in the New Jerusalem.

5. Luke 23:43—*“And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’”*

The most natural interpretation of this verse is that the Lord was reassuring the repentant thief, who was dying at His side, that **he would be with Him in Paradise (in Hades/Sheol) later that day.**

6. Acts 2:27—*“For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”*

In biblical times, the process of decomposition was believed to start after three days (cf. John 11:39). Luke applies the prophecy about David in Psalm 16 to David’s Descendant, the Messiah (Acts 2:31). He (that is, His spirit) will be in Sheol/Hades; but God won’t leave Him there. He will be released and reunited with His (glorified) body before it begins to decompose.

7. Romans 10:6–7—*“But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, ‘Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).*

When He was resurrected, according to this verse, the Lord came “up from” Hades/Sheol. The gamut of His experience spanned all of Creation—from Heaven above to Hades/Sheol below.

8. Ephesians 4:8–10—*“Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’” (Now this, “He ascended”—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)*

Paul’s comments here form a midrash (commentary) on Psalm 68:18. His point is that the Lord truly filled “all things” in the sense that His experience spanned everything from the lowest regions of the earth (Sheol, the Pit) to His place of exaltation in the highest Heaven of heavens (the New Jerusalem).

The reference to a victor’s return from battle with his vanquished captors in tow is unmistakable. This type of procession following a hard-won victory was common in ancient times. What’s striking here, though, is that in this instance, when the Lord returns to Heaven, he’s not leading captives per se (i.e., people He vanquished). **He is leading Captivity itself!** He is leading Captivity (Paradise/Sheol) captive—and transferring the spirits of the righteous dead from Sheol directly into the Presence of God in Heaven. This shows us that He truly is the One who possesses the keys of death, hell, and the grave (Rev. 1:18).¹⁴

THE TRANSLATION ISSUE IN EPHESIANS 4:9

Commentators who are skeptical about the Descent into Hades tend to lean heavily on the Greek text of Ephesians 4:9. The NKJV follows the KJV in translating the last part of the verse like this: “He first descended into **the lower parts of the earth**” (κατέβη πρῶτον εἰς τὰ κατώτερα μέρη τῆς γῆς, emphasis added). The CSB, NASB, and RSV take this same approach, which supports the view that the Lord descended into the subterranean regions during those three “harrowing” days. However, another possible rendering is: “He first descended **into the lower regions, the earth.**” (Note the placement of that crucial comma in English.) This alternative translation is reflected in the NLT, NIV, the NET Bible, and ESV, and lends support to the view (held by many evangelicals) that the Lord’s “descent” was **to the earth itself** (i.e., in His Incarnation), not to the nether regions **under the earth.** However, since the use of the Greek genitive here allows for either rendering, this verse by itself doesn’t settle the question. That’s why it’s wise to triangulate other pertinent verses in order to arrive at a reasonable and plausible position.

9. Philippians 2:9–10—*“Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth.”*

Paul reminds us that there are sentient beings not only in Heaven above, and here on the earth, but also in the nether regions “under the earth”—and all of them, without exception, are subject to the lordship of the risen and glorified Messiah-King, Yeshua of Nazareth.

10. Colossians 2:14–15—*Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.*

The Lord disarmed “principalities and powers” at the Cross. In the Greek text, these are the *archas* (ἀρχάς) and the *exousias* (ἐξουσίας)—categories in the hierarchy of fallen spirit-beings mentioned here and also in Ephesians 6:12. This would presumably include the “spirits in prison,” confined in Tartarus (see below).

DESCENT INTO HELL: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

This should more properly be called “the descent into Hades,” for the Greek word *Hades* renders the Hebrew *Sheol* and means “the place of the departed.” This is to be distinguished from the word *Gehenna*, which refers to “the place of punishment.” Peter on the day of Pentecost quotes Psalm 16 and then refers it to Jesus, saying that “he was not abandoned to Hades” (Acts 2:31 RSV), and Paul tells his readers not to ask who will go into the abyss to bring up Christ from the dead (Rom. 10:7). These references are reinforcing NT statements about the reality of the death of Christ and therefore the reality of His resurrection. He shared to the full the human experience of death.

The descent was asserted in some early Arian creeds. It was not in the Old Roman Creed, but reached the Apostles’ Creed via the Aquilean Creed of Rufinus about [AD] 400. It is not mentioned in the Nicene Creed. As to what Christ did in descending to Hades, beyond sharing human experience, we have two very difficult passages in 1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6. The proclamation of Christ’s triumph seems to be involved, but there is no clear agreement about the nature of the message or the type of people who heard it.

—R.E. Nixon, “Descent into Hell” in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 294.

11. 1 Peter 3:18–20—*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.*

Here, Peter says that while the Messiah’s body was dead in the tomb (“put to death in the flesh”), His spirit “went and preached to the spirits in prison.” The “prison” here is Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4), which appears to be a high-security prison, of sorts, for particularly depraved and powerful fallen angels who participated in a diabolical conspiracy to pollute the human bloodline and produce unnatural, hybrid offspring (Gen. 6:1–4).¹⁵

The Greek word Peter uses for “preached” here is *kerusso* (κηρύσσω), which signifies a public proclamation—like in ancient times when a royal herald would enter a town square, unroll a scroll, and read an edict from the king for everyone to hear. The king’s word was law; it wasn’t up for debate.¹⁶

12. 2 Peter 2:4–5—*For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly.*

In Greek, the phrase “cast them down to hell” is one word—the verb *tartarosas* (ταρταρώσας). It literally means “confining [the angels who sinned] in Tartarus.” They are held securely there “in chains of darkness.” The imagery here is that of a long-forgotten prisoner chained securely to a stone wall in the deepest, darkest bowels of a medieval dungeon, with no hope of escape. The time frame is connected to the Great Flood (“but saved Noah . . . a preacher of righteousness”); so once again, our thoughts are directed back to the events recounted in Genesis 6.

13. Jude 6–7—*And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.*

Here, the inspired text provides more information about these fallen angels who have been “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness” (in Tartarus) pending their future judgment. Here are the four transgressions this passage says they committed:

- a. **They did not keep their proper domain.** That is, these renegade angels abandoned God’s original plan for them. He created them for one purpose, but they decided to do something else. It was an act of sedition against Him.
- b. **They left their own abode.** These rebellious angels left their rightful place in Heaven, where they had fellowship with the LORD God, their Creator, and with other angels.
- c. **They gave themselves over to sexual immorality.** Their attention became focused on events on earth, where these fallen angels were apparently allowed to roam freely (1 Peter 5:8). Their leader, Satan, was even recognized as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4). Subsequently, a relatively small number of particularly powerful and depraved fallen angels hatched a plot to impregnate human women (possibly an attempt to pollute the human genome so the Messiah couldn’t be born later). These are the angels who have been singled out for confinement in Tartarus.
- d. **They went after strange flesh.** The text literally says these rebellious angels “went after flesh of a different kind.” The Greek *sarkos heteros* in Jude 7 means “[flesh that is] not of the same nature, form, class, [or] kind.”¹⁷ Human flesh—this is what these fallen angels pursued in violation of God’s natural, created order. How created beings from two different species (human and angelic) could successfully procreate is a mystery—but that doesn’t mean it didn’t happen.¹⁸ Remember that what happened was not natural. It was supernatural—not unlike the Virgin Birth.

Another possibility is that the illicit procreation in Genesis 6 was accomplished through some form of demonic possession rather than through an actual, physical union of fallen angels (“sons of God”) and “the (human) daughters of men” (v. 2). That is, fallen angels took control of evil men, using them to impregnate human women and raise up a race of depraved, anti-God “mighty men” (“giants”) known as *Nephilim* (v. 4).¹⁹

In either case, the results were disastrous, and God decided to destroy the world before it destroyed itself (vv. 5–7). Only Noah and his family would be preserved. At this point, the Messianic line and promise were hanging by a thread.



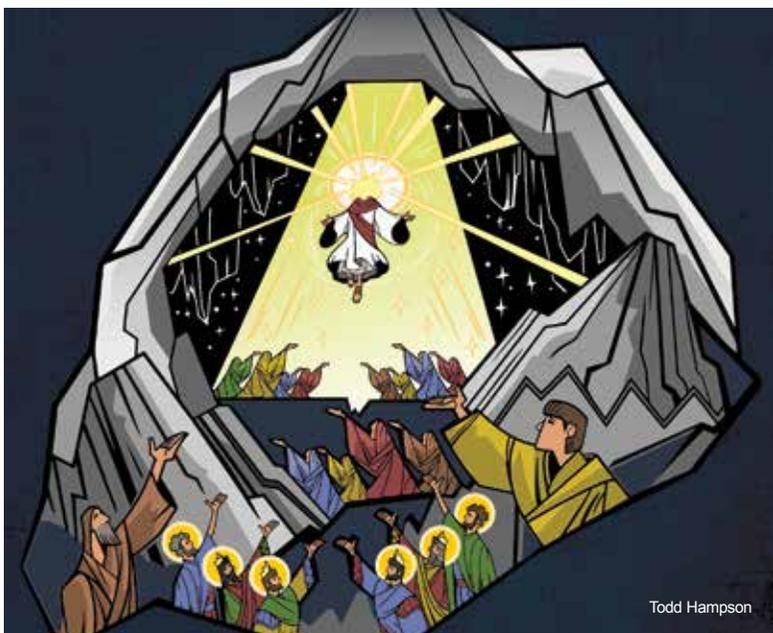
CONNECTING THE PUZZLE PIECES

Those, then, are the thirteen biblical pieces of the puzzle. Now let’s see how they might fit together in a way that makes sense.

We acknowledge up front that completing the picture will require a certain amount of speculation where there are gaps in the biblical data. If others put the puzzle together differently, then, we won’t take issue with them.

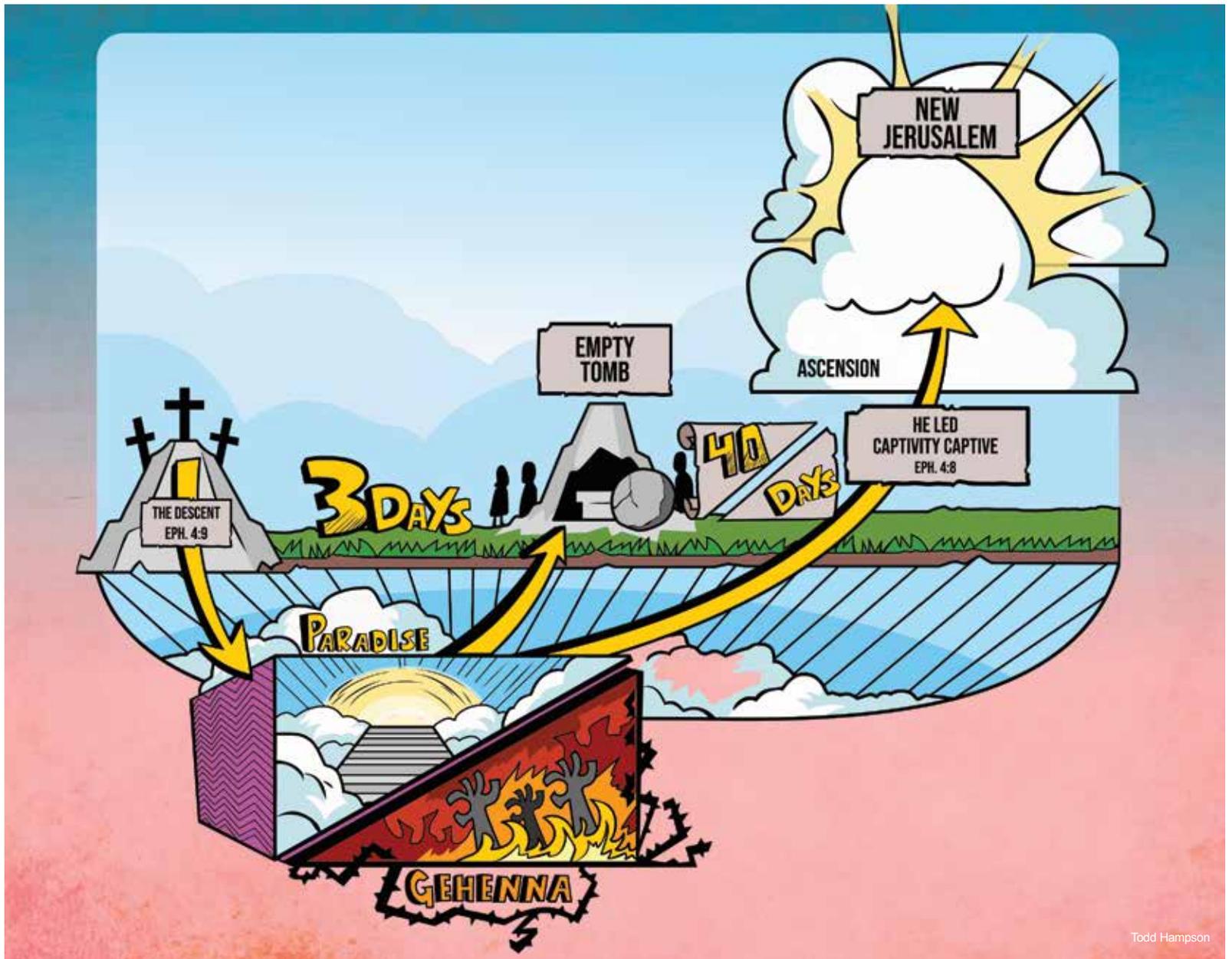
For our purposes here, though, let’s start by thinking about how the sequence of events may have unfolded. Here’s a summary:

1. Yeshua died on the Cross at around 3 p.m. At that momentous point in time, the blood of the covenant had been shed (Zech. 9:11) and Messiah’s work of Redemption was “finished” (John 19:30).
2. His spirit (and that of the remorseful thief—Luke 23:39–43) descended into Paradise.



Todd Hampson

3. In Paradise, angels may have ministered to Him like they did after His wilderness conflict with Satan (Matt. 4:11). The mental, spiritual, and physical anguish He endured must have been inexpressively traumatic for the Son of Man.
4. Upon His arrival in Paradise, the Lord announced (to the saints there) that God’s plan of salvation had been completed, and the price of Redemption had been paid in full (1 Peter 4:6). Their “captivity” in Hades/Sheol was coming to an end!
5. There are indications that the Lord also approached Tartarus, the area of Hades/Sheol where the rebellious fallen angels from Genesis 6 are imprisoned in “chains of darkness” (2 Peter 2:4–5; Jude 6–7), and announced His victory to them, too (1 Peter 3:18–20). This may have been an instance where Yeshua’s lordship was acknowledged even by “those under the earth,” like Paul describes in Philippians 2:9–10.
6. A 40-day countdown began that would end with a victory procession of Yeshua, followed by the righteous dead, from Paradise below to Heaven above.²⁰
7. In the meantime, on the third day after His Crucifixion, the Lord’s spirit rose from Paradise to be reunited with His glorified body in the tomb. He walked out of the tomb sometime after sundown on Saturday (John 20:1–18).
8. Mary Magdalene told Peter and John that she had been to the tomb—and found it empty. They came to see for themselves. They were convinced and returned to their homes (vv. 1–10).
9. Mary lingered in the vicinity of the tomb and encountered two angels, and finally Yeshua himself (vv. 11–16).
10. Yeshua evidently embraced her briefly but told her to let go of Him because the first stage of His Ascension to the Father had already begun (John 20:17). There was much to do during the next 40 days!
11. He spent this time with His disciples, teaching and “speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).
12. During those 40 days, the Lord met with His friends and followers on numerous occasions—like the encounter on the road to Emmaus (Mark 16:12–13; Luke 24:13–35), a subsequent appearance to 10 of His disciples (Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–25), another meeting with 11 disciples (vv. 26–31), and still another gathering a week later at the Sea of Galilee (21:1–25). His next-to-last meeting with them (prior to the Ascension) appears to have been on an unnamed mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:10, 16–20).
13. As the 40 days drew to a close, Yeshua’s final stop was the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem (v. 12). He shared some final words with the assembled onlookers before He was “taken up” while they watched “and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).
14. After the Lord rose into the sky and disappeared into a cloud, two angels standing nearby reminded everyone that He would return someday, just as they had seen Him go (Acts 1:11).
15. The spirits of the OT righteous dead followed the Lord in a glorious victory procession upward through the atmospheric heavens to the heavenly City (Eph. 4:8). We don’t know if this was something that could have been seen with human eyes. We can only imagine what their reception on the other side looked like!



Todd Hampson

The late W.A. Criswell, longtime Baptist pastor in Dallas and two-time president of the largest Protestant denomination in the world, once summarized the proposed scenario in a sermon:

Now these interpreters say the great change from *Sheol*, from *Hades*, from that waiting place, to Paradise, to God in Heaven, occurred here . . . in this passage [Ephesians 4:8]. When the Lord Jesus ascended up on high, He led these captives who were waiting in Sheol, He led them, His triumph, He led them up to Glory. He entered Glory at the head of a great multitude of Old Testament saints who were waiting for His atoning grace and for His expiation of their sins, and He led them up into Glory.²¹

CONCLUSION

The objections some believers have to the teaching of the Descent into Hades/Sheol are based largely on misconceptions—like the mistaken notion that He went to Hades/Sheol to experience additional suffering for our sins. But an objection that’s based on an error can itself become an error!

So, is it possible for us to know with any degree of certainty that the Descent really took place?

Well, in the legal world, there’s something they call the principle of judicial precedent. It means an earlier ruling can be used to decide a later case. The earlier (or older) the precedent, generally speaking, the more weight it has. We’re not dealing with jurisprudence in this article, of course—but still, I wonder how old the precedent is for saying that Yeshua made the Descent into Hades/Sheol during those three days? We’ve already said the Descent didn’t make its way into any formal church creeds until the fifth century or so; however, the story doesn’t end there.

Irenaeus (AD 130–202) was a prominent leader in the early church who was known, in particular, for his fervor for sound doctrine and orthodoxy. He’s the last known Christian leader with a connection to the Apostles. Irenaeus had heard Polycarp (69–155), who, in turn, had (according to tradition) studied under the Apostle John (who died around AD 100).

Here’s the precedent: Irenaeus believed in the Lord’s Descent into Hades/Sheol. He wrote, “It was for this reason, too, that the Lord descended into the regions beneath the earth, preaching His advent there also. And He [declared] the remission of sins received by those who believe in Him.”²²

The purpose of His Descent, in fact, was to announce His victory to the saints in Paradise and to inform them of their impending release from their “captivity” there. Who could possibly have had more of an interest in what Yeshua did at the end of His earthly life than the OT saints? Just imagine Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Elijah, Elisha, King David, and a multitude of others, all anxiously awaiting word that Messiah Yeshua had fulfilled the prophecies and paid the price for their Redemption on Calvary. The Lord wanted to bring word to them personally—and that’s what we believe He did. Our Lord’s Descent into the underworld, then, was annunciatory, not propitiatory.

Those OT saints knew they weren’t in Heaven, per se, but only in a temporary holding area (that is, Paradise). It was a lovely place, no doubt—but still, it wasn’t Heaven! One can only imagine their excitement when they learned that their long wait for Heaven was almost over!

Our wait, too, may be almost over. Maranatha—“O Lord, come!” (1 Cor. 16:22).

*“Even so, Lord Jesus, come;
Hope of all our hopes the sum,
Take Thy waiting people home.”*



*Dr. Gary Hedrick
is president of
CJF Ministries.*

¹ We use the term “spirit” here in a specialized sense. When a believer dies, the spirit departs the body. While the body “sleeps” in the grave (or in the dust of the ground), the spirit evidently takes on an intermediate, temporary form that resembles its former physical likeness. When Moses and Elijah appeared with Yeshua on the Mount of Transfiguration, for example, the disciples recognized them (Matt. 17:3). The disciples had never met Moses and Elijah, of course; but they nonetheless knew who they were. Dr. Walter Elwell elaborates, “When reflecting on what it will be like to be in that interim state between death and resurrection, Paul likens it to being unclothed. The soul has shed its body [temporarily] and is naked (2 Cor. 5:3-4)” (*Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996], 375).

² Since it’s called “the Apostles’ Creed,” some people assume this ancient statement was composed by one or more of the apostles—the original followers of Yeshua. However, that’s not the case. The earliest form of the creed appeared in around AD 390, centuries after the apostles had passed from the scene. The version used today is even younger, dating to around the eighth century or so.

³ Some later versions of the text replace “He descended into hell” with “He descended to the dead.” The original Latin is *descendit ad inferos*—lit., “He descended to the lower/inferior [regions].”

⁴ Joel Osteen, Easter service message (April 23, 2000), on the *Discover the Champion in You* program aired on Trinity Broadcasting Network (April 26, 2004). Accessed at web.archive.org in June 2020.

⁵ Ezek. 28:14; Luke 10:18; Rev. 12:9

⁶ Kenneth Copeland, “Did Jesus Go to Hell?” in the “Question of the Day” feature on the *Kenneth Copeland Ministries* website at kcm.org (November 22, no year indicated). Accessed in June 2020.

⁷ Roman Catholics typically follow the teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas that Hades/Sheol (“the unseen realm of the dead”) consists of four areas: (1) Purgatory, (2) Limbo of the Fathers (“Abraham’s Bosom”), (3) Limbo for Children, and (4) Gehenna (*Summa Theologiae: Christ’s descent into hell*, III, q. 52, a.2). Evangelicals, on the other hand, generally believe Hades/Sheol has two distinct regions—one for OT believers (Paradise, or Abraham’s Bosom) and another for unbelievers (Gehenna). Paradise is no longer inhabited. Its former inhabitants are now in Heaven.

⁸ Scientists tell us that fifty spheres the size of our moon would easily fit inside Planet Earth if it were hollow. That illustrates the immensity of the earth’s interior. Even allowing space for the molten core, there’s still an incredible amount of room. See “PA Standards: Orientation Objectives” at astronomy.org. If the earth is diagrammed as a peach, human drilling and tunneling hasn’t even pierced the skin.

⁹ 1 Samuel 28, for instance, tells the story of King Saul of Israel tricking the local witch from Endor into summoning the deceased Prophet Samuel from Sheol. The poor woman, it would seem, had little experience with real spirits—so, when the spirit of Samuel surprisingly and unexpectedly appeared, she was frightened out of her wits (v. 12). When she screamed, Saul asked her what she saw. She answered, “I saw a spirit **ascending out of the earth**” (v. 13, emphasis added).

¹⁰ Cited from Charles H. Spurgeon’s comments on Psalm 68:18 in his *Treasury of David*. Accessed in June 2020 at studylight.org.

¹¹ In the Davidic psalms, Israel’s Shepherd-King often uses the Hebrew word *bowr* (בֹּרַ; “pit”) to denote Sheol or the grave. One example is in Psalm 30:3: *O LORD, You brought my soul up from the grave; You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit*. See also 28:1, 88:4, 88:6, and 143:7. Note also the parallelism between Sheol and the Pit in Proverbs 1:12 and Isaiah 14:15. Further, Isaiah 24:22: *They will be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and will be shut up in the prison; after many days they will be punished*.

¹² We find the Hebrew equivalent of three days and nights in the story of Queen Esther, for example, where she sent word to Mordecai to have their people fast for three days and nights (Esther 4:16). This period ended not after 72 full hours, but “on the third day” (5:1). Also, note that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus told the Lord that “today is the third day since these things happened” (Luke 24:21). The Lord couldn’t have been in the tomb for a full 72 hours if He was already walking with them on their way to Emmaus on the third day!

¹³ The fact that a place as lovely and comfortable as Paradise (in Hades/Sheol) could be seen as “bondage” in comparison to the New Jerusalem should tell us something about the glories and pleasures of being in God’s Presence.

¹⁴ Spurgeon comments: “The metaphor of keys is intended, no doubt, to set forth the double thought of our Lord’s possessing both the right and the actual dominion over death and hell. . . . When the tenant gives up the key to the landlord, then the owner has the house again under his power, and in his possession, by that act and deed. So Christ is not only de jure (according to right), but de facto (according to fact) Lord over hell and death” (“Christ with the Keys of Death and Hell [Rev. 1:18],” from *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Volume 15 [October 3, 1869]).

¹⁵ Some expositors see this angelic perversion as an attempt on the part of the powers of darkness to corrupt the gene pool of the human race so the Messiah couldn’t be born in fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 3:15. While angels are essentially spirit-beings (Heb. 1:7, 14), they have no difficulty assuming human form and engaging in physical activities like walking, talking, and eating (e.g., Gen. 18:1-8). Also, the fact that they don’t “marry” (Matt. 22:30) doesn’t mean they are incapable of engaging in sexual relations. (Sex and marriage are two different matters, especially in an amoral, depraved culture.) Nonetheless, an alternate view of 1 Peter 3:18-20 is that it has nothing to do with Hades/Sheol or fallen angels. Instead, this view says Christ preached **through Noah** in the days before the Flood—and “the spirits in prison” were the people who heard him during those 120 years while he was building the Ark (Gen. 6:3). However, this latter view seems like a case of “shoehorning” a text to make it fit someone’s preconceived, antisupernaturalist notions.

¹⁶ A few commentators have suggested that Yeshua went to Hades to preach the Gospel so the lost people there could have an opportunity to be saved. However, there’s no hint anywhere that the Lord made the Descent so He could evangelize the lost inhabitants of Gehenna (in Hades/Sheol). Instead, He was proclaiming to the residents there—angels and humans alike—what He had just accomplished by paying the price of Redemption with His own sacrificial blood.

¹⁷ Larry Pierce, in the Online Bible’s *Outline of Biblical Usage* at Jude 7. Accessed in June 2020 at onlinebible.net.

¹⁸ For a more in-depth treatment of the possibilities regarding human-angelic procreation, see “Who (or What) Were the Nephilim?” by Michael S. Heiser on “Logos Talk,” the Logos Bible Software Blog at blog.logos.com (Nov. 8, 2017), accessed in June 2020. Heiser, who has a PhD in Hebrew Bible and Semitic Languages from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, has also written a helpful book on this topic—*The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015).

¹⁹ The Hebrew word *Nephilim* (נְפִילִים) literally means “fallen ones.” Even in modern Hebrew, *nephilah* is the feminine noun for a “fall.” However, the precise ancient etymology of the term is uncertain.

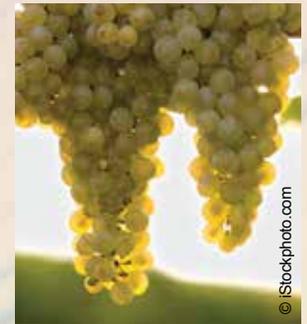
²⁰ Some critics have suggested that the proposed scenario (that is, the Lord leading Captivity captive, based on Ephesians 4:8) violates the analogy of the ancient victory processions where vanquished prisoners of war were forced to march in defeat and humiliation behind the victors. After all, the OT saints who we believe accompanied Yeshua on His way into Heaven certainly were not in any sense vanquished captors! Instead, they were co-victors with Yeshua! They had been freed from Hades/Sheol! However, notice the specific wording of the text: The Lord “led **captivity captive**” (Eph. 4:8). **Captivity itself** (i.e., Hades/Sheol) is what He led captive—not the OT saints! Death itself had been vanquished. Paul made a similar declaration in another passage, when he said, “*O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?*” (1 Cor. 15:55). Remember what Spurgeon said: “The Lord Jesus puts death to death!”

²¹ W.A. Criswell, “Leading Captivity Captive (Ephesians 4:8-10),” a sermon preached in the 8:15 a.m. service at First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, on Sunday, January 31, 1971. Available in the archives at wacriswell.com.

²² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV.27. Accessed at newadvent.org in July 2020.

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



Mardi Gras Evangelism

Michelle Beadle, CJFM representative (New Orleans), and her team experienced amazing outreach results during Mardi Gras. Over a five-day period, the team of five shared the Gospel on the streets of New Orleans. They distributed more than 1,000 tracts, shared the Gospel 45 times, and 22 people prayed with them to receive Jesus as their King and Redeemer! They also met two Jewish believers and an unsaved Jewish person.

Michelle's new book, *Messiah in Jewish Scripture*, is now available at smile.amazon.com (with an option to designate your nonprofit giving to CJFM) and was rated #1 in new sales in the Messianic Jewish category. It is a unique 11-week Bible study series on Messianic Prophecy, unlike anything available on the market at present. It is written for Jewish believers, Christians, and unsaved Jewish individuals who are interested in studying Messianic prophecy.

Walks in the Park

Richard Hill, CJFM representative and pastor of Beth Yeshua Messianic Congregation (Las Vegas), and his group of volunteers prayed about how to evangelize amidst the coronavirus lockdown. The Lord impressed upon their hearts to go to the parks in the evenings, and they had some very profitable opportunities:

- Oanh (Rich's wife) and Richard Cooper led three children to the Lord.
- Volunteers shared the Gospel with a Jewish homeless man, who eventually became more open.
- Oanh and Beth led an entire family of five to the Lord, who also want to attend *Beth Yeshua*.
- After Rich and Richard Cooper shared the Gospel with "Bella" and answered her questions, she prayed the salvation prayer directly from a CJFM tract.

Virtual Meetings

Michael A. Campo, CJFM church ministries representative (Chicago), writes, "Covid-19 has affected my ability to speak *in* churches, but it has not affected my ability to *speak*." He praises God that through the use of technology like Zoom, Google Chat, and Microsoft Teams, he has been teaching a group of 25 people every Sunday, which has also resulted in seven unsaved visitors joining them. In addition, people who never attended the mid-week prayer meeting are praying every Wednesday with him. Michael has also added a podcast linked to his Zoom meeting so that individuals can join a Bible study on the book of Revelation. He asks us to pray that requests for speaking dates would be well received and accommodated when churches begin meeting in person again.

Zooming . . .

CJFM Representative Eric Chabot (Columbus, OH) decided to continue his weekly campus apologetics meetings, despite the lockdown, by using Zoom. He has hosted various scholars and apologists, such as Michael Licona, David Wood, Michael L. Brown, Craig Blomberg, Darrell Bock, and others. The Zoom meetings have been well attended, averaging 30-80 people each week. This has been a good opportunity to equip, encourage, and edify. All of these meetings can be accessed by doing a search for "Eric Chabot, YouTube."

Eric has been hitting the streets, as they have been filled with people protesting in the midst of racial tensions. He uses a tract called, "How to Overcome the Fear of Death?" He also uses a sign that states the importance of how a biblical worldview is the foundation of human value, dignity, and equality. People are asked questions about their concept of social justice, where it comes from, and why they are protesting for justice. Praise God that he has had several spiritual discussions. Eric covets your prayers for divine appointments, as he plans to continue using this approach on campus in the fall.

Anti-Semitism

CJFM representatives Richard and Rosamund (Ireland) have been confronted with anti-Semitic attitudes toward Jewish ministry since their move from London. However, God raised up a man who came to their assistance. He attends the same prayer fellowship and is appalled by anti-Semitism. He has a role working with the various churches in the area and will be introducing Richard to church and ministry leaders, encouraging them to have Richard speak in their churches about anti-Semitism once this pandemic subsides. Richard is writing a booklet for the churches, which deals with this and other spiritual matters, and is continuing to post rabbis with some of the tracts he has written over the years. Rosamund, too, experienced anti-Semitism with a member of her ladies' prayer fellowship and is writing a booklet specifically for women about how to pray for Israel, anti-Semitism, and other relevant issues. Pray for a greater understanding and receptiveness to Richard and Rosamund's ministry in Ireland.

Spirits Lifted

Diann Parkas, CJFM representative (New Jersey), asked an unsaved, depressed, Jewish woman to meet her in a local park. This meeting uplifted the woman's spirits and encouraged her to read the Bible. She called Diann and said that she read the book of Matthew in one sitting and agreed to study the Bible with her. Please pray for her salvation.

Bible Questions & Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at garyh@cjfm.org, or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

QUESTION: *What did Jesus mean when He told Mary not to touch Him after His Resurrection (John 20:17)?*

ANSWER: The passage says, *Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God'"* (John 20:17).

Some have taken this passage to mean that Mary Magdalene intercepted Yeshua in the Garden, after His Resurrection, when He was on His way from Hades/Sheol back to Heaven. They say He had the OT saints with Him at the time and was leading "captivity captive," as it says in Ephesians 4:8.

He asked Mary to stop clinging to Him because she had interrupted His Ascension to Heaven, according to this view. After all, "I am ascending to My Father" is in the present tense, making it sound like it was happening at that very moment. Proponents of this view say He would return to earth later to appear to His disciples and spend 40 days with them (Acts 1:3).

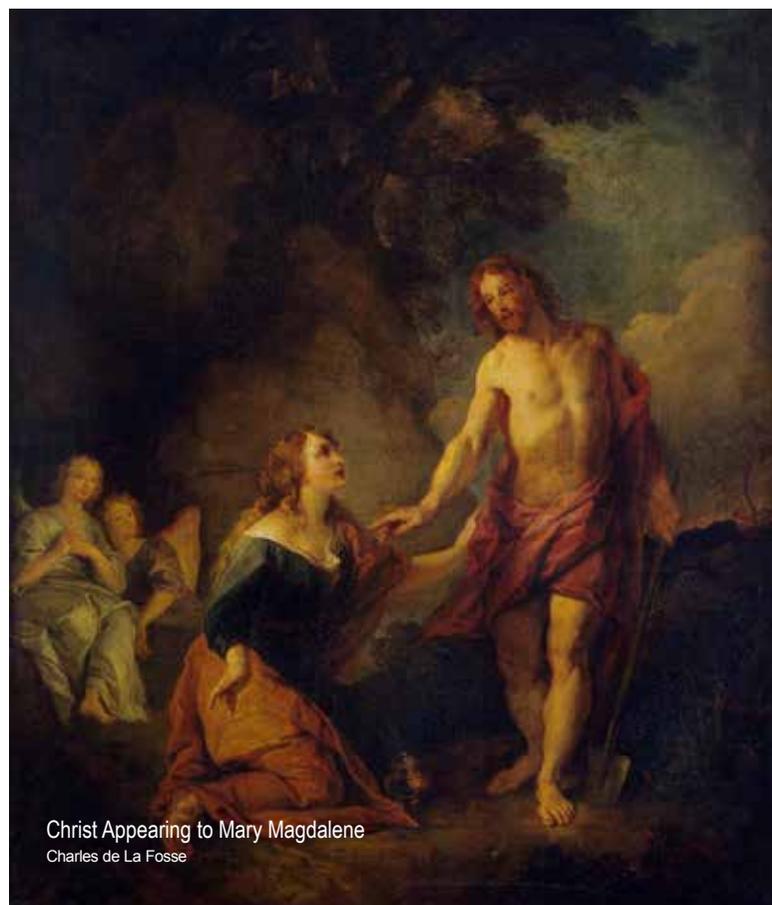
Furthermore, some people who espouse this view say Jesus was also taking His blood with Him (from His Crucifixion) to offer as an atonement on the heavenly Mercy Seat. As evidence, they cite this verse from Hebrews: *Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place [in Heaven] once for all, having obtained eternal redemption* (9:12).

These are intriguing claims, to be sure; but they're difficult to reconcile with Scripture. For one thing, this theory creates two Ascensions rather than just one (v. 9). Proponents are saying that after Yeshua left Mary in the Garden (John 20), He ascended to Heaven. Upon His arrival in Heaven, He dropped off the OT saints (and offered His blood on the heavenly Mercy Seat, according to some), and then He descended back to earth sometime later to spend another 40 days with His followers before ascending to Heaven a second time (Acts 1). This is problematic because the Ascension of our Lord back to Heaven following His Descent to Hades/Sheol is the theme of at least two biblical texts or prophecies (Psalm 68:18 and Ephesians 4:8–10), neither of which offers any option of multiple Ascensions.

Another problem is that the Greek syntax of Hebrews 9:12 suggests that when Yeshua entered the heavenly sanctuary, He had **already** paid the price of Redemption ("having obtained eternal redemption") on the Cross. His redemptive work was "finished" there (John 19:30) and there was nothing to add to it. Verse 12, in fact, says He offered His blood "**once** for all." He didn't offer His blood once on earth and then again, later, in Heaven.

A more plausible view of John 20:17 is that the Lord is telling Mary here not to hold on to Him because He has places to go and people to see. This is not a time for being weepy-eyed and licking old wounds. It's time to get busy! He had risen from the dead, returning triumphantly from Hades/Sheol, and now He would spend 40 days with His disciples before ascending from the Mount of Olives back to the Father (Acts 1:12) and leading Captivity captive (Eph. 4:8).

On the evening of His encounter at the tomb with His friend Mary, the Lord appeared to His disciples and greeted them, "Shalom Aleichem" ("Peace be upon you"; John 20:19). This began a 40-day countdown to His departure from Olivet, so we could say that this was all part of an extended Ascension event—a 40-day transition from earth to Heaven. That's why He could say, "I am ascending [present tense] to My Father and your Father." The present tense verb (*anabaino*) doesn't imply that He was on His way upward at that very moment and Mary was holding Him back. It just means the 40-day countdown began the moment He walked out of the tomb! 



Christ Appearing to Mary Magdalene
Charles de La Fosse

IN THIS ISSUE

Did Jesus Descend Into Hades?

by Dr. Gary Hedrick
Page 1

Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger
Page 10

Bible Questions & Answers

Do Not Cling To Me
Page 11

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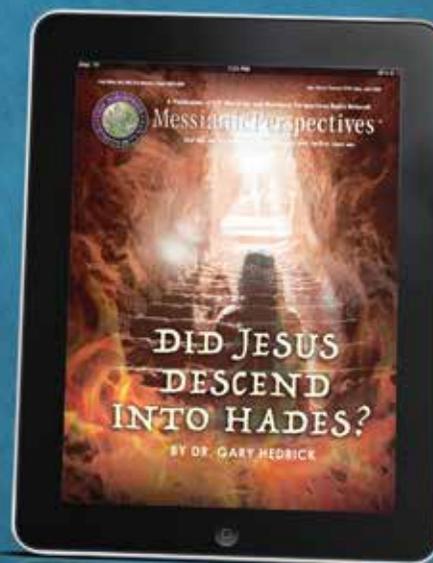
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