DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this lesson we will study the meaning of two cognate words in different languages, the Hebrew word Sheol and the Greek word Hades. The word Hades was common in the Greek world and appears eleven times in the NT. However, the meaning of the word in the NT is not necessarily the same as in the Greek world. In other words, we cannot determine the meaning of the word Hades in the NT by how Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates used it. We must determine its meaning by the cognate OT Hebrew word Sheol.

Sheol has been translated in various ways: grave, hell, pit. The cognate Greek word Hades appears eleven times in the NT, and only once (in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus) does it refer to a place of burning. The translation of the word is confusing where it is rendered as grave, hell, depths, and Hades. In the lone exception, the apostle Paul wrote that the righteous would come forth from Hades at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:55). Clearly, the translators understood that it would be absurd for the righteous to come forth from hell at the resurrection! So we are left with the question, what is the proper meaning of Hades?
Read 1 Corinthians 15 from the translation of your choice. Write out 1 Corinthians 15:51–55. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
How do we know that the word *Hades* is the Greek cognate of the Hebrew word *Sheol*? The answer is that the NT paraphrases or quotes OT verses and replaces the word *Sheol* with *Hades*. For example, Paul paraphrased Hosea 13:14 (in 1 Cor. 15:55) and replaced *Sheol* with *Hades*:

- Hosea 13:14: “O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave [Sheol], I will be your destruction!”
- 1 Corinthians 15:55: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”

The book of Acts provides another example. On the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted Psalm 16:10 (in Acts 2:27, 31) and also replaced the word *Sheol* with *Hades*:

- Psalm 16:10: “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”
- Acts 2:27: “For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.”

In this synonymous parallelism, the word *soul* in the first line is parallel to “Holy One” in the second and the word *Hades* in the first is parallel to the word *corruption* in the second. One cannot miss the point that the soul is the Holy One (not a part of the Holy One) and *Sheol* is a place of corruption and decay, not burning!

We find a prime example of the proper meaning of *Hades* in the RSV translation of Matthew 16:18: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.” *Hades* is a place of death, not burning!

The KJV and NKJV translate the word *Hades* in Matthew 16:18 as “hell.” However, other versions transliterate the word as the “gates of *hades*” (NIV) and still others translate *Hades* as “death itself” (CEV), “the power of death” (NCV), and “not even death” (GNT). The Complete Jewish Bible replaces the expression “the gates of *Hades*” with the Hebrew, “the gates of *Sheol*,” which provides further evidence that in Jewish thinking, *Hades* is a cognate of *Sheol*. The idea that *Sheol* and death are enclosed by gates that keep the dead locked in finds its roots in the OT (Isa. 38:10; Ps. 107:18).

The immediately succeeding context of Matthew 16:18 explains why the gates of *Hades* and death would not prevail against the church. They will not, because they did not prevail against Jesus! (Matt. 16:21). He broke the fetters of death and the grave on the third day. The word *Hades* in Matthew 16:18 could easily have been translated “grave” in the KJV and NKJV. Death would not be able to keep Jesus or His church in *Hades* because He is the resurrection and the life!
DARK AND SILENT

The Bible describes Sheol/Hades as a dark and silent place. It is difficult to conceive of any place that is darker or more silent than being six feet under! Thus, Psalm 115:17 tells us that “the dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence” Job described the grave in 17:13, 14 as a place of darkness and corruption, where the worms do their work.

The Bible portrays Sheol/Hades as a prison house with bars (Isa. 38:10; Ps. 107:18; Matt. 16:18). It is not a place of torture and burning but rather of silence and darkness, where the dead know nothing (Eccl. 9:5, 10). Jesus taught that the dead are in their graves (John 5:28, 29) and will remain there until the resurrection. Those who are in the grave are sleeping and unconscious of everything that transpires around them (Dan. 12:2; Ps. 13:3; Job 14:12; John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:13, 14; Rev. 14:13).

Job 7:9, 10 uses the metaphor of a vanishing cloud to portray those who go down to Sheol: “As the cloud disappears and vanishes away, so he who goes down to the grave does not come up. He shall never return to his house, nor shall his place know him anymore” (emphasis supplied). The faithful dead are not in heaven praising the Lord, for the Psalmist wrote that in death there is no remembrance of God and in Sheol no one will give Him thanks (Ps. 6:5). The gospel prophet Isaiah assures us that Sheol cannot thank the Lord and death cannot praise Him, and those who go down to the pit cannot hope in His truth. Only the living can praise the Lord (Isa. 38:18, 19). Job longed to go to Sheol, where his sufferings would cease (Job 14:13). If Sheol was a place of burning and torture, why would Job want to go there?

Many are terrified at the prospect of death. They wonder what will happen the moment they draw their last breath. We can be certain of one thing. Some die in hope and some in despair. If Jesus had not resurrected, everyone would be doomed to eternal darkness and silence. However, the Bible has great news—the dead in Christ will rise from the grave immortal and incorruptible. Because Jesus lives, those who are in Christ will live also. “For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:16–20).
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What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

John 5:28, 29
Revelation 1:17, 18
Psalm 49:14, 15
Job 14:10–15
1 Corinthians 15:55
(cf. Hosea 13:14)
Revelation 20:13, 14

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with 1 Corinthians 15?

Review your memorized verse from 1 Corinthians 15.
**JESUS HAS THE KEYS!**

The Bible compares *Sheol/Hades* to a prison house with bars and gates (Ps. 9:13; Isa. 38:10). The first reference to *Hades* in the book of Revelation uses the prison analogy. Jesus said to John on Patmos: “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death” (Rev. 1:18, emphasis supplied).

Let's reflect for a few moments on verse 18, where Jesus has the keys of *Hades* and death. The grave is the prison, the dead are the prisoners, and Satan is the jailer with keys in hand, who does not let his prisoners go free (cf. Isa. 14:17). The good news is that Jesus died, went into the grave, took away the keys from the jailer, and came forth with them in His hand. Because He lives, we will live also (John 14:19).

When the venomous serpents in the wilderness bit the Israelites, God neutralized the venom by raising His own serpent, a symbol of the death of Jesus (John 3:14, 15; 12:31–33). Scientists make antivenin from venom. Likewise, Jesus defeated the venom of death by His death! He went into the grave, took away the keys from Satan, and came out alive! The book of Hebrews explains that by His death, Jesus destroyed Satan, who had the power of death: “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:14, 15, emphasis supplied).

As we stated previously (cf. Matt. 16:18), the gates of *Hades* will not prevail against the church because they did not prevail against Jesus (v. 21). The resurrection of those who died in Christ is dependent on the resurrection of Christ. The book of Revelation describes Jesus as the Firstborn from the dead (Rev. 1:5), not because He was the first to resurrect in time but rather because His resurrection guarantees the resurrection of those who died in Him. The word *firstborn* is figurative and refers to the preeminence of Jesus’ resurrection (Rom. 8:29; Col. 1:15, 18). His resurrection makes all other resurrections possible. Because He lives, the dead in Christ will live also. If we have the Spirit of Christ in our lives, the one who raised Jesus will raise our mortal bodies as well (Rom. 8:11).

If we die in Christ, He will unlock the prison house of death at His coming and take us to heaven. Paul wrote that “the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16) and then He will transform this corruptible body into the likeness of His glorious body (Phil. 3:20, 21). Finally, death and *Hades* will be thrown into the lake of fire and destroyed once and for all (Rev. 20:14, 15; 1 Cor. 15:26).
HATING ON HADES

Nowhere in the Sacred Scriptures is found the statement that the righteous go to their reward or the wicked to their punishment at death. The patriarchs and prophets have left no such assurance. Christ and His apostles have given no hint of it. The Bible clearly teaches that the dead do not go immediately to heaven. They are represented as sleeping until the resurrection. 1 Thessalonians 4:14; Job 14:10–12. In the very day when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl broken (Ecclesiastes 12:6), man’s thoughts perish. They that go down to the grave are in silence. They know no more of anything that is done under the sun. Job 14:21. Blessed rest for the weary righteous! Time, be it long or short, is but a moment to them. They sleep; they are awakened by the trumpet of God to a glorious immortality. “For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. . . . So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” 1 Corinthians 15:52–54. As they are called forth from their deep slumber they begin to think just where they ceased. The last sensation was the pang of death; the last thought, that they were falling beneath the power of the grave. When they arise from the tomb, their first glad thought will be echoed in the triumphal shout: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” Verse 55. (Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911], 549, 550.)

Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: “Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!” Throughout the length and breadth of the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite their voices in a long, glad shout of victory. (White, *The Great Controversy*, 644.)

The wicked receive their recompense in the earth. Proverbs 11:31. They “shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts.” Malachi 4:1. . . . In the cleansing flames the wicked are at last destroyed, root and branch—Satan the root, his followers the branches. The full penalty of the law has been visited; the demands of justice have been met; and heaven and earth, beholding, declare the righteousness of Jehovah. (White, *The Great Controversy*, 673.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How does this week’s lesson bring comfort for those who die in Christ?

How many times does the word Sheol appear in Psalm 49:14, 15 and how is it translated? (Compare several versions.)

Read Job 14:7–15. Which metaphors does this passage use to describe death and the resurrection? How do these metaphors bring comfort?

Make a list of the synonyms that appear in Jonah 2 that describe the place where Jonah went for three days. When Jonah cried out from the belly of Sheol, (Jonah 2:1), was he in a place of burning or in a watery grave?

Why does Revelation 6:8 say that death and Hades followed the pale horse? Does the grave literally follow death?

How has Jesus having the keys of Hades and of death change your life perspective?