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APPENDIX:

Hades Defined

The phrase "Gates of Hades" can be an illusive phrase to define. Some have understood this phrase to be a reference to death, while others a reference to the devil and his angels. This article will present this phrase from a different perspective.

To understand the phrase, "Gates of Hades" (a literal translation of the Greek text, not "Gates of Hell" as some versions translate it), one must understand what Hades is and is not. First, Hades is not the same place as hell. Hell is a different place which is also described in the Bible as the "eternal fire" (Mat. 18:8; 25:41; Jude 7) and as the "lake of fire" (Rev. 19:20; 20:10,14,15).¹ Second, hell and not Hades is the place which was prepared for the devil and his angels (Mat. 25:41). It is a place containing pits of darkness where angels are already being held and awaiting judgment (1 Pet. 2:4). Hades, on the other hand, is the place where the unbelieving dead are being kept and awaiting judgment (Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15; 16:23-24; Rev. 20:13). It is a place for which Jesus holds the keys (Rev. 1:18), having authority over it. Third, the fires of Hades are not eternal like the fires of hell are, unless one sees the fires of hell (which Hades is thrown into) as an extension of Hades (Rev. 20:14). Therefore the usage of the word hell (Mat. 23:33; Mark 9:43-49) looks beyond Hades to eternal judgment; it being the lake of fire, the second death (Rev. 20:14). Fourth, hell and not Hades is the final place where people (Rev. 19:20; 20:13-15; 21:8) and fallen angels (2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 20:10) will together (Rev. 20:10) spend eternity.



The phrase "Gates of Hades" is used only once in the Bible, that being in Matthew 16:18. Though this term is associated with death, it is not another term which means death; or as was stated above, it is not a reference to the second death. One obvious association between death and Hades is that when the unredeemed die, they are placed in Hades. Another association is found in the book of Revelation where the words "death" and "Hades" are linked together on three occasions (Rev. 6:8; 20:13; 20:14). However, it is clear from these references in context that they are two separate entities and not one and the same. Whereas Hades refers to a place where the unredeemed reside (cf. Luke 16:23-24), death refers to a state of exist-

¹In Matthew 18:8-9, the eternal fires and hell are referred to as the same place. In Matthew 25:41, 2 Peter 2:4 and Revelation 20:10, a correlation is made which establishes the fact that the eternal fire and the lake of fire are the same place. Therefore hell, the eternal fire, and the lake of fire are all referring to the same place.

ence for the unredeemed in contrast to the state of existence of the redeemed, that of life (cf. John 5:24,28-29; 2 Cor. 5:6; Rev. 20:13-14). Therefore, the "Gates of Hades" and death are not the same thing.

The phrase "Gates of Hades" is also not a reference to the devil and his angels, being in a position of power and authority over it. There are no references in Scripture which tie these two together. Actually, the opposite is proposed here since Satan has no power or authority over Hades, only Christ does. It is He who was given authority over all things by His Father (cf. Mat. 11:27; 28:18; Acts 2:36; 1 Cor. 15:27), and it is He who holds the keys to Hades (Rev. 1:18). Therefore, since Jesus is the One who holds the keys, it would logically follow that He decides who will or will not enter the Gates of Hades; for the one who holds the keys is the one who has authority over the thing or place which the key unlocks (cf. Isa. 22:22; Mat. 16:19; Rev. 1:18; 3:7; 9:1; 20:1-3). It is then not Satan who makes decisions about, resides in, or rules over Hades for he has no authority regarding it.

What then does the term "Gates of Hades" refer to? There are ten uses of the word "Hades" in the Greek New Testament. These references describe Hades as a place:

1. where the souls of unbelievers descend to upon death (Mat. 11:23; Luke 10:15)
2. whose gates will not overpower the church of Jesus Christ (Mat. 16:18)
3. of torment by fire for unbelievers (Luke 16:23-24)
4. to which Jesus was not abandoned by the Father upon His death (Acts 2:27,31)
5. to which Jesus holds the keys (Rev. 1:18)
6. which follows death (Rev. 6:8)
7. where the unbelieving dead are kept (Rev. 20:13)
8. which will be thrown into the lake of fire at the final judgment (Rev. 20:14)

From these uses, one can see that Hades is a place of torment and punishment where the souls of the unbelieving dead are kept until the day they are released for judgment before being thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13). In these verses, it is also clear that the "Gates of Hades" will not overpower the church (Mat. 16:18). The question then is: "What did Jesus mean when He said this?"

The word "gates" as used in the Bible refers to more than just the physical gates of a city. It refers to the entire city and what it contained (cf. Gen. 22:17; 24:60; Exo. 32:26; Deut. 12:12; Lam. 4:12; Rev. 22:11,14). The gates of a city were also a place where important business was transacted (cf. Gen. 23:10-16; Deut. 16:18; Josh 20:4; 17:8; Ruth 4:1-11). Taking these facts into account, the word "gates" would then portray a place of prominence, power and strength. Therefore the "Gates of Hades" refers to Hades as a whole, including all its inhabitants; those being the souls of the dead who are imprisoned there awaiting final judgment. It also is a prominent and powerful place, having authority over not only those who reside there, but also over those who will one day reside there as well. It will overpower all unbelievers.

In reference to the church however, the "Gates of Hades" will never overpower, prevail against or gain control over it to its detriment. Simply put, not one true believer in Jesus Christ will ever enter those gates. Believers are exempt from entering

because they are redeemed by the Lamb of God and are in Christ (cf. Rom. 8:1). Through Jesus, Christians have victory over Hades (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54-57; 1 John 5:4). And although Hades was once a place where the souls of both Old Testament believers and unbelievers once resided [believers in Abraham's bosom and unbelievers in a flame of fire (Luke 16:22-26)], only the souls of unbelievers reside there today (cf. 2 Cor. 5:8).

In conclusion, Hades has an innate prominence, power and authority, and is an entity in itself simply due to the fact that these characteristics were given to it at its creation by God. Therefore Hades is not the fortress of Satan, or of death for that matter from which either can launch their attacks against the church.