

## Resurrection Liberation into Glory



### **1 PETER 3:19-20**

<sup>18</sup> For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring <sup>us</sup> to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, (1 Peter 3:19-20)

### **COMMENTARY**

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA: Here Peter answers the question which some objectors have raised, namely, if the incarnation was so beneficial, why was Christ not incarnated for such a long time, given that he went to the spirits which were in prison and preached to them also? In order to deliver all those who would believe, Christ taught those who were alive on earth at the time of his incarnation, and these others acknowledged him when he appeared to them in the lower regions, and thus they too benefited from his coming. Going in his soul, he preached to those who were in *hell*<sup>1</sup>, appearing to them as one soul to other souls. When

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<sup>1</sup> As Peter Chopelas makes clear in his article referenced here, translating all references to Sheol / Hades, the grave and the pit as "hell" is unwarranted from the Scriptures and reflects a Latin (both Roman Catholic and Protestant) heretical distortion of "hell" as a separate place of torment rather than a state of being in the presence of God where He is rejected. Please read Chopelas's article in full for a comprehensive Scriptural and Patristic explanation.

the gatekeepers of hell saw him, they fled; the bronze gates were broken open, and the iron chains were undone. And the only-begotten Son shouted with authority to the suffering souls, according to the word of the new covenant, saying to those in chains: "Come out!" and to those in darkness: "Be enlightened."

In other words, he preached to those who were in hell also, so that he might save all those who would believe in him. For both those who were alive on earth during the time of his incarnation and those who were in hell had a chance to acknowledge him. The greater part of the new covenant is beyond nature and tradition, so that while Christ was able to preach to all those who were alive at the time of his appearing and those who believed in him were blessed, so too he was able to liberate those in hell who believed and acknowledged him, by his descent there. However, the souls of those who practiced idolatry and outrageous ungodliness, as well as those who were blinded by fleshly lusts, did not have the power to see him, and they were not delivered.

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## **CONCLUSION FROM THE ARTICLE BY PETER CHOPELAS**

"For our God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:29)

<https://churchmotherofgod.org/articleschurch/articles-about-the-orthodox-church/2065-heaven-and-hell-in-the-afterlife-according-to-the-bible.html>

"The Holy Orthodox Church, in keeping with Scripture and the most ancient Christian doctrine, teaches that all people come into the presence of God in the afterlife. Some will bask in joy because of that infinite love, glory, light, power, and truth that is Almighty God. Others will cower in fear and be in torment DUE TO THAT SAME PRESENCE. All the same, there will be some kind of separation or "great gulf".

"Life" in the Orthodox Church as defined by the Fathers, is experiencing the perfect, pure and infinite love of God in ultimate harmony and intimacy for eternity, and "death" is experiencing God's energies in torment, darkness and disharmony for eternity. It is only

through Christ that we come to that place of perfect harmony, in this life, in this world. The goal of the Christian is not to get to "heaven" in the after life, but rather to come to a state of constant communion with the Holy Spirit, beginning in this life. We may bask in the presence of God's glory here and now, and in the afterlife for eternity.

Accordingly, from ancient times icons have shown the Saints dwelling in a place filled with the golden, uncreated divine light of God. With the icon we symbolically peer through this "window" into the spirit realm infused with God's energies. In the icon of the Heavenly Kingdom, we see Christ enthroned in the centre as God Almighty, surrounded with the host of angels, His mother the Theotokos, and all the saints. However, at His feet you see others, also in His presence, who are being burned and tormented due to just being there, and have no escape. The larger more elaborate icons of the Resurrection show the Old Testament saints with halos looking on with joy, and others without halos on the other side of the gulf, looking on in fear and confusion, as Christ frees the captives of Death. He rescues all of humanity (represented by Adam and Eve being pulled from the tomb) and all of creation with them, from the beginning of time to the end of time.

It is not God's intention that his love will torment us, but that will be the inevitable result of pursuing our own selfish desires instead of seeking God. When we are in harmony with God, we will bask in that presence. Yet, if we desire our own will and are in disharmony with God, we suffer in His presence. Satan is evil not just because he harms others, but because he is an angel of light who stands in the presence of God yet chooses to pursue his own selfish desires, which causes him to tremble in fear. Satan and his fallen angels, the demons, were thrown to the earth and he became the 'god of this world'. It can be speculated that Satan and his demons are on the earth because it is the only place they can escape God's presence, if only temporarily. This is why they will suffer for eternity after God reclaims the world at the end of this age, filling it with his presence. Then there will be nowhere to escape God, for both demons and evildoers.

So "hell" is not a "place" but rather a condition we allow ourselves to be in, not because of God's "justice" but because of our own selfish and sinful disobedience. In other words, we put ourselves in "hell" when we do anything other than seeking God's will. It is not that God wants to harm us; He loves us unconditionally, but torment is the result of coming into His pure presence when we are in an impure condition.

It is like spending your whole life in a cave or basement in darkness, never seeing the sun, then suddenly being thrust into bright sunshine. Your skin will burn, your eyes will burn, you will want to bury yourself under the rocks to try and escape this terrible thing pouring down on you, but there is no escape, just as described in Revelation. However, if you expose yourself to the sun regularly and often, eventually you will want nothing but to bask in the warmth and light of the sunshine. The same sunshine that torments one person brings warmth and pleasure to another. Similarly, if you get too close to the sun, you will be burned, not because the sun wants to burn you, because it is the sun's nature.”