

# SLIPPING THROUGH THE GATES OF DEATH

## Chapter 1

### Hell

*Fear of death produces bondage... (Heb 2:15)*

**D**o you fear your death? How many people truly understand what will happen to them when they die? Most religions have teachings that vary wildly about what happens to us when we die, leaving the student bewildered and unsure. Would you like to experience the comfort of sound biblical truth regarding death, heaven and hell? People generally believe that the wicked go to hell at death, while the righteous go to heaven. But is there record of the righteous also going to hell? What if there was an escape from hell? Would you ever hear about it – and – what would the ramifications be? The message of hope in God’s word regarding the dead is powerful. But preconceived beliefs can act as a veil that hides truth from us creating roadblocks to our growth and faith. It’s hard to learn something different from what

we think we already know. It can be even more difficult to learn something that we feel is different from what our synagogue, church or friends believe, out of concern that it may put us at odds with them. When Nicodemus sought out the wise but unconventional teachings of Rabbi Yeshua, he came privately by night so he could avoid detection. Persecution for anyone who believed differently was as alive and well in the first century as it is today. Truth is for the independent-minded ones who are as hungry as they are brave, and the reward of Gods' truth is always freedom (John 8:32).

To understand death and hell we must first understand what we are, what we are made of and why we are here. Understanding death is best accomplished by understanding the purpose of our life. Do you know why you were born? Do you know why you were born *when* you were born? Do you have a soul? What is a soul? Do you have a spirit? Do you really know YOU?

To learn about God is to learn about ourselves, for we are made in His image. God is a very exciting and multifaceted being. To understand what will happen to

us at death, we'll need to understand the truth of what we are. This is our own personal truth and the roots of our heritage.

Let's begin with an examination of just what and where Hell, Sheol or Hades is. Since the Holy Bible is the basis of truth and understanding, let's first be sure we're clear as to the meaning of a few Biblical words or phrases. The original Holy Bible is known as: Torah, the Prophets, the Writings and the Psalms. This compilation is known as the Tanach. Later we have the addition of the letters and books that make up the B'rit Hadashah which later also came to be called the *New Testament*. The phrase "Old Testament" is not a biblical term, nor does it accurately describe the contents of the Tanach. Yeshua's Will and Testament is part of the fulfillment of New Covenant promises made in the Torah and Tanach, and so came to be called the B'rit Hadashah or New Testament. B'rit means covenant. *Britain* means covenant people. The "Old" Covenant refers to only one of many Covenants within the Tanach, and it is only a part of the many aspects and teachings within the Tanach.

The Tanach was originally written primarily in Hebrew. Hebrew is a beautiful picture language, so only a few Hebrew words are needed to paint a picture of what is being communicated. English is a precise scientific language. A single Hebrew word may contain the breadth of meaning that requires a whole sentence to translate it into English. There may be five or ten widely-varying English words to express one word in Hebrew. Only one of these words may fit the context, or, perhaps all can be correct. The meaning may be singular or its meanings may be intended to be understood differently according to the context, or even multilayered – i.e., one a type or forerunner, one a reality or full-scale fulfillment, one physical, one spiritual etc...

Now let's get back on topic. The Hebrew word **קֶבֶר** **qeber**: is translated *grave*, *tomb*, and *sepulcher*. It refers to a hole in the ground as a resting place for decomposing bodies as they return to dust. The old English word "hell" was once used to refer to a hole in the ground where potatoes or wine could be stored in a cool underground cellar. A hole in the ground like a grave or resting place is not the hell that is usually conjured up in our minds when we hear the word

“hell” – and rightly so. There are many graves, many tombs, and many cellars. There is only one real hell.

The Hebrew word **שְׁאוֹל Sheol** is translated into the English words *hell, netherworld, pit, bottomless pit, underworld, abode of the dead, Sheol*. The exact Brit Hadashah (New Testament) equivalent of the Hebrew word *Sheol* is the Greek word *Hades*. Sheol or Hades is described as being deep in the heart of the earth, as compared to a relatively shallow hole on the surface of the earth like a tomb or grave. The Bible describes Sheol as being a singular place or abode of the dead, where the inmates are held captive, like as in a prison. There are many graves but not many hells. People can go down into a tomb or grave, lay their dead to rest and come back out of the grave. People are not free to go to Sheol and return. Let’s see this scripturally:

Sheol (hell) is described as a place with bars, gates, locks and ravines from which no man can escape. God asked Job if the gates and doors of death had been revealed to him.

Job 38:17 Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the doors of the shadow of death?

Sheol is NEVER used scripturally as a plural noun, but is always singular, as it is a singular place. The plural of קֶבֶר *qeber*, for *graves*, is used frequently. Here are a few interesting distinguishing facts about Sheol (hell) and the grave:

- ‘Qeber’; A tomb or grave, is always located *on* the earth.
- ‘Sheol’ is never located *on* the earth.
- Men can go into tombs, lay the dead to rest and return, such as those who placed Yeshua’s body in a tomb.
- Men cannot return from Sheol to the earth without being raised by God.
- Men never put other men into Sheol – and cannot access Sheol without personally dying first.
- Men often put other people into a *qeber* – into their graves.

There are many other such comparisons that can be made, but first let’s take a look and see where God’s word reveals that Sheol is located.

To the Pharaoh of Egypt and all his multitudes, God pronounced to them that they would die and be

brought down into the depths (*tahity*) of the earth to lie in the lowest parts of Sheol (Ezek 31:14 – 18). The Hebrew word for being under the depths is *tahity* meaning: below, lower or lowest parts of the earth.

David said of his would-be murderers; “those *who* seek my life, to destroy *it*, shall go into the lower parts of the earth (Ps 63:9).”

Clearly David understood hell as being in the lower parts or deep beneath the earth. David’s son, Solomon, wrote the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs is known for its succinct and pithy wisdom. Check out this clear description of hell’s location:

The way of life *winds* upward for the wise, that he may turn away from hell (*Sheol*) below (*tahity*) (Prov 15:24).

Torah also describes Sheol as being deep under the earth, under the foundations of the mountains. We have all seen the deep foundation holes that are dug to hold the towering steel and concrete structures of today’s sky-scrappers. The footings of the foundations go many stories down below grade. How much deeper are the foundations of the large mountain ranges and high peaks. God Himself tells us that Sheol is under the foundations of these tall mountain ranges. Let’s read about it:

For a fire is kindled in My anger, And shall burn to the lowest hell; It shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains (Deut 32:22).

God is sending Satan down to Sheol – to the pit in lowest depths of the earth where the dead will gaze at him in amazement. Notice Isaiah 14:9 - 15:

9 "Hell from beneath is excited about you, to meet *you* at your coming; It stirs up the dead for you, All the chief ones of the earth; It has raised up from their thrones All the kings of the nations.

10 They all shall speak and say to you: 'Have you also become as weak as we? Have you become like us?'

11 Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, *and* the sound of your stringed instruments; the maggot is spread under you, And worms cover you.'

12 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!

13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north;

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,  
I will be like the Most High.'

15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to  
the lowest depths of the Pit  
(Isa 14:9-15).

It is beyond dispute that hell is down in the lowest depths of the heart of the earth. There is *NO* grave that can be dug that deep. What does this mean? It means that the grave is not hell. A hole on the surface of the earth like a grave, tomb or a storage cellar for wine or potatoes is certainly NOT the hell of the Bible.

The body dies and is placed into a relatively shallow grave or tomb where it decomposes and returns to dust. The souls of the dead go down much further into Sheol.

Messiah said He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt 12:40). The heart symbolizes the

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“innermost part” of man. Thus the phrase, “heart of the earth” is the innermost part of the earth. The emissary Sha’ul (Paul) understood this too, as we will see.

Notice how Sha'ul expounded upon the words of the Psalmist when he quoted: "You have ascended on high, you have led captivity captive (Ps 68:18)."

Eph 4:8-9

8 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?

Yeshua descended into the lower parts of the earth. Clearly this is *NOT* referring to His tomb which was in a shallow cave on the earth's surface.

It may be quite a shock to many to realize that Yeshua actually went to hell! (There will be more on this topic in future chapters.) Messiah descended deep into the lower parts of the earth, right into Sheol!

Let's learn from the apostle Peter as he presses this fact in Acts 2:22-27:

22 "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did

through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know —

23 Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;

24 whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

25 For David says concerning Him: *'I foresaw the LORD always before my face, for He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.*

26 *Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.*

27 *For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*

Notice the words “For You will not leave my soul in Hades...” in verse 27. Clearly, Yeshua’s soul would have had to have first gone to Hell, for David’s statement to be true. Yeshua’s soul was not left in Sheol, but He did go there! This was Peter’s point. Sha’ul then built upon this truth by explaining that Yeshua ascended from Sheol (Eph 4:8-9).

Yeshua, like Jonah, died and went to Sheol for 3 full days and 3 full nights.

Jonah 2:2-3, 6

"2 Out of the belly of Sheol I cried, *and* you heard my voice. 3 For you cast me into the deep..."

6 I went down to the moorings of the mountains; The earth with its bars *closed* behind me forever; Yet You have brought up my life from the pit, O LORD , my God.

Jonah's body remained in the belly of the fish, but his soul went to Sheol – a place that flesh and blood cannot enter. Jonah went down so deep he says he went to the very moorings (foundations) of the mountains to a pit closed in by bars – the description of Sheol. Once again we see Sheol described as being under the mountains, deep under the sea and likened to a prison!

In fact, many times we see Sheol described as a place with gates from which no man can escape. People are not locked in graves with bars and locking gates. Further, graves are never described as burning with fire, like some portions of Sheol are (Deut 32:22).

The body returns to dust in a grave, but souls go to Sheol (Hades).

King David described the nations that forget God as sinking down into the pit of Sheol. He also praises God for lifting him up from the gates of Sheol (Ps 9:13 – 17). You can't be lifted up from a place you have not first been to. David describes the gates of hell as being like gates of bronze or iron that only God can cut and break (Ps 107:15 – 18). Satan himself is described as having power over the dead and being in a position that could be likened to being Hell's prison warden (Heb 2:14).

When we compare these plain biblical facts about the grave and Sheol with our beliefs, we find out how our beliefs hold up to biblical truth!

In future chapters, we'll learn more about the fate of those who go to hell, about the difference between your soul and your body and about the long journey of our souls from the words of our own Bibles.