

## UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God*  
**IN KING JESUS.**

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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### ***Gates of the Unseen (Hades)***

Now I, also, am saying to you that you are Peter, and on this rock will I be building My ecclesia, and the gates of the unseen [hades] shall not be prevailing against it. (Matthew 16:18 CLV)

Now I also say to you, that you are Peter [a stone], and on this solid rock I will build my Assembly [or, Church], and [the] gates of the realm of the dead [Gr., hades] will not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18 ALT)

It is not uncommon to hear preachers quote the above verse, proclaiming the dark forces of this world shall not prevail against the church. In other words, they interpret this verse in light of Paul's exhortation that *our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12). This is an undeniable truth, but it does not mean that this is what was meant by the Lord Jesus in referring to the gates of hades not prevailing. It should be noted that the thought of Jesus referring to the dark forces is reinforced by some translations that use the word *hell* instead of *hades* or *unseen*. The whole concept of hell as seen by so many today, as a place of eternal torture and torment for the lost with the devil in command, is based on pagan mythology.

Recently, I heard a pastor-teacher declare that the gates of hades shall not prevail against the church because the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ is within us and it is to come out from us and overtake the powers and principalities. Sorry, but this is not according to scripture, for it is taking two unrelated verses and joining them together to make what appears to be a spiritual statement that has some measure of truth in it but, nevertheless, misinterprets and robs the meaning of the two verses. What we need to understand is the meaning of the gates of hades or of the unseen, which is actually the gates of death.

To begin, the word *gate* refers to a physical structure that controls (allows or denies) entrance or exit into a place. Ancient city walls had gates to keep out intruders. Also, gates can be taken figuratively to refer to the *authorities* or *powers* of a place. In the ancient cities, the authorities and powers of the city sat in the gates. In this case, the power or authority pertains to the unseen. Thus, *the gates of the unseen* simply mean *the authority or power of the unseen*, which is the realm of the dead.

According to Hebrew scripture, the unseen refers to *sheol*, that is, death. The comparable word in the Greek is the word *hades* or *unseen*, which is easily proven by comparing Psalm 16:10 to Acts 2:27, 31, where the verses in Acts 2 are a direct quote of the verse in Psalm 16: *For Thou does not leave my soul to Sheol, nor givest thy saintly one to see corruption*. The word *corruption* refers to death (see 1 Corinthians 15:53-55). In other words, the state of death will not prevail against His *ecclesia* because Christ died for the sin of the world, was buried, and then was raised from among the dead. Jesus was declaring that because He was about to overcome death, so would His *ecclesia* overcome death, not when individuals die but when the *ecclesia* is raised up together at His presence.

However, there is another way to prove the point, and that is to see if the phrase *the gates of the unseen* or a similar phrase appears in other places of scripture.

Such a phrase was first used by Hezekiah, king of Judah, when he was ill and literally about to die. He cried out: *I, yea, I say: In the height of my days am I going into the gates of the unseen, made to miss the rest of my years* (Isaiah 38:10 CLV).

Given the context of Hezekiah's cry and God's response of lengthening his days, there is no doubt that the king was referring to his death and returning to the unseen. His life was about to be cut short, and he was going to the place of the dead, where *the dead know nothing whatsoever* (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6). When people go to the unseen, they cease to be; and Hezekiah did not want to die in the height of his days or, as we would say, in the prime of life. His spirit was about to return to God who gave it, his body was about to return to the soil from whence it came, and his soul was about to return to the unseen, what Jesus and Paul called a *sleep* (John 11:11, 14, 39; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-16).

Strictly speaking, the gates of the unseen refer to the return or death of the soul. The human soul speaks of the human experience or sensations (consciousness, feelings, desires). It is the experience or sensation that results from the combination of an organic body with spirit (the breath of the spirit of life) and has been described as a phenomenon resulting from the perception of the senses. When life departs a body, the soul ceases, for it has no life apart from the spirit and the body. Consequently, the soul going into the gates of the unseen means one has died.

What was Hezekiah referring to when he said that he was going into the gates of the unseen? It simply meant that, in a figurative sense, the unseen has a particular power or jurisdiction (see Revelation 20:6) over man and that power keeps the soul in the state of the unseen. With the spirit gone and the body returned to the soil, no soul of the dead has ever returned from the unseen to tell about it. At best, it is a state (not place) of sleep. Hezekiah saw himself going into the power of the unseen *not* in the physical or even the spiritual sense of possessing a life after death and entering into some unseen, yet real, realm. Please do not read this into his words. He saw himself dying and ceasing to be, for death is death and no one has the power to overcome death and return to life. By the way, this is why we believe in Jesus, for He alone has conquered death. The power of the unseen could not hold Him in the state of unconsciousness, for the power of God raised (roused) Him from among the dead. Hezekiah was simply stating the truth that all mankind knows from experience. There is no way for man to rise from the dead and become a living soul again, based on his own power. Mankind has no power over death, for *death passed through into all mankind* (Romans 5:12). When man dies, he has no power to give himself life to rise out of the grave. Consequently, death is the last enemy of mankind that must be abolished at the consummation of the ages (1 Corinthians 15:26). Until then, the ones to rise up from among the dead will be the Lord's people, and this will occur with His presence at His second arrival (coming) or what could be called *His consummational arrival*.

The Psalmist asks: *What master could live and not see death? Could his soul escape from the hand of the unseen?* (Psalm 89:48). The answer is that no one is exempt from dying and no one can escape from the unseen. Thank God; His Son has done it! David also cried out to the Lord as he was in much anguish and faced possible death from those who hated him: *Show me favour, O Yahweh! Behold my humiliation due to them who hate me, lift me on high out of the gates of death; that I may recount all thy praises...* (Psalm 9:13-14). Notice that David specifically referred to the gates of death. He was not physically dead at this point, but he thought he might die if his enemies persisted. In a sense, it seems that he likened his state of mind to death, as well, as all his enemies sought for his life. The point is that he joined gates or power with death.

Why will *the gates of the unseen or of death* not prevail against the Lord's *ekklesia*? The answer is in the resurrection. Jesus' disciples, in particular Peter, who declared that Jesus is *the Christ, the Son of the living God* (Matthew 16:16), did not understand that their Master had to be killed and raised up on the third day, as evidenced by Jesus' rebuke of Peter (Matthew 16:21-23). Because Jesus was resurrected, meaning He overcame death, so too will His *ekklesia*, which is His body, one day be resurrected and overcome death in His life, putting on immortality. Paul makes the point indirectly in his letter to the Colossians where he proclaims that Jesus is *the head of the body, the ekklesia; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead* (1:18). In such a glorious set of verses from 1:13-20, why did Paul join the body with the firstborn from the dead? Because the body of Christ will be the firstfruits of resurrection at the end of our present age, ushering in the open manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth as heaven unites with earth in the next age. As believers, this is our grandest hope, and Jesus was and is today telling us to hold to this hope. Death shall not prevail! Resurrection is on the near horizon!