

Christian Education

Church 102: The Gates of Hades

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This title *Church 102: The Gates of Hades* may appear to be a mistake. After all, the church proclaims a message of eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. Why address the gates of Hades in the category of *Church 102*? Simple. Jesus did.

When Jesus spoke about the beginning of the *church* with His disciples, He said, “...and on this rock I will build My church, and the forces of Hades will not overpower it.” (Matthew 16:18, HCSB²). *Church 101: Church Beginnings* used the first part of this statement to address the beginning of the church. Now, *Church 102: The Gates of Hades* will focus on the second part of this great statement on the beginning of the church.

Before the church was ever established, Jesus made this very clear: the church will have opposition, but the opposition will not succeed. There is a spiritual battle taking place and the church is victorious because Jesus won the victory!

Below are some different Bible translations of this part of Matthew 16:18:

- ASV³: *and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*
GNT⁴: *and not even death will ever be able to overcome it.*
HCSB: *and the forces of Hades will not overpower it.*
KJV⁵: *and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*
MNT⁶: *the powers of Hades shall not succeed against it.*
NASB⁷: *and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.*

NCV⁸: *and the power of death will not be able to defeat it.*

NIV⁹: *and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

NKJV¹⁰: *and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.*

RSV¹¹: *and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.*

WNT¹²: *and the might of Hades shall not triumph over it.*

TGNT¹³: και πυλαι αδου ου κατασχυσουσιν αυτησ

What a variety of translations! Translating from The Greek New Testament could also be: *and the gates of Hades will not overpower her.* *Hades* is the Greek word. A translation of *Hades* could be *unseen* or *world of the dead*. That would make the translation: *and the gates of (the) unseen.* Or, the translation could be: *and the gates of (the) world of the dead.* *Overpower* could also be *win*. The gates of Hades will not be victorious over the church!

What is Jesus saying? Consider some of the historical context. According to Matthew 16:13, Jesus and His disciples were in the region of Caesarea Philippi. This area is located 20 miles north from the Sea of Galilee. The area includes Mount Hermon and a deep cavern that gave view to an under the earth river of water that fed the Jordan River. Earthquakes have changed the landscape some, but some of ruins remain. The area was well known for the worship of pagan gods. Niches were carved in the mountain side and contained the statues of various gods. The Greeks built a shrine near the cavern opening that was dedicated to god Pan, who had the hind quarters, legs, and horns of a goat. The entrance to the cavern or abyss, was also known as *the gates to Hades*.¹⁴ Several ancient writings suggest Mount Hermon as the portal for fallen angels who at times wage war against the people of God

Stop here and read Revelation 9:1-11. Check the box when complete.

For Jesus to reference the gates of Hades while in



this area certainly suggests He was speaking to the religious beliefs and practices of the day, especially those of the Greco-Roman peoples. The disciples did not understand what was truly taking place in and through Jesus. In one quick statement He declared the establishment of His church and that *the gates of Hades* would not overpower her. The church was being established with such strength that the powers coming from Hades will not be able to stop her. Satan, you have been warned!

And while the Romans ruled the day, the international language of the day was still Greek. Even the Hebrew Scriptures had been translated into Greek. The Greek Septuagint was produced in Egypt, not Israel, in the third and second centuries before Christ entered this world.

What is intriguing is the use of the word *Hades*. The Greek Septuagint uses *Hades* as a translation of the Hebrew word *Sheol*. *Sheol* is a reference to the grave or the abode, the dwelling, of the dead. *Hades*, in the Greek culture, also had a reference to the dwelling place of the dead, or departed spirits. Today, modern man calls Greek religious beliefs mythology. Jesus, however, used one of the Greek religious terms to explain the enemy of the church.



While *Hades* is often a term used interchangeably with *Hell*, the two are not necessarily the same. *Hades* is a temporary abode of the dead. One day, all of the dead will arise and face final judgment. *Hell* is used in association with the Greek word *Gehenna* which is from the Hebrew

GeHinnon, which means the Valley of Hinnon. The Valley of Hinnon lay to the south of Jerusalem. Here, the worship of pagan gods included child sacrifice. Later, after Israel repented of such wickedness, the valley became a burning and smoldering trash pit. Jesus says this *Hell* is a place of



“*unquenchable fire, where their worm does not die, and the fire is*

no quenched” (Mark 9:43-44, HCSB). Jesus said one should prefer to lose a hand, a foot, or an eye, than to risk being cast into *Gehenna*. *Hell*, not *Hades*, is more likened to the Lake of Fire in Revelation 20:13-15.

Among the Greek gods was Hades, the lord or king of the underworld. Hades ruled over Tartarus¹⁵. Interestingly, Tartarus is used once in the New Testament: *For if God didn't spare the angels who sinned, but threw them down into Tartarus and delivered them to be kept in chains of darkness until judgment* (2 Peter 2:4, HCSB). Tartarus appears to be interchangeable with Hades, so that *Hades* is both a ruler in the underworld and the name of the place he rules. At the gates of Hades is a loyal three-headed watchdog named Cerberus. Cerberus had a mane of serpents and a serpent tail. Cerberus was responsible for preventing dead souls from leaving and never allowing the living into Tartarus, or Hades¹⁶.

Hades, the lord of the underworld, is closely associated with, but not to be confused with Satan or the Devil. Hades is described as almost never leaving the deepest and darkest part of Tartarus called Erebus. Here, Hades dresses in black, lives in a palace made of black rock, and rides a black chariot drawn by black horses. He is described as jealous, violent, vengeful, and very possessive over every new resident. Satan, on the other hand, *is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour* (1 Peter 5:8, HCSB). Hades may very well be a literal being who serves Satan, one of Satan's fallen angels.

Hades is referenced as both a place and a person in The Revelation. Find and complete the following verses, the first is John referring to Jesus and what He said; and, the second refers to what John saw and learned:

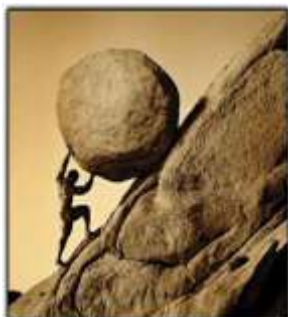
Revelation 1:17-18, HCSB: *When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. He laid His right hand on me, and said, "Don't be afraid! I*

am the First and the Last, and the _____ One. I was dead, but look--I am _____ forever and ever, and I hold the _____ of _____ and _____.

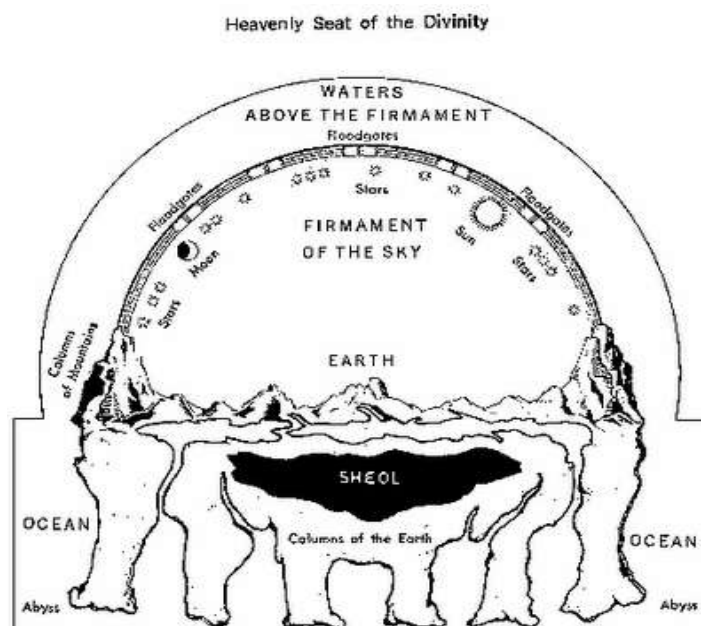
Revelation 6:8, HCSB: *And I looked, and there was a pale green horse. The horseman on it was named _____, and _____ was following after him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill by the _____, by _____, by _____, and by the wild animals of the earth.*

Beyond the gate and the wall of Hades, is the abode of the dead. The Greeks believed there were two locations within Hades. If the souls of the departed were virtuous, they were allowed to dwell in the Elysian Fields. Here the dead spirits are happy and dance to music day and night¹⁷. Webster's adds that the Elysian Fields is a place or condition of ideal bliss or complete happiness; paradise¹⁸. Jesus referred to Paradise when He said to one of the criminals hanging on the cross next to Him, "I assure you: Today you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43, HCSB).

The second location has already been referred to as Erebos. Erebos means darkness. This is a place of suffering. Here, Sisyphus, the greedy king of Corinth, has been doomed to roll a huge rock uphill. But before he gets to the top, the rock slips his grip and rolls to the bottom. He must do this over and over and over.



Ancient



Greek religious beliefs do sound odd. Yet, Jesus referred to Hades. Actually, Bible references go back even farther. Note what God said to Job:

Have you traveled to the sources of the sea or walked in the depths of the oceans? Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Have you seen the gates of death's shadow? Have you comprehended the extent of the earth? Tell [Me], if you know all this. (Job 38:16-18, HCSB)

Read and check the following passages that speak about *Sheol* or *Hades*.

- Numbers 16:28-33
- Job 26:5-6
- Psalm 49:5-15
- Isaiah 14:3-17

When the Greeks went to settle their land after the Tower of Babel incident (Genesis 11), they took truth mixed with error regarding the One True Living God who ruled over the Great Flood. And they wildly elaborated on what they believed. Jesus did not embrace Greek religious thought as a whole. Those gods are corrupt like mankind. Jesus came revealing the God who is *holy, holy, holy* (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). But He did refer to *Hades*, and that may suggest an element of truth in what the Greeks believed about this abode of the dead.

The Jewish historian Josephus wrote a discourse to the Greeks concerning Hades.¹⁹ He was sharing the Jewish understanding of Hades. In this writing Josephus states both the righteous and the unrighteous dwell there. He calls Hades a subterranean region wherein the light of this world does not shine. Angels are appointed as guardians. There is also a lake of unquenchable fire that as of yet, no one has been cast therein. Beyond the entrance gate, which is guarded by an archangel, angels are appointed to lead the righteous to the right

unto a region of light while singing hymns. This is a place of smiles and rest. The Jews call this The Bosom of Abraham. The unrighteous are dragged by force to the left which goes downward near the lake of fire. Hot vapors, noises, and the terrible looks of the angels in charge bring a terrifying expectation of the judgment to come.

While Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem for what would be His final Passover meal with His disciples before His death, He would teach the large crowd of people walking with Him. One of the stories He told was about Lazarus and a very rich man. Some people think this was just a made up story to make a point. However, Jesus referenced a man named Lazarus, someone whom the people could learn more about if they so choose to do so. Jesus told about a time when Lazarus was very poor and sickly. When begging at the rich man's gate, he was too weak to chase away the dogs who were licking his sores.

Find Luke 16 and complete the following verses.

Luke 16:22-24: *"One day the _____ man died and was carried away by angels to Abraham's side. The _____ man also died and was buried. And being in _____ in _____, he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off, with Lazarus at his side. 'Father Abraham!' he called out, 'Have _____ on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and _____ my tongue, because I am in _____ in this _____!'"*

Here we have a direct reference to life after death. One man is happy and being comforted. The other man is in a different side of Hades, the place of torment. The Greeks said there was two places within the gates of Hades, the abode of the dead: Elysian Fields or Paradise and Erebus or Tartarus.

Luke 16:25-26, HCSB: *“‘Son,’ Abraham said, ‘remember that during your life you received your _____ things, just as Lazarus received bad things, but now he is _____ here, while you are in _____. Besides all this, a great _____ has been fixed between us and you, so that those who want to pass over from here to you cannot; nether can those from there cross over to us.’”*

Wealth on earth is not necessarily a sign of God’s blessing. The rich man had wealth, but no faith in God. Lazarus had no wealth, but for his faith in God. In the end, they were rewarded accordingly. Now, they dwell in the state that responds to their faith, or lack thereof. The chasm that is fixed is a yawn in the landscape or a deep gulf between two places. For the Greeks, this may be the location of one of the rivers associated with Hades. The Cocytus River is the river of shrieking or wailing. The Phlegethon River is a river of fire. The rich man may even have seen the river as he had asked in the torment of flames for a drop of water for his tongue. The Greek understanding of Hades is close to what Jesus described. Again, what Jesus is teaching is no mythological parable, but truth without error!

Luke 16:27-28, HCSB: *“‘Father,’ he said, ‘then I beg you to send him to my father’s house--because I have five _____--to _____ them, so they won’t also _____ to this place of _____.’”*

No one can leave Hades. Make note of this, however, there is consciousness after the physical body has ceased to function. This consciousness in Hades meant comfort for one, and torment and alarm for the other. The torment has already been noted. The alarm is for unbelieving family who will also go down to torment unless



they put their faith in the LORD God Almighty. The man in torment thought a person rising from the dead would surely be witness enough to convince others to believe. But such an event was not for Lazarus (Luke 16:29-31). That privilege was being reserved for Jesus!

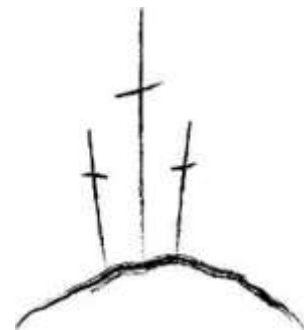
On the day of Pentecost, those who had believed Jesus to be the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). This was the focal passage of *Church 101*. While many spoke about the great acts of God in the native languages of the people who had come to Jerusalem for Pentecost, Peter gave the first evangelistic message. He spoke about Jesus, His life, crucifixion, and resurrection. During that message, Peter referenced David, the great king of Israel and writer of many of the Psalms. Complete the following Scriptures.

Acts 2:31-32, HCSB: *Seeing this in advance, he spoke concerning the _____ of the Messiah: **He was _____ in Hades, and His flesh did not experience decay.** God has resurrected this Jesus. We are all witnesses of this.*

Psalm 16:9-10, HCSB: *Therefore my heart is _____, and my spirit _____; my body also rests securely. For You will not abandon me to Sheol; You will not allow Your Faithful One to see _____.*

When Peter says, *He was not left in Hades* (Acts 2:31), he is saying that after Jesus died on the cross, and while they attended to His body and laid His body in a tomb, Jesus was in fact in Hades. But He was not left there. He arose on the third day! No doubt, Jesus entered into Paradise and spoke to the forgiven thief who died on a cross next to Jesus. Complete and consider the following Scriptures.

1 Peter 3:17-19, HCSB: *For it is better to suffer for*



doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing _____. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteousness, that He might bring you to _____, after being put to death in the fleshly realm but made _____ in the spiritual realm. In that state He also went and made a proclamation to the spirits in _____....

Ephesians 4:9-10, HCSB: But what does "He ascended" mean except that He _____ to the _____ parts of the earth? The One who descended is the same One who _____ far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.

Matthew 27:52-53, HCSB: The tombs also were opened and many bodies of the saints who had gone to their rest were _____. And they came out of the tombs after His _____, entered the holy city, and _____ to many.

That appears to tell us that Jesus brought out of Hades, from the section called Paradise, those who were believers and followers of God. In The Ante-Nicene Library, a collection of early writings from church leaders, is one called *The Gospel of Nicodemus*.²⁰ He names three rabbis that told about not only seeing Jesus alive from the dead but an additional 12,000. No one could approach them out of fear, but they could hear them singing praises about how Jesus had indeed risen from the dead and now reigns forever. These rabbis also declared seeing Jesus taken up into Heaven. Paradise is now in Heaven with Him! This is the hope found in Christ Jesus and in the church.

Acts 1:9-11, HCSB: ...He was taken up as they were watching, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.... "This Jesus, who has been

taken from you into heaven, will come in the same way that you have seen Him going into heaven.”

1 Peter 3:22, HCSB: *Now that He has gone into heaven, He is at God’s right hand, with angels, authorities, and powers subjected to Him.*

2 Corinthians 5:6-8, HCSB: *Therefore, though we are always confident and know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord--for we walk by faith, not by sight--yet we are confident and satisfied to be out of the body and at home with the Lord.*

Philippians 1:21-24, HCSB: *For me, living is Christ and dying is gain. Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don’t know which one I should choose. I am pressed by both. I have the desire to depart and be with Christ--which is far better--but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you.*

Hades is the abode of the dead. Paul believed he was going to Christ in Heaven. Indeed, all who now believe in Christ will go to Heaven. Consider what Jesus said. Find the following verses and complete them.

John 5:24, HCSB: *I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has _____ and will not come under _____ but has passed from _____ to life.*

John 11:25-26, HCSB: *Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who _____ in Me, even if he _____, will _____. Everyone who lives and _____ in Me will _____--ever. Do you believe this?*

Hades is the abode of the dead. Heaven is the abode of the living! Only those with a right relationship with Jesus enter into His kingdom. This relationship is established with repentance and belief. Together they are called faith. Faith is revealed when one believes Jesus is the victor over sin and death and starts living as His Word instructs. The personal relationship is established through worship, prayer, and reading God's Word. Call out to Jesus in prayer. Ask Him to deliver you from sin and death even as you acknowledge Him as the Lord of your life. And *the gates of Hades* will not keep you away from the Lord and His kingdom.

Revelation 20:13-15, HCSB: *Then the sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works. Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.*

1 Corinthians 15:54-58, HCSB: *...then the saying that is written will take place: **Death has been swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your victory? O Death, where is your sting?** Now the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Therefore, my dear brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*

Lord Jesus, I believe! Forgive me and deliver me. I will trust and follow You!

End Notes

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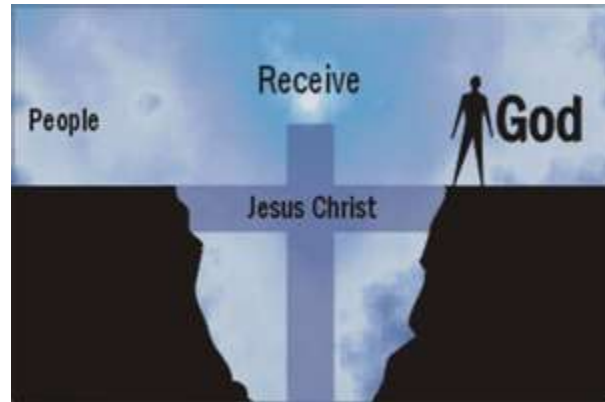
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³ ASV: American Standard Version.

⁴ GNT: Good News Translation.

⁵ KJV: King James Version.

⁶ MNT: Moffett's New Testament.



⁷ NASB: New American Standard Bible.

⁸ NCV: New Century Version.

⁹ NIV: New International Version.

¹⁰ NKJV: New King James Version.

¹¹ RSV: Revised Standard Version.

¹² WNT: Weymouth New Testament.

¹³ TGNT: The Greek New Testament.

¹⁴ www.generationword.com/Israel/caesarea_philippi.htm

¹⁵ Evslin, Bernard and Dorothy, and Ned Hoopes. *The Greek Gods*. New York, New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1966. Page 20.

¹⁶ *Greek-gods-and-goddesses.com*

¹⁷ *ibid.*, *The Greek Gods*. Page 20

¹⁸ All English word definitions come from *Webster's New World College Dictionary*. Fourth Edition. Cleveland, Ohio: Wiley Publishing, 2004.

¹⁹ *The Works of Flavius Josephus*. Database, WORDsearch Corporation, 2007.

²⁰ The Ante-Nicene Library. *The Gospel of Nicodemus*. Volume 8, Chapter 1.

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