

CHAPTER 8

WHEN MESSIAH FREED THE CAPTIVES FROM HELL, THEY ASCENDED

“...I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” ~Yeshua

Thus far in our journey we have surveyed many passages about Hell and our soul’s life after death, as we explored many deep mysteries of God’s plan of life and salvation for us all. Now let’s look deeper into these hidden mysteries and see the distinction God makes for the righteous faithful believers.

It’s incredibly refreshing to accept God at His Word. He is a Tree of Life. The passages we have already examined are weighty. Many of them attest that Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Christ) went to Hell. That is an intriguing and enlightening fact. But why? Why did He go to Hell? The words of God that we are

about to examine next are at the heart of the Gospel to every soul.

In previous chapters, we have already seen the expression “lower parts of the earth” is a common Bible phrase that refers to Sheol. The following passages, and the passages we have already covered, *leave no doubt* that Sheol is where the dead are held captive and that Sheol is deep in the lower parts of the earth – not on the surface: (Ps 16:10, 63:9, Pr 9:18, 15:24, Job 11:8, Deut 32:22, Isa 14:9, 66:22-24, Ez 31:14-18, 32:18-24, Mt 12:40, Eph 4:9).

Many times we read passages that we are accustomed to reading, but with such a focus on one aspect in the passages that we expect to see, that we gloss over other revealing aspects of what is being revealed. Take this passage for an example:

Rev 5:13

And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power *Be* to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!"

John records hearing every creature blessing and praising God and the Lamb. Since the creatures were able to bless God and to speak in complete sentences, some might rule out dogs, cats and fish, but certainly we would not rule out men or angelic creatures. John also records the location of the creatures that are praising and blessing the Lamb. Let's take note of that as well:

- Every creature which is *IN* heaven.
- Every creature which is *ON* the earth.
- Every creature which is *UNDER* the earth

And, less we think of the term “under the earth” to refer to those underwater creatures in the sea, he adds:

- And such as are *IN* the sea.

There are living conscious creatures capable of praising God “under the earth” right now. The Bible says so in many places. How many times have we read over that passage without ever contemplating those living beings that are under the earth? Only desperation would lead someone to deny the clear meaning the verbiage this passage demands.

John wept because no one **UNDER** the earth or **ON** the earth was able to open the scroll and read it (Rev 5:3 – 4). The apostle Paul spoke of those knees that would bow before Yeshua HaMashiach. He said:

Phil 2:10
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, (*emphasis added*)

So in addition to all the life that is in heaven, in addition to all the life that is on the earth, all the life that is teeming in the seas, there is the netherworld deep under the earth. It has more inhabitants than those on the earth. It is the abode of the dead and it is called Sheol – Hades – Hell. There are those there who “bend their knee” in worship of Yeshua Messiah! Those men who are there are held captive. Many angels are also held captive in a separate compartment of Sheol called in the Greek tongue, **Tártaros** NT:5020 (1 Pet 2:4).

WHEN MESSIAH FREED THE CAPTIVES

Let’s examine what captives were freed, where they were freed from (i.e., what held them captive) and when they were freed, once Messiah freed the

captives. This is great stuff – the stuff hope and truth are rooted in.

Eph 4:8-10

Therefore He says: "*When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.*"

⁹ (Now this, "*He ascended*" — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?

¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

Messiah came to free us from sin and bondage behind the gates of death. Yeshua said, “whoever commits sin is a slave of sin (John 8:34).” He also said, “if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed (John 8:36).” Sha’ul (Apostle Paul) taught us, “he who has died has been freed from sin (Rom 6:7).” We have seen in previous chapters that Hell is a place with gates and bars from which there is no escape. The dead are there as inmates. Hell is likened to a prison and to bondage, but it is also likened unto slavery in Egypt from which only God can provide an exodus (*way out*).

Once Yeshua HaMashiach (Jesus the Christ) came, it was very good news, for men were freed from sin, freed from death and freed from the gates of Hell.

Indeed, Messiah said the gates of Hell would not prevail against His Church (Matt 16:18). The gates of Hell have never really been closed to God or there could not have been any resurrections! Now, Messiah states clearly that Hell will not be able to confine the saints – the body of Messiah!

When Messiah came He freed the captives of Hell (Eph 4:8 – 10). The granting of this freedom was prophesied long ago in Isaiah 61. This was no longer a future event, for Messiah fulfilled this passage while in the flesh and stated so clearly one fine Sabbath afternoon while attending synagogue:

Luke 4:18-21

18 *"The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;*

19 *To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."*

20 Then He closed the book, and gave *it* back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.

21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (emphasis mine)

It was written long ago that God would grant liberty to the saints held captive in Hell. Some have been to Hell and back more than once.

THE SAINTS NO LONGER GO TO HELL

How did He do it? How did Yeshua free the captives? That is what Sha'ul (Paul) was explaining in Eph 4:8 – 10 above. He first had to descend into the lower parts of the earth – to Sheol (Ps 16:10, Acts 2:27, Eph 4:9). We know Messiah went to Hell on the day of His death, just like many before Him, for we remember He told the repentant thief on the cross, “today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43). That has already been adequately covered in previous chapters. But Yeshua’s soul was not left in Hades. He was raised out of Hell after 3 days and 3 nights. We have record that 40 days later He ascended on high, as He was taken up in the clouds (Acts 1:1-3, 9). When He ascended, He took the captive saints with Him (Eph 4:8-10). Only believers were freed at this stage, for they are the first-born, the first fruits. The others will rest until the appointed time. What an amazing mystery is being revealed.

Sha'ul (Apostle Paul) was teaching and expounding on the prophecy from Psalms 68:18. Specifically *WHEN* did Sha'ul say the captives from Sheol, held in the

lower parts of the earth, were freed? This is such an important and enlightening passage, it bears looking at again with eyes open wide;

Eph 4:8-10

Therefore He says: "*When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.*"

9 (Now this, "*He ascended*" — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?)

“When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive...” WOW! Praise Yah. That is the *when*. Actually, Messiah said He fulfilled the freeing of the prisoners long before he ascended (Luke 4:18 – 21), but when He ascended He took the captives with Him! And, certainly from the time Messiah ascended back to the Father and forward, the saints no longer go to Sheol, for Messiah promised, “the gates of Hell shall not prevail against my church [congregation] (Matt 16:18).”

Truth can be really exciting, when we believe and accept it. To the degree we believe and accept God’s truth – that is the degree He continues to reveal new truth to us (Mark 4:20, 24).

Since Messiah freed the captives of Hell when He ascended to heaven, do we have record of the saints with Yeshua in heaven? Absolutely! Let’s see. But

first let's briefly re-consider some of the congruent passages we have already examined.

- We reviewed the record of the souls under the altar in heaven (Rev 6:9). Remember, they lived and spoke to God and God answered them, comforted them, and dressed them in white robes. This account is clearly in heaven.
- The Transfiguration passages bear record. We have seen that Moses and Elijah were with Messiah in glory when He was transfigured before them. Of course they were, for Messiah said He would never leave us (Heb 13:5).
- We are the Body of Messiah. Since the saints make up the Body of Messiah – He lives in us – where He goes His Body goes. It only makes sense.

But let's now move on to some new exciting proof that the believing saints of today, along with those of the past, are currently living in heaven with Yeshua! Sha'ul (Paul) made a pointed comment about this when he was discussing the unity between the Jew and the non-Jew, through the blood of Messiah. This is a very basic truth. Notice:

Eph 2:5-6

even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

⁶ and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus
(emphasis mine)

When the resurrection occurs, the saints will inherit and dwell on the earth, ruling with Messiah. Until then, clearly the saints will sit with Messiah in heaven. The Complete Jewish Bible translates Eph 2:6 this way:

Eph 2:6

That is, God raised us up with the Messiah
Yeshua and seated us with him in heaven, CJB

What a great truth. But there's more – much more. What if we could see a registry, like of a census, of those who are in heaven – not of those who will be in heaven – a registry of those who currently in heaven? We do have such a record, it has been provided for us. Some of you may not believe it, but you will see it now:

Heb 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,

23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,

24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

These citizens of heaven are known as “a cloud of witnesses (Heb 12:1).” Their territory is spiritual Mount Zion – the heavenly Jerusalem (vs 22). It states, “you have come to...” this heavenly Jerusalem. The passage then begins to speak of who is already there. But first let’s notice the verbiage in verse 23, “*church (congregation) of the first born who are registered in heaven.*” The word “registered” is from the Greek word *apográphō*; NT:583 which means: to register in a census. A census is taken to demonstrate who is in a country, not who has been or will be in a country.

Now let’s review who is presently in heaven to whom are we told we will “come to”.

- An innumerable company of angels

- The general assembly and church of the firstborn
- To God, the judge of all
- To the spirits of just men made perfect
- To Yeshua (Jesus) the mediator of the new covenant

Two of the groups listed as being in heavenly Jerusalem right now are 1, the general assembly and church [congregation] of the firstborn and 2, the spirits of just men made perfect. That is the testimony of the Holy Spirit and that is very cool indeed!

Of course it makes sense that the general assembly and community of the firstborn, and the spirits of just men made perfect would be listed as being in heaven – since Sha’ul (Paul) said our citizenship was in heaven.

Phil 3:20

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

How can your citizenship be IN heaven if we never go there? Clearly we do. I realize that the saints will inherit the Earth. But until then, their citizenship is in

heaven with Messiah – who says to those who believe in Him; “I will never leave you (Heb 13:5).”

Life can get hard sometimes. Sha’ul (Paul) was getting weary toward the end of his life in the flesh. He was hard pressed. Personally he wanted to let his body die so he could be with the Lord Yeshua, but... what was best for his fellow disciples? Let’s note what he said:

Phil 1:21-24

For to me, life is the Messiah, and death is gain.

22 But if by living on in the body I can do fruitful work, then I don’t know which to choose.

23 I am caught in a dilemma: my desire is to go off and be with the Messiah — that is better by far —

24 but because of you, the greater need is to stay on in the body. CJB

Wow! What an encouraging thing to read. What a loving man and a great mitzvah (good deed). But even more encouraging is the realization that the death of the saints is their unity of life in Messiah. This was not a metaphor! Paul sincerely knew being with Messiah – even before the resurrection of his body – was “better by far” than living in this life now.

It would be absolutely ludicrous to assert that Sha’ul (Paul) was saying he would prefer to die and rot in his

grave for a couple thousand years awaiting the resurrection, than continuing to life. That certainly would not be “with Messiah.”

There’s more... a lot more.

2 Cor 5:1-10

5 For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Notice when the earthly house is destroyed (when our body dies) we have a home *in heaven!* Let’s continue:

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven,

Again, our habitation is *in heaven*. Continuing:

3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked.

4 For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

6 So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord.

Here in verse 6 we see that the flesh is a veil separating us from God. While in our physical bodies, we are absent from the Lord Yeshua. Continuing:

7 For we walk by faith, not by sight.

8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

9 Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him.

WOW! When we are absent our body, we are present with the Lord. That's Fantastic. But notice further. Sha'ul (Paul) said he made it his aim to be pleasing to the Lord both while in his body and while absent his body (verse 9). This is a clear statement that the saints have both the will and power to be able to be pleasing to the Lord – to do pleasing things for Him – even after death – even after their soul departs their bodies. This is not a description of a state of being almost comatose but alive. This is an active life in the Body of Messiah – living and pleasing Him and being pleased

by Him. It is a life of pleasure, of joy and purpose. Praise Yah! Continuing:

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

These passages are so fantastic that each of us ought to bubble over in joyful anticipation of the Kingdom of God – both in heaven and later when it is brought down to Earth. They also ought to drive us on in faith to obey God to our best, for we will be judged for the things done in the body. But with His grace, we will marry Messiah and be one with Him. The gates of Hell shall not prevail against the body of believers in Messiah Yeshua! This is the Good-News.

Those who believe only in life for the dead after the resurrection often quote from the latter part of 1 Thessalonians, the fourth chapter. They believe the dead rest only in their graves. They do not believe the dead saints go up to heaven with Messiah. Typically, part of their challenge in understanding is due to confusing translations. But even so, the passages they quote from still contain a poignant truth they overlook. Let's see an example first in the NKJV:

1 Thess 4:14

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again,
even so God will bring with Him those who
sleep in Jesus.

If this passage is associated with the return of Messiah at the last trump, then we have the promise, “God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.” Messiah will bring with Him those who sleep, means that they are already with Him. Otherwise, He would return to get them, not bring them with Him! There’s no getting around this fact.

If the syntax of this passage is not ignored, then we have Yeshua taking the dead to Heaven with Him until He returns and bringing them back with Him. The result – those who have died in Messiah are now with Him!

Now let’s see an even more clear translation of this passage:

1 Thess 4:14-17

14...For since we believe that Yeshua died and rose again, we also believe that in the same way God, through Yeshua, will take with him those who have died.

15 When we say this, we base it on the Lord’s own word: we who remain alive when the Lord

comes will certainly not take precedence over those who have died.

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a rousing cry, with a call from one of the ruling angels, and with God's *shofar*; those who died united with the Messiah will be the first to rise;

17 then we who are left still alive will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and thus we will always be with the Lord. CJB

Notice the verbiage “will take with him those who have died” in verse 14. This makes sense in light of Messiahs promise not to ever leave us or forsake us. Remember He also promised, “where ever I am there you will be also (John 14:3).”

I'm always amazed at how many passages have to be completely ignored or avoided to maintain the belief that the dead saints still rest in their graves- even after Messiah freed the captives and dwells in them (the saints – both dead and alive – are the body of Messiah). Listen to the words of Messiah Himself, speaking of His return:

Matt 24:31

31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

When Messiah returns He will gather together His elect *from* where.....? *From* Heaven!

Just prior to His return, Messiah gathers His elect from heaven – not from the Earth, not from their graves – but from heaven! Then He will descend with them to begin to establish His kingdom upon the Earth.

David foresaw this as well in the Psalms 149. The apostle John was also inspired to record the same thing:

Rev 19:14

And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

You might ask, ‘how do we know those who follow Messiah on white horses are the saints?’ We know this because it states who they are who are dressed in the bright fine linen – the saints just a few verses earlier.

Rev 19:8

8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

You may remember souls under the alter in heaven were also dressed in white (Rev 6:11).

Since we're called to become kings and priests (Rev 5:10), we will return with Him when He returns to conquer the discordant armies of the Earth that resist Him. But clearly, we RETURN WITH HIM. He does not return to get us! Can you accept and appreciate these absolutely wonderful glorious truths?

All this glorious hope-filled truth is possible because God breathed His Spirit life into our souls. This is all possible because our soul is the essence of life in the inner man, because there is a spirit in man. Our body derives life from the spirit and soul that dwell in it, not the other way around (Jm 2:26). Just as our soul is able to learn, grow and experience life through our bodies, so we will continue to experience all that God has to offer in the Body of Messiah, until our new spirit body is prepared for us in the resurrection.

Understanding the truth that our soul is our life, and that our soul has life independent of our bodies, is the only way that the words of Messiah make sense. Consider this passage:

John 5:24

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

At the very moment when we become believers – we pass from death to everlasting life. This was true for the saints in the Tanach, such as Abraham, so it is true for the saints today. I know the difference between the meaning of the words “has everlasting life” and “will have everlasting life.” The verbiage Messiah used was current tense (*has* everlasting life), not future tense (will have everlasting life). This was not something that had to wait for the resurrection – it takes place when we believe. Similarly, the verbiage “has passed from death to life” is both current tense and past tense but it is not future tense. Our eternal life begins when we accept Messiah as the Son of God and sacrifice for our sins – not at the resurrection.

Notice the next verse too:

John 5:25

Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live.
(emphasis mine)

The hour is coming for some, but for others the hour is NOW! Those dead saints in Sheol heard the voice of their Messiah and lived. Those who were alive at the time, heard and believed Messiah – passed from death to life at that moment. Those who only believe eternal life begins at the resurrection, miss the words of Messiah Himself. The following example, as a case-in-point, does not even makes sense unless one understands the full ramifications of Messiahs teachings on the soul surviving the death of the body.

John 11:25-26

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

How can a believer both live and die at the same time? How can we reconcile the statements; “though he may die” and “whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” – especially since both were spoken at the same time? Though the body dies, the soul of believers shall never die. This is such an amazing truth. Messiah asks us all, “Do you believe this?” I believe.

There is no other understanding of Messiah’s words in John that actually make sense.

O the depth of love and hidden joys that are shrouded in the mystery of God's family of man. Praise and laud our Father Most High. Blessed are those who trust and kiss His Son (Pr 2:12).