

## Chapter 29

### The Three Doors

“Imagine there’s no heaven. It’s easy if you try. No hell below us, above us only sky....” John Lennon voiced the astonishing dream of fallen man, who wants so desperately for there to be “no hell below us” that he’s willing to give up heaven itself to be rid of it. Although he probably didn’t know it, Lennon got two things right: a vivid imagination is required for man to suppress the dread of hell and the hope of heaven that Yahweh placed within our souls; and once sin entered the world, heaven and hell became two sides of the same coin—one can’t exist without the other. Someone once quipped that the little-known last verse of the song—the one he wrote *after* his untimely death—began: “Oops....”

Hell, of course, is no laughing matter, though many scoff at its very existence. In truth, it isn’t hard to see why. There are a thousand conflicting traditions about what the “afterlife” is—if it exists at all—and half of ’em are derived, at some level, from the Bible itself. Part of the problem is that no one who has ever been there (whether a place or a state) has ever come back and told us about it. The Apostles’ Creed states: “He descended into hell...He ascended into heaven...” but there is no universal agreement about what those terms—heaven and hell—mean (and the Creed isn’t inspired scripture anyway). More to the point, Yahshua didn’t come back and say, *Hey guys, guess what I found out....*

The problem is compounded because the words used in scripture to describe the afterlife are themselves laden with cultural baggage—concepts which are not necessarily factual. However, they were the only words available, whether in Greek or Hebrew, that would have conveyed even approximately the meaning Yahweh intended. (He could have simply made up new words, I suppose—like Muhammad often did—but that wouldn’t have helped matters unless he had also provided a lexicon of some sort. He wisely opted to avoid that particular can of worms.) Another problem: the English words used to convey the Greek and Hebrew concepts are often anemic, misleading shadows of what was actually conveyed in the original texts. Further, several millennia of speculation by imaginative humans has only muddied the waters: we need to remember that Plato, Augustine, Dante Alighieri—and Gary Larson, for that matter—were only guessing.

It is instructive to examine the *why* of it. Why did Yahweh provide us with so little definitive information about the afterlife? Why did His apostles and prophets use common words that of necessity came laden with speculative traditions and errant cultural connotations? I think it has to do with motivation. Yahweh created us to love Him, or more correctly, to reciprocate His love toward us. But as we

know, love is not something that can be forced or mandated: it must be offered freely, or it isn't love at all. So by definition, heaven can't be the payoff for a celestial bribe. I have a feeling that if Yahweh had told us what heaven is really like, we'd be "loving" Him just to get in the door—having fellowship with our Creator would be seen as a byproduct of heaven, not the other way around. In the same way, if we really knew what hell was like, I'm pretty sure we'd all do *anything*—even cozy up to a God we didn't particularly care about—to avoid the place. But Yahweh didn't make heaven as an inducement or hell as a threat. Eternal life isn't a reward for being good, nor is death (necessarily) the punishment for being naughty. God wasn't even *thinking* about man when he constructed hell—it was built to house rebellious spirits. Life and death are merely the natural and inevitable consequences of a far more weighty matter: what we choose to do with Yahweh's love.

So God didn't tell us very much about the precise nature of the afterlife. Exacerbating our ignorance today, our English Bible versions are invariably slanted to reflect the preconceived notions of the translators. For example, the KJV often translates the same Hebrew word, *sheol*, as "the grave" when talking about good people but "hell" when talking about bad people. This adds a layer of complexity to the concept that just isn't there in the original. That's not to say the subject of what happens after death isn't complex. Isaiah, for instance, voices two seemingly contradictory statements within a few sentences of each other: first he proclaims—**"They are dead, they will not live; they are deceased, they will not rise. Therefore You have punished and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish."** (Isaiah 26:14) Then in practically the same breath he says, **"Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."** (Isaiah 26:19) He's saying that those who belong to Yahweh will be resurrected to a state of eternal bliss (something worth singing about), while those who troubled Israel (the subject of verse 14) will not. But does that mean that each of God's enemies have received all the punishment that's coming to them when they die? Will their souls "sleep" or be annihilated? Will those who align themselves against Yahweh get off scot free? This would not only fly in the face of two millennia's worth of serious Biblical exegesis on the subject, it flatly contradicts all of those familiar passages that clearly speak of eternal torment, of everlasting punishment for the wicked. What's happening here?

Only by examining the words of scripture can we come to a knowledge of the truth. But I'll warn you right up front. What you are about to discover may not mesh with your religious perceptions and traditions. If you're like me, you've been taught all your life that there are only two possible eternal destinations: a heaven for the saved in which everything is beautiful and good, and a hell filled with eternal torments for the damned. Most Christians are vaguely aware of a few

nagging logistical glitches in this theory, but we tend to sweep them under the mental rug, preferring not to deal with them. A couple of extreme examples will bring the problem into focus: what happens to aborted fetuses? And what is the fate of the children of lost parents (Muslims, atheists, pagans, etc.) who die in infancy? They didn't choose Yahweh (and probably wouldn't have, even given the opportunity) so it's not really appropriate to "force" them to spend eternity in familial fellowship with Him. But neither did they reject Yahweh in favor of Satan, so it seems harsh, unfair—even cruel—to consign them to the eternal torments of hell. Is the exercise of one's choice the spiritual Rubicon? Truth be known, *most* people never make a conscious and deliberate choice.

Christians normally deal with such conundrums by appealing to human logic (instead of scouring the scriptures for answers, like they should). They appeal to something called an "age of accountability," prior to which no one is held accountable for their sins, nor does the Adamic sin nature Paul talked about play any role. Some would place this "age" later in life, say in one's teens. Others envisioning toddlers crossing the line. My own pastor, half joking, envisions it to be that magic moment when kids all of a sudden become embarrassed about running around the house butt naked after taking their baths. I suppose that's as good a definition as any, except for one slight glitch: scripture doesn't mention or support the concept of a get-out-of-jail-free age of accountability. There is mention of children being accounted "holy" by virtue of the faith of a believing parent (I Corinthians 7:14), but that's different. It does nothing to address the puzzle of "non-choosers" being either forced to live eternally with Yahweh, or conversely, being sent to a place of everlasting torment because of their ignorance, apathy, or bad luck.

The idea of purgatory doesn't help, either. There is absolutely no scriptural basis for it, since it puts people in the place of God (making atonement for their own sins or the sins of their loved ones) and it makes works—not grace—the mechanism that purges us of our sins. The concept of purgatory, however, has a history that predates Constantine (under whose influence Christian doctrine began to fall apart in earnest), a history that suggests that the early Church fathers were even then struggling with the inadequacies of the two-doors-to-eternity theory—a theory that makes it impossible to reconcile God's infinite mercy with His perfect justice. Thus the idea of postmortem penance was posited by Clement of Alexandria as early as 202 A.D. and by Tertullian about 210. Following their lead, Augustine, in the fourth century, wrote, "Temporal punishments are suffered by some in this life only, by some after death, by some both here and hereafter, but all of them before that last and strictest judgment. *But not all who suffer temporal punishments after death will come to eternal punishments, which are to follow after that judgment.*" (Italics mine.) Augustine quite rightly couldn't conceive of how a loving God could allow those who were merely weak or misled

to suffer eternal torment, but he wisely perceived that God couldn't admit them into fellowship with Him in their sinful state, either. His man-made solution to this conundrum, however, was completely erroneous—characterizing Yahweh as a capricious sadist. Nevertheless, purgatory became a cornerstone of Roman Catholic soteriology under Pope Gregory I late in the sixth century. Only later did the church figure out how to make a buck out of it, selling the “indulgences” that eventually helped precipitate the Protestant Reformation.

Although the “bliss or torture” teaching that led the Catholic Church into such error was carried over as a mainstay of Protestant Christian dogma, the Protestants (unlike the Catholics) have *never* offered a plausible explanation for their God's seemingly erratic and inconsistent behavior. Christians today seem content to wallow in wilfull ignorance every time they encounter something uncomfortable or inconvenient about their God—or more properly, about their cherished beliefs concerning Him. But as we're about to see, the answer is everywhere you look—an answer that proves Yahweh to be the very merciful, just, and loving Father He purports to be. To see the answer, however, we must be willing to look at scripture with fresh eyes. We need to stop seeing things through the cataracts of traditional religious dogma, and begin to examine and embrace the actual words of scripture. They can lead us to some stunning and awe-inspiring truths.

\*\*\*

Let's begin by revisiting a parable through which Yahshua described His kingdom: **“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind [literally: family], which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”** (Matthew 13:47-50) It's disturbing enough to find that “bad fish” are swimming with the “good” ones, though we saw this very thing in the parables of the mustard seed and the wheat and tares. These “bad fish” can even be found within the nominal church, as Yahshua made all too obvious in His seven letters in Revelation 2 and 3.

But there's more here than meets the eye. A subtle differentiation between two types of “bad fish” in this passage is totally lost in the English, a distinction that is important to our understanding of mankind's prospective eternal destinies. The fish that were characterized as “bad” are simply “thrown away.” By contrast, “wicked” fish are “cast into the furnace of fire” where there will be “wailing and

gnashing of teeth.” We ordinarily assume these are the same souls, but they’re not. The word translated “bad” is the Greek *sapros*. It means rotten and decayed, putrefied, decomposed, thus unfit and worthless. A fish that is *sapros* is dead, and judging by the stench, has been for some time. “Wicked,” on the other hand, is the Greek word *poneros*, meaning one causing pain, peril, and trouble, someone who is diseased, malignant, seriously faulty, evil, morally corrupt, vicious, even one who derives his wickedness from supernatural evil powers. Fish that are *poneros* are very much alive—and they’re dangerous. Thus there are not two but *three* kinds of fish: the good, the lifeless, and the evil. And there are three corresponding potential destinies: (1) eternal life with Yahweh (a very good thing), (2) death (a bad thing), and (3) everlasting punishment like that reserved for Satan and his demons (something infinitely worse than bad). That may come as a shock, but as we’ll soon learn, it’s a theme that’s as ubiquitous in scripture as it is hard for us to see.

In a way, this subject is a little like man’s perception of the advents of the Messiah. In the first century, everybody *knew* that God’s Anointed One would come and fulfill all the Messianic prophecies all at once—reigning in glory and subduing Israel’s enemies. When the devout Simeon encountered the infant Yahshua, he referred to Him (as Isaiah had) as “A light to bring revelation to the gentiles *and* the glory of Yahweh’s people Israel.” We’re still waiting for the second half of that, in case you haven’t noticed. Some Jews of the time were vaguely aware of some “suffering servant” passages, but they misapplied them or simply ignored their significance because they were upsetting and inconvenient to their tidy little theologies. The idea that the prophecies could be fulfilled in two different advents separated by thousands of years occurred to practically no one. What’s more, Yahshua didn’t bother correcting our misperceptions; He gave us only the information we needed to live our lives day by day in reliance upon Him.

In the same way today, our common Christian perceptions of the afterlife may be based on incomplete or partially understood information. A casual reading (in English) of any number of scripture passages on the subject (like the one we just read) *seem* to indicate a simple choice between two alternatives, eternal life and eternal death. But how is this death defined? Sometimes death is characterized as eternal anguish, torment, a sharing in the everlasting punishment of the devil and his angels. On the other hand, it is far more often described as the destruction of the soul—a total cessation of life on the sub-corporeal level. And it occurs to very few of us that these are mutually exclusive concepts. For the words of scripture to have any meaning at all, there must be *three* possible doors—not just two—through which men pass after physical death: eternal life, annihilation, or eternal conscious torment.

Examining a few examples under the microscope will help us clarify the distinction. **“You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.”** (Isaiah 38:17) The Hebrew word for “corruption” is *beliy*, which actually means nothingness—it is the word for negation, literally: “no, not, or without.” Isaiah is saying that by placing our sins out of His sight, Yahweh has saved our souls from becoming nothing, from dissipating into nonexistence. He’s quite clearly describing door number two. (At least it’s clear in the Hebrew—it’s as fuzzy as a spring lamb in the English).

Or try this: **“He who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.”** (Galatians 6:8) Here in the Renewed Covenant, the word “corruption” is rendered from the word *phthora*, meaning the destruction that is characterized by decay, moral corruption, or depravity. Paul’s point is well taken: if one lives only to please his flesh, his destiny will be in kind. The body dies, decays, and returns to dust—a metaphor for what will happen to his soul. Again, door number two is being described. There is no mention here of divine retribution or wrath; God is not even said to be angry or upset. Corruption is merely the natural, inevitable result of choosing to live like a spiritless animal.

Let’s check in with Peter. **“The heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”** (II Peter 3:7) For our present discussion, we need to look hard at two words in this verse, translated “judgment” and “perdition.” Judgment is from the Greek *krisis*, meaning a separation, sundering, or selection. Perdition (*apoleia*) means ruin, waste, loss, utter and eternal devastation—with the emphasis on *eternal*. (Try to remember these Greek words. We’ll run into them again.) So ungodly men are going to be “separated” *and* undergo eternal ruin. As we’ll see later in more detail, this “separation” is not between good and evil, but between the “ungodly” and the *anti-godly*. Those assigned to *krisis*—mere separation—are getting by far the better deal. *Krisis* is door number two.

Bildad prophesied in the book of Job: **“Those who hate you [in context, who hate the one who is blameless before God, a man of integrity] will be clothed with shame, and the dwelling place of the wicked will come to nothing.”** (Job 8:22) Here I believe we have a subtle comparison between doors number two and three. The Hebrew word for “shame” is *boset*, meaning shame, disgrace, or humiliation. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* reports that its root *bos* “expresses that sense of confusion, embarrassment and dismay when matters turn out contrary to one’s expectations,” as well as “the disgrace which is the result of defeat at the hands of an enemy.... Involved here are all the nuances of confusion, disillusionment, humiliation, and brokenness which the word connotes.” But then in contrast, Bildad turns around and says (in literal terms), “the home or habitation—the

tent—of the guilty—those declared to be in violation of a standard of law—will *not be*.” This last word is *'ayin*, meaning “nothing, none, or naught,” from a root connoting “to be nothing or not to exist.” Once again, we see the dichotomy between the dead and the damned: the enemies of Yahweh and His people will suffer shame and humiliation—things that require life and existence—while the merely “guilty” will cease to exist at all.

Yahshua once asked one of the most significant questions of all time: **“What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?”** (Luke 9:25) Why were two separate negative contingencies listed? Because two distinct destinies were possible for the lost. The word translated “destroyed” is from *apollumi*, meaning to destroy, ruin, lose, disappear, or die. We should now be able to recognize this as door number two. And the contrasting word, *zemioo*? It means to sustain damage, receive injury, suffer loss, forfeit, or undergo punishment. No destruction, disappearance, or death is possible here: *zemioo* requires one to be extant and conscious of his situation: it’s door number three. The amazing thing about all this (at least to me) is how Yahweh can say something so many times in so many ways and we still don’t get it: there are *three* post-mortal destinations—life, death, or damnation. The default is death; we must *choose* to receive either eternal life or everlasting damnation.

In the context of the Last Days, that fact makes these next two passages really scary. First, **“If anyone worships the beast [that is, the Antichrist or the demon who inhabits him] and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”** (Revelation 14:9-11) That warning applies to everyone alive on earth during the last half of the Tribulation, when, as you’ll recall, the “mark of the beast” will be instituted as a sign of submission to the Antichrist and his Satanic world government. In order to avoid door number three, people will have to become outlaws, fugitives, rebels against the system. Many will pay for their convictions with their lives—a small price to pay, however, for avoiding eternal torment and gaining everlasting life.

Second, Yahshua explained what will happen to those left alive at the end of the Tribulation. They will be separated as a herdsman separates his sheep from the goats. **“And these [the “goats”] will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous [that is, the “sheep”] into eternal life.”** (Matthew 25:46) Why is this so terrifying? Because He has apparently ruled out non-choice (leading to door number two) as an option for these last hardy survivors. I realize it’s an argument from silence which makes it hard to be dogmatic, but it appears that by the time the King takes

His throne, no one on earth will still be sitting on the fence trying to ignore the world of spiritual things. No one will be “merely wicked,” marked for destruction. If by this time you haven’t chosen to reciprocate Yahweh’s love, then you will be counted as His enemy, actively engaged in the futile work of Satan. You won’t have to be a theologian or serious student of “religious things” to demonstrate your choice, however. Your decision will be evident in how you treat Yahweh’s people—especially the Jews—during this time of testing. Bless them and God will bless you. Curse them, and it’s door number three. That principle will have been in force for four thousand years at this point, proven at every turn to be true, if only we’d pay attention to the consequences of our actions. You’d think we’d have gotten the hint.

\*\*\*

One thing we need to be clear on from the outset: God considers the doctrine of the afterlife basic and foundational: **“Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”** (Hebrews 6:1-2) In other words, these are baseline truths—(1) that your good works can’t save you—rather, you must rely upon God’s saving grace; (2) that our baptism in water is a demonstration of our acceptance of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection as payment for our sin, and that our subsequent immersion in His Holy Spirit is the essence of the Christian walk; and (3) the point germane to our present study, that there is such a thing as life after death—whether for good or ill—in addition to what we witness with our own eyes, physical death. If you don’t comprehend these fundamental doctrines, you will have trouble understanding anything about God’s plan for your life.

The writer of Hebrews didn’t specifically point out the second of the three doors—destruction of the soul—because he was teaching about the “elementary principles of Christ,” one of which is life after death. This points out one reason the doctrine of the three doors is so hard for us to comprehend: the scriptures rarely mention all three “doors” in the same passage. The parable of the dragnet we saw above is an exception, and we can only see it there if we get into the Greek. Most of the time eternal life is contrasted with only one of the two possible alternatives: death, destruction, annihilation and dissipation on the one hand, or eternal waking participation in Satan’s well-deserved torment on the other.

The idea that the righteous dead could live again was nothing new. In the Bible’s oldest book, Job in his distress looks forward to his own bodily

resurrection. **“Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands.”** (Job 14:13-15) The insight Yahweh gave Job is obscure in the English, so it may be helpful to look at a few of the Hebrew words. To “hide” (Hebrew: *tsaphan*) is not merely to keep something out of sight (as in the parallel “conceal”—*sathar*) but to store up, to treasure, to put away for safe-keeping. Believers who have perished are thus like “buried treasure” to Yahweh, and He plans to someday come back and dig up what’s His. Then Job asks, **“If a man dies, shall he live again?”** “Live” is the Hebrew word *chayah*. It means “to live, to have life, remain alive, sustain life, live prosperously, live for ever, be quickened, be alive, or be restored to life or health.” (*Strong’s*) It’s a rhetorical question with a surprising answer: Yes, he can.

Job was looking forward to lying peacefully in his grave awaiting a transformation. The “change” of which he speaks is the Hebrew *chaliyphah*, the same word used of a change of clothing or a changing of the guard. At its root it means to replace or succeed—hence it is the root of the Arabic word “Caliph,” a ruler who has succeeded or replaced a former one. In the same way the word is used of the second or “replacement” growth that arises from the stump of a tree that has been cut down. This is certainly the picture Job had in mind, for just before this he had been comparing the fortitude and resilience of a tree with the apparent frailty of man: **“For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its tender shoots will not cease. Though its root may grow old in the earth, and its stump may die in the ground, yet at the scent of water it will bud and bring forth branches like a plant. But man dies and is laid away; Indeed he breathes his last and where is he?”** (Job 14:7-10) As Job mulled over his predicament as a mortal, Yahweh revealed to him that though he may be cut down like a diseased tree, his roots, firmly planted in God, will someday cause him to “change,” to grow into a new tree—different from the original and yet anchored and sustained by the very same roots—Yahweh Himself. (As singer/songwriter Keith Green once phrased it, “He is divine, and we are de branch.”) Job is describing bodily resurrection.

A few chapters later, Job has arrived at an even clearer picture of what’s in store for him in eternity. **“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”** (Job 19:25-27) Again, physical bodily resurrection and restoration is in view, a concept that is abundantly clear in the Hebrew. (If you’ll recall, we discussed these new, immortal bodies and how they’ll differ from our present ones back in chapter 8—our introduction to the rapture.) Notice Job’s emphasis on vision here. The Hebrew word for “eye” is *ayin*, of which the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* says, “More than the eye itself is

implied by this word. Occasionally it represents the whole process of seeing and by extension, of understanding and obedience.... The eye is used to express knowledge, character, attitude, inclination, opinion, passion, and response. The eye is a good barometer of the inner thoughts of man.”

Keeping this in mind, the first instance of “see” in this passage, as well as the word translated “behold,” are the Hebrew word *chazah*, meaning not only the ordinary bodily perception of sight (to look, observe, or gaze), but also to see visions or prophecy—to receive information from God. The word connotes selection or preference—to choose one object over another using the faculty of sight as a means of differentiating between them. Thus to “see” God in Job’s parlance is to perceive what Yahweh has in store for His people, to use the perceptive abilities He gave us to distinguish between the world’s error and God’s truth. It is the essence of God’s primary gift to us: choice.

The phrase “and not another” doesn’t come across in the English. “Another” is the Hebrew term *zuwr*, meaning a stranger, a foreigner, an enemy—even a prostitute (in the sense of being a woman “strange” to you). Job is saying that whereas *he* will “see God” in the afterlife, those who are strangers to Him will not. His heart yearns within him for this vision—especially since Yahweh is so hard to see with mortal eyes—but those who are His enemies, those who give their affections to other gods, couldn’t care less. They won’t “see God” because they’re not looking for Him.

This is one of hundreds of places in scripture where “door number one”—eternal life—is contrasted with the alternative but it’s not terribly clear what that alternative is. It’s not too surprising that our conception of “hell,” in the sense of being the opposite of “heaven” (terms I’ll define in the next chapter), is shaped by the relatively few passages that unmistakably speak of eternal torment. But this one requires no such interpretation. All it says is “people who are strangers to Yahweh won’t perceive Him.” For this, and for the vast majority of “afterlife” passages, door number two—annihilation of the soul—makes far more sense. Once we come to terms with the concept that there are actually three doors, we’ll start to see a whole new dimension to God’s mercy—and justice. In the end, He’ll give us precisely what we asked for; and even if we ask for nothing, we’ll receive that. Before we’re through, we’ll have a pretty good handle on the specific factors that separate door number two from door number three—that differentiate death from a fate infinitely worse. But first, let’s review another few examples that will help clarify door number one: eternal life in the presence of our God.

Paul refers to a passage we saw earlier in this chapter: **“All things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He [Yahweh] says: ‘Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead,’ and Christ will give you light.”** (Ephesians 5:14) This, of course, reminds us of the vision, the ability to “see

God,” for which Job yearned. The Apostle was alluding to Isaiah’s proclamation that we looked at a little while ago: **“Your dead shall live; Together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust. For your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.”** (Isaiah 26:19) Paul caught it, though the translators didn’t: the “My” in “my dead body” should be capitalized—this is in Yahweh’s voice. The redeemed will arise with (or as a result of) *Yahshua*’s “dead body.” Because He conquered death, so too will those indwelt with His Spirit awaken from their mortal state.

Like a lawyer making his case, Yahshua appealed to Moses to demonstrate that the righteous dead will arise: **“Even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called Yahweh ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.”** (Luke 20:37-38) Notice that He listed only “saved” people here. When Yahshua declared that “*all* live to Him,” He was referring to all of those to whom He has given life. The word for “living” and “live” (Greek: *zao*) has a decidedly positive connotation in the original: *zao* is not just alive, but vital, blessed, vigorous, efficacious. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are (because they are imbued with Yahweh’s Spirit) alive to Him, even though their bodies died thousands of years ago. In context, Yahshua was demonstrating the concept of door number one—resurrection to eternal life for Yahweh’s children—to a group of Sadducees who didn’t believe it was possible. We usually get so excited about that, we miss the converse: He is *not* the God of the dead. The dead—those headed for door number two—have no God, real or false. They have no existence whatsoever.

If you’ll allow me to speculate for a moment, I’d like to take this argument one step further. It seems to be implying that those who have chosen door number three—association with Satan’s spirit—are in a real pickle. Because they are “living” and “all (who are living) live to Him,” then Yahweh, not Satan, is their God. But because they have chosen Satan’s fate, they have no access to, nor comfort from, Yahweh. Satan can’t help them (not that he wants to), and Yahweh refuses to overrule, even now, the disastrous choice they’ve made. So those of door number three are stuck knowing *about* God but having no relationship or contact with Him. Knowing you’ve missed the boat is far more painful than not knowing the boat exists. The living dead of the third door are (as they say in theological parlance) *screwed*.

John’s first epistle used some rather provocative turns of phrase: **“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.”** (I John 3:14) John isn’t waxing poetic (or stupid) here. We haven’t passed from *nekros* to *bios*—transformed from being a lifeless corpse into having a “living soul,” something possessed by any garden slug. Rather, the apostle says that we’ve passed from

*thanatos* to *zoe*—from the lifeless state of being separated from Yahweh’s Spirit to a condition of abundant, essential, and permanent vitality and animation.

But then he discusses the alternative: **“He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”** (I John 3:14-15) Now there’s an interesting way to put it: “abides in death” (again, *thanatos*). The original Greek renders it as somewhat less of an oxymoron. “Abides” is *meno*, which according to *Strong’s* means: “to remain, to abide. In reference to place: to sojourn or tarry, not to depart, to continue to be present, to be held or kept continually. In reference to time: to continue to be, not to perish, to last or endure. Of persons: to survive, to live. In reference to state or condition, to remain as one, not to become another or different.” Ponder that definition: it’s a perfect picture of the third door—to live in death, to survive in separation.

Since that’s a bad thing, we should examine what puts somebody in this state. John says it’s being a “murderer.” Is he saying that killers can’t repent of their sins? Is murder an unforgivable offense? No. This particular word (*anthropoktonos*) is used only three times in scripture, two of them right here. So it behooves us to look closely at the third. It was used when Yahshua was lambasting the Pharisees for their disastrous spiritual affiliation: **“If God were your Father [as you claim], you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer [*anthropoktonos*] from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.”** (John 8:42-47) Okay. Now we’re getting somewhere. The horrors of the third door are not reserved for someone who has merely taken a mortal life—a common manslayer—but specifically for one who, in his role as a child of Satan, has prevented others from having a life-giving relationship with Yahweh. It is their alignment with—their “rebirth” in—the spirit of Satan, the father of murder and lies, that condemns them. As John reminds us, our very first historical record of Satan tells of his tempting Adam and Eve to betray Yahweh. His success defined him as a murderer, an *anthropoktonos*, not separating a man’s soul from his body, but separating God’s Spirit from his soul.

This brings into sharp focus the underlying significance of the sixth commandment: **“You shall not murder.”** (Exodus 20:13) Yahweh has once again used an illustration in the physical realm (in this case, murder—the malicious and purposeful separation of someone’s soul from his body) to demonstrate the far

more serious spiritual principle that underlies it: You shall not be a party to the separation of Yahweh's spirit from a person's soul—this is spiritual murder. And as John points out, murderers of this sort will “abide in death.”

Later in the same passage in which Yahshua defined the kind of “murder” that would prove alliance with Satan, He defined the path to eternal life. He said, **“Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”** (John 8:51) He's speaking about spiritual death, of course, so the word he uses for “death” is *thanatos*, not *nekros*. According to this verse, then, we need to understand what it is to “keep Yahshua's word.” The Greek word for “keep” is *tereo*, which means to attend to carefully, to guard, to observe, to keep in view. We saw it used in Revelation 3:10, where those believers who had “kept” Yahshua's command (*logos*) to persevere were assured that they in turn would be “kept” out of the coming hour of trial—the Tribulation. *Tereo* is the word used in both places. The word for “word” is *logos*, which was also employed in Revelation 3:10. *Logos* means a word or speech embodying a concept or idea, especially a declaration from God; thus it is not surprising to find the Word being used to describe Yahshua the Messiah in the first chapter of John's Gospel. To “keep Yahshua's word,” then, is to carefully pay attention to, observe, and take seriously the things that Yahweh has done and said—the foremost of which is the life and mission of the Messiah, Yahshua.

And what does it mean to “see” spiritual death? The Greek *theoreo* does not mean “to experience,” as we might expect. The truth here is even more astonishing. *Theoreo* means to look at or behold, to perceive—whether with the eyes or merely as a mental picture; to discern or consider. We are being told here that if we “keep Yahshua's word,” we will be so far removed from *thanatos*, we won't even be able to conjure up a mental image of what it would be like to be separated from Yahweh's Spirit.

John's first epistle puts the same truth into slightly different terms. He writes, **“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.”** (I John 5:11-13) John is not talking about the kind of life (*bios*) we share with garden slugs by virtue of our *nephesh*, or souls. The word (as we have come to expect) is *zoe*, animated, active, vigorous and essential life—a word used in the New Testament as a technical description of a believer's spiritual state in Yahweh.

We all know who the “Son of God” is, but what does it mean to “have” Him? In Greek, the word is *echo*, meaning to have, hold, keep, or possess. One is said to “have” the clothes he wears, property, riches, or his spouse, or “have” an opinion,

emotions, or a worried mind; the word is even “used of those joined to anyone by the bonds of natural blood or marriage, of friendship, duty or law, or of attendance or companionship.” (*Strong’s*) To “have the Son of God,” then, is to hold onto Him, possess Him, join yourself to Him, clinging to Him through bonds of blood (His sacrifice allows us to relate to Him as our Father); marriage (His called-out assembly—the *Ekklesia*—are His bride); friendship (there is no greater love than His laying down His life for us); duty (not to Him but to our own souls—the duty of self-preservation); and law (the Torah speaks of Yahweh’s salvation—Yahshua—between every line).

By the way, that phrase in verse 13 **“that you may know that you have eternal life,”** is mistranslated (though it’s no doubt true anyway). It literally says that John had written these things so that we could **“be related (by blood) to, be devoted to or an adherent of, and be of the household or brotherhood of [all of that is inherent in the meaning of the Greek word *oikeios*] the eternal life you possess.”** If you work this stuff out in the original Greek or Hebrew, all of the doubt and trepidation that permeate our English versions completely disappear. All that’s left is joyful confidence in our eternal destiny—*if* we “have the Son of God,” that is.

Yahshua put it like this, a statement no less astounding for all its clarity: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. (John 5:24-29)** Who are “all who are in the graves?” In the English, it seems to mean “everyone who has died,” but the Greek doesn’t necessarily support that view. The word for “graves” here is *mneneion*, which *Strong’s* defines as “any visible object for preserving or recalling the memory of a person or thing; a memorial or monument, specifically, a sepulchral monument.” What’s being stressed in the choice of this word is not death, but rather the *memory* of the deceased. If the souls without a spirit are simply annihilated upon the death of the body, then this dual resurrection to which Yahshua is referring—to either life or condemnation—will include only those souls who are indwelt with an immortal spirit, whether Yahweh’s or Satan’s. The dead of door number two are not marked for resurrection; they are not “remembered.” They are simply dead. They never passed “from death into life.” They were spiritually stillborn. They never *were*. That being said, they *will* in a sense be resurrected at the Great White Throne in order to face the final judgment—the sorting out of who will join Satan in eternal torment and who will simply cease to be. More on that in a bit.

Though we could continue *ad nauseum*, I think the point is now abundantly clear: everlasting life awaits Yahweh's children. I'll give Daniel the last word on door number one. What he reports is, not surprisingly, very similar to we just heard from Yahshua. **"And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever."** (Daniel 12:2-3) The contrast between being asleep and awake is quite picturesque in the original Hebrew. *Yasen* is the ordinary word for sleep, though it is clearly being used here as a euphemism for physical death. But it is a death we are *designed* to awaken from: the word "awake" (the Hebrew *qayits*) actually means "summer" (though it's translated "awake" or something similar about half the time). This picture is like the view out the window of my study. At the moment, everything I can see is bleak and "dead"—gray-brown tree trunks and leafless, apparently lifeless, twiggy underbrush. But in a couple of months (I know from experience) I will see instead a lush, verdant forest, bright with new growth—poplars and maples, walnuts and oaks, each with its own unique take on life. What will have happened? A miracle? Not really. Just an annual preview from our Creator of what's supposed to happen to us: when the summer comes, we will have fully awakened from the death of winter.

But Daniel speaks of *two* groups who are to awaken. For the first group, summer's awakening brings *'owlam chayah*, literally, eternal life, restoration, and revival. This, of course, is what we've been calling door number one. The group set in contrast with them here will also awaken with the "summer," but like the weeds that are sure to sprout in my wife's garden, they will awaken to "shame and everlasting contempt." That's *cherpah*: reproach, scorn, taunting, and disgrace; and *'owlam deraown*—everlasting abhorrence, aversion, and repulsion.

These are meaningless concepts to the dead. They instead describe those who have "awakened," doors number one and three. But notice that Daniel doesn't say that *all* will awaken—only "many." (There is a perfectly good word in Hebrew for "all", and this isn't it.) He has thus indicated the existence of a third group: those who, though they too "sleep in the dust," will not awaken to either glory or shame, but will simply remain asleep: they are the extinguished souls of door number two.

When Daniel says that those who are wise (*sakal*: prudent, circumspect, having understanding) will "shine," he's really saying that they will teach, warn, and admonish, for that's what the Hebrew *zahar*—to be or send out light—really means. The effect or outcome of this illumination is the turning of many to "righteousness," that is, *tsadaq*—vindication, justification, being declared right or innocent before Yahweh. *Tsadaq* is a baseline qualification for door number one.

\*\*\*

But there is an even more fundamental requirement for eternal life. Our bodies were not built to live forever. Further, as we saw in the previous chapter, the soul—the *nephesh*—cannot function independent of its body. Any physical body, whether animal or human, that has been separated from its soul is, by definition, dead. This is a universally observed phenomenon: nobody gets out of here alive. That is why Yahweh (whose whole point in creating us was to make companions for Himself who could choose to reciprocate His love *forever*) breathed into us the *neshamah*—the capacity for receiving His Spirit, or *Ruach*. Spirits, unlike souls, are eternal. Neither Yahweh nor the spirit messengers He created (commonly known as angels and demons) can ever die. Thus unless a human soul is indwelt with a spirit, it will perish when its mortal body dies. Just like any animal.

That’s why Yahshua told Nicodemus, **“Unless one is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”** (John 3:3) I know your translation probably reads “born again,” but the Greek word is *anōthen*, meaning “from above” (from *ano*: up, above, or upward). The distinction, as we shall see, is important, for although He didn’t say it here, it’s also possible to be born “from below,” so to speak. Yahshua proceeded to educate one of the most learned men in Israel on the fine points of having a body, soul, and spirit, as only the One who had created them in the first place could explain: **“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit [both of them, is the connotation—physical birth followed by spiritual re-birth], he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’”** Flesh, of course, is the body. Being “born” is the indwelling of this body with a *nephesh*, or soul—it is then “alive” in the mortal sense. But if we are to be equipped for everlasting life, the *nephesh* is not enough; one’s *neshamah* must in turn be indwelt with God’s eternal Spirit. **“The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”** (John 3:5-8) We can’t see air moving; we know the wind is blowing only by the evidence it offers. It’s the same with the Spirit. You can’t see it, but its presence can be detected by what happens in and through your life.

That is why, in the John 8 passage we looked at a few pages back, Yahshua told the Pharisees, **“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.... He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.”** (John 8:44, 47) These religious teachers were “born *again*,” all right, but they weren’t “born from above.” Their father was not Yahweh, but rather “the devil.” Stated another way, Yahshua told them, **“Fill up, then, the**

**measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers, how can you escape the condemnation of hell?"** (Matthew 23:32-33) From Genesis to Revelation, Satan is described as a serpent. By calling the Pharisees a "brood of vipers," Yahshua was identifying their spiritual father: Satan himself.

That explained their actions: the son advances the agenda of his father, whether good or evil. Yahweh's agenda can be boiled down to one word: love. Satan's agenda, on the other hand, is our submission—the exercise of power and dominion over one's fellow creatures. It's a fascinating phenomenon, really. Yahweh, being the self-existent Creator, is the only One to whom power naturally belongs. He therefore doesn't consider it a thing to be grasped at or coveted—it's just a normal component of His existence. Rather, He wants the only thing ultimate power *can't* bring Him: the reciprocation of His love for His creatures—us. We were created for no other purpose. That's why He has gone to such extraordinary lengths to invite us to participate in His love.

Satan, meanwhile, was created (like all angelic beings) to be God's servant—brilliant and beautiful, but a servant nonetheless, with no creative nature and no capacity for love. All he really knows is submission, for that is what his role was intended to be: Yahweh says "do this," and His angels perform His bidding. But Satan rebelled, exercising a choice that was never his prerogative, like a corporal telling his general to take a hike. And now, all he can do is look at Yahweh and covet what He has (by virtue of who He is): power, authority, and dominion. Since Satan in his pride wants to be "like God," he believes that the more he can coerce his fellow creatures into submission to himself, the closer he will get to his goal.

As the ubiquitous scriptural metaphor presents it, we as children represent our fathers, advancing His agenda before the world. Thus if our spiritual Father is Yahweh, we will one way or another reflect and advance His love to those around us. But if, as Yahshua revealed about the Pharisees, our spiritual father is actually Satan, then the devil's agenda will in turn become our agenda. We will be motivated primarily by a desire to enhance our positions of power and/or wealth relative to our fellow man. Don't misunderstand me: this is something fundamentally different from working hard to get ahead in your career with the ultimate aim being to provide a good, comfortable life for yourself and your family. Satan's goal is our *submission*. Likewise, his children invariably attempt to suppress, dominate—even enslave—others in order to elevate themselves by comparison. It is one's *relative* position that becomes important to them. A key component is pride, leading to arrogance, leading in turn to abuse—the antithesis of love.

This is far more sinister than merely following one's animal instincts through life. In fact, most motivational triggers are spiritually neutral. The "big three,"

power, sex, and money, will serve as examples. To one born from above, the power he has is seen as a gift from God, a tool to be used to make the world a better place or to alleviate suffering. Sex is a joyful expression of oneness with one's mate, a physical communication of one's love. Money, like power, is a gift to be used wisely. It is a means, not an end, and the material blessings it can buy (for yourself or for others) are to be received with thanksgiving and gratitude, for we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can take nothing with us when we leave it. But if one is born "from below," power is something to be grasped in order to elevate one's status. Sex becomes conquest, an opportunity for physical domination on an intimate scale. And money is the lubricant that greases the wheels of pride.

So our reactions to the normal impulses of our environment are geared to the spirit (if any) living within us. But if we're honest with ourselves, we'll recognize that many—even most—of the people around us show no evidence of any kind of spiritual rebirth in their lives. They aren't driven by God's love, but neither are they consumed with a desire to control and dominate those around them. Their "beliefs" are stated in declarations like: "I believe I'll have another beer." At best, they're just living their lives, studiously unaware of the spiritual warfare going on around them. At worst, they're victims, held in bondage by those advancing Satan's agenda. But either way, they're spiritually dead—or more accurately stated, they're spiritually *unborn*. It is this group that Yahweh and His redeemed are reaching out to, inviting them into the fellowship of life and love. But at the same time, it is this same group that Satan and his spiritual children are determined to keep under subjection, in the dark, reserved for door number two: death.

That is why scripture spends so much time condemning Satan's "third-door" converts—who are in all likelihood as few in number as Yahweh's "first-door" children. It is they, not Satan directly, who make it their business to prevent the spiritually unborn from finding life. And by doing so, they place themselves in direct opposition to God's primary objective: the salvation of mankind. Peter told us about them: **"But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber."** (II Peter 2:1-3) The word for "destruction," used four times in this passage, is one we've seen before: the Greek *apoleia*, defined as destroying, ruin, waste, loss, utter and eternal destruction—*Strong's* describes it as "the destruction which consists of eternal misery in hell." Here the English words (or the concept presented in the scriptures) fail even the lexicographers, for "destruction" is technically incompatible with "eternal

misery.” *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says of *apoleia*, “What is meant here is not a simple extinction of existence [what we’re calling door number two], but an everlasting state of torment and death.” Well, that’s not quite it either, for “torment” and “death” are, once again, mutually exclusive concepts, though we’re starting to get the idea. *Apoleia* describes what we’ve been calling door number *three*: eternal spiritual consciousness in a state of total separation from Yahweh, bringing with it the torment and anguish of unending remorse. When Peter says “their destruction (*apoleia*) does not slumber,” he’s personifying the torment that these false teachers will suffer: “it” will not become careless or negligent, nodding off to sleep (Greek *nustazo*) but will rather remain ever vigilant, wide awake.

Look carefully at the way Peter describes them. These false teachers will work in secret, deny Yahweh’s provision for salvation, and gather to themselves a large following. Because they falsely claim to be God’s representatives on earth, many of the lost, the spiritually unborn, will observe their hypocrisy and selfish intent and curse the God they say they serve. They say, *If this is the kind of person God wants, then I don’t want to have anything to do with Him*. The false teachers’ motivation is covetousness, and their means is exploitation. Like their father, Satan, their agenda is to force, trick, or otherwise compel those who fall into their clutches to submit to them, kneel before them, *pay them*.

Peter goes on to describe their destiny: **“But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness.”** (II Peter 2:12-13) The Greek grammar is really tough here (reflected in the wide disparity between translations). The NASB puts it like this: **“But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong.”** The *victims* of false teaching aren’t necessarily doomed to eternal damnation like their overlords are. Note that “destruction” here is not *apoleia*, but *phthora*, meaning decay, moral corruption, or depravity. False teachers are not Teflon coated. The filth they dish out will inevitably stick to them—in this life as well as the next. Those who have sought and attained positions of authority through which they “speak evil of the things they do not understand” will be touched by the evil they spread. It doesn’t matter whether they deal in religion, politics, commerce, education, or war. What goes around comes around.

And in the end, their destiny is eternal darkness. **“These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.”** (II Peter 2:17) Wells without water promise to slake the thirst, but provide nothing of value. You can’t drink false hope. Nor does the parched land benefit from clouds

that merely scud by overhead. A false promise is far more cruel than silence. Therefore, those who lead the spiritually unborn astray, those who conspire to keep them from experiencing the light of Yahweh's love, have a confirmed reservation in Hotel Hell, described here as "the blackness of darkness." And their stay is described as *forever*. As the Eagles' old rock anthem put it, "You can check out any time you like, but you can never leave."

It's an interesting phrase: "the blackness of darkness." The Greek *zophos* means deep gloom, the blackest darkness of hell. And *skotos* is the word for the darkness of night, also indicating "darkened eyesight or blindness; the darkness of ignorance respecting divine things and human duties, and the accompanying ungodliness and immorality, together with their consequent misery in hell." (*Strong's*) Scientists tell us that there are places within every galaxy called "black holes," where the gravitational pressure is so great that not even light can escape. Crushing, voracious, and utterly lightless, these black holes provide an apt metaphor for what hell is like. (And who knows? Perhaps they're more than metaphors. Could it be that Yahweh has reserved a black hole for each soul inhabited by Satan's spirit? This thought is obviously beyond SF10 on my speculation scale, but that doesn't mean it *couldn't* be true.)

Jude used a lot of the same language Peter did in describing these people. He, too, begins by warning about false teachers sneaking in. **"Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ..."** The only defense against false teachers is to adhere tenaciously to the scriptures, the basis of our faith. In fact, he says, these very scriptures warned us about them, and foretold their fate. The phrase rendered "long ago were marked out for this condemnation," literally reads: "having been previously written for this judgment." The Greek word *prographo* means to write before (in the sense of time), or to depict or portray openly. Jude is not talking about being predestined to hell (like it sounds in some English translations) but about being forewarned of the coming judgment. The particular false doctrine Jude was concerned with here was the odd notion that because we are under grace, we are free to lead a life of sin and debauchery, since we have our "fire insurance."

Jude next gives examples of people (and angelic beings) recorded in scripture who had promoted the same error, which as you'll recall he equated to a denial of Yahweh and His Messiah. **"But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that Yahweh, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own**

abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire....” You’ll note that the line between “bad behavior” and “false teaching” has been blurred somewhat here. Taking Jude’s last example, sodomy, as a test case, we should note that falling into the worst sort of sexual sin is not in itself unforgivable, but when one crosses the line and begins publicly promoting a homosexual lifestyle as if it were God’s natural order of things, we have taken our first step through door number three. A “gay pride” parade is nothing short of a march to hell. The word so unfortunately translated “vengeance,” by the way, means nothing of the sort: *katadike* actually indicates a judicial decision, especially one of condemnation, and by extension, the execution of that sentence. We’re talking about law and justice, not petty vindictiveness on the part of God.

“Likewise also these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries. Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘Yahweh rebuke you!’ But these speak evil of whatever they do not know; and whatever they know naturally, like brute beasts, in these things they corrupt themselves. Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, have run greedily in the error of Balaam for profit, and perished in the rebellion of Korah....” Okay, so it seems Jude is suffering from a little Attention Deficit Disorder. Or is it just our English translation? The subject is still the false teachers who deny Yahweh and pervert His grace. Why in the world would Jude condemn them for “speaking evil of *dignitaries*?” Who (or what) are these? The word *doxa* is invariably translated in the New Testament as glory, majesty, honor, or some such concept. But that’s not what the word connotes at all, except by a long and convoluted reasoning process. It’s primary meaning is simply: an opinion, what one thinks, a viewpoint—it’s always used of a “good” opinion in the scriptures. With this insight, we can finally see what Jude was saying. The false teachers are known by their propensity for belittling the godly opinions of Yahweh’s people: they “speak evil of whatever they do not know.” Jude’s examples, then, make this principle clear. Cain despised Abel’s opinion of Yahweh’s instructions, so he killed him. Balaam willfully disregarded Yahweh’s blessing upon Israel, selling them out despite his knowledge in order to make a quick buck. And Korah rebelled against Moses’ view of Yahweh’s mandate. One as erudite as Michael the archangel, however, refused to put his spiritual foot in his mouth as these false teachers are wont to do; he simply deferred to Yahweh’s opinion on the matter.

Jude concludes: “These are spots in your love feasts, while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. They are clouds without water, carried about by the winds; late autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, pulled up by the roots; raging waves of the sea,

foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” (Jude 3-13) The summary description is one of imperfection, irreverence, and selfishness. Their promises are proven false, they provide nothing of value, and for all their activity, they amount to nothing but useless froth. Their destiny is to be “twice dead,” both *nekros* and *thanatos*, dead in body and in eternal anguish of spirit. “Wandering stars” is a telling description. The Greek *planes* (wandering) comes from a root which means “to lead or go astray.” The planets of the solar system were referred to as “wandering stars” because unlike true stars, they didn’t have fixed positions in the heavens—they aren’t stable. What Jude couldn’t have known (but intimated anyway) is that planets have no light within themselves. Whatever brightness they exhibit is just a reflection from a real light source. Thus we see the same phrase Peter used: “the blackness of darkness forever.” Door number three represents, quite literally, the night of the living dead.

Yahshua couched the same truths in terms more familiar to his first-century audience. He said, **“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.”** He’s talking about the same false teachers Peter and Jude described—those who make it their business to prevent people from coming to Yahweh. And He makes two comparisons: He says that either death or mutilation would be preferable to what they will actually experience. **“If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched—where ‘Their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.’”** (Mark 9:42-44; cf. Isaiah 66:24) Neither this “fire” nor the “worms” need be taken literally. I believe Yahshua is merely using terms His hearers could easily relate to. Fire speaks of judgment, of testing and trial. The very word *Sheol* (the grave, the place of the dead) is derived from a verb meaning “to ask, to enquire.” And the “worm,” of course, speaks of corruption, putrefaction, decay. But we’re talking about lost souls indwelt with immortal spirits here, for whom literal fire and real worms would hold no horror. The *spiritual* equivalent of “fire” and “worms” will be another matter, I’m guessing. Yahshua is saying that physical death, decay, and dissipation are far better than the fate of anyone who even *tries* to keep one of “these little ones”—including the spiritually yet-to-be-born—from finding freedom in Yahweh’s love. In other words, door number two is infinitely better than door number three, which is what you’ll get if you willfully prevent people from entering door number one.

\*\*\*

Since all men die, a subsequent potential life (or living death) beyond the grave is implied in the familiar words of Yahshua to Nicodemus: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”** None of us are “saved” from physical death (or some other mode of departure from mortality, like the rapture), nor is the condemnation of which Yahshua speaks in the following verses something that will be experienced fully in this world. **“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”** (John 3:16-18) The dividing line between condemnation and vindication is one’s belief in—his trust and reliance upon—the Messiah, or more precisely, His *name*, which literally means Yahweh Saves.

“Condemned already?” Until I came to recognize the three-door concept, I never understood this statement: it *seemed* to be saying the same thing I’d heard in sermons all my life—that if you haven’t “gotten saved,” if you haven’t made a “profession of faith in Christ,” then you’re on your way to eternal fiery torment. Therefore, you’d better come forward and repent before they’re through singing the last verse of “Just As I Am,” if you know what’s good for you. Frankly, it didn’t seem quite right to me, but being a dutiful Christian, I swallowed hard and went along with this teaching, despite my misgivings. It’s not that it wasn’t Yahweh’s prerogative to send people to hell for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, but it was the very antithesis of His revealed character.

Now I realize that Yahshua wasn’t making threats; He was just stating a fact. If one has not been “born from above,” (which is the result of the choice one makes to “believe in,” to trust and rely upon, Yahweh) then his *neshamah*—by definition—has not been indwelt with Yahweh’s Holy Spirit. It is empty of life. Consequently, when his body dies, his spiritless soul will die with it, just as with any animal. He is thus truly “condemned already.” It is a state we are born into, but a state that can be changed at any time as long as we draw breath—transformed from condemnation into vindication by our decision to rely on Yahweh.

There’s a caveat, however, one Yahshua explained elsewhere: if you have been born of Satan—if you have accepted *his* spirit into your *neshamah*, then your condemnation has become permanent and irreversible. **“Assuredly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they may utter; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation.”** (Mark 3:28-29) The parallel passage in Matthew 12:31-32 makes it clear that even such speech uttered against “the Son of Man” (that is, Yahshua in His role as a human being) may be forgiven, but not against the Holy Spirit. This

blasphemy (Greek *blasphemia*) is not a technical religious term, but ordinary slander, reviling, or defamation—abusive speech intended to injure someone’s good name.

Our thoughts and attitudes eventually emerge in our words and deeds, and what we say and do in this life will follow us for eternity. Later, in the same context, Yahshua said, **“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”** (Matthew 12:34-37) That is true generally, but especially true in the case of what we do and say about Yahshua the Messiah: **“If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation.”** (Romans 10:9-10) The point is that we speak of that which lives within us. If Yahweh’s Holy Spirit is the source of our spiritual life, we will find it impossible to slander Her. We will honor *both* our spiritual Father and Mother, as we’re commanded to do in Exodus 20:12. If, however, we have accepted and embraced the spirit of Satan, we will be able to do nothing else—slandering God will be part of our nature. And what of those who are spiritually unborn? Spiritual things are spiritually discerned: they will have nothing to say on the matter.

Nicodemus was, at the time of his after-hours conversation with Yahshua, of this unborn group. But he was an honest searcher, so Yahshua described the state of condemnation to him in general terms. **“And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”** (John 3:19-21) The choice we make is between light and darkness. The distinction being drawn here is between door number one and all possible alternatives.

Unfortunately for mankind, Yahshua foresaw that those who chose light and life would be relatively few. **“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”** (Matthew 7:13-14) A quick look around us will confirm that most of the world prefers the broad path that we now know ultimately leads to destruction—or to something worse. This observation is not vindictive, judgmental hysteria on my part; it is merely a somber assessment of the way things are. A tree is known by the kind of fruit it bears. As the writer to the Hebrews put it, **“The earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated,**

receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned.” (Hebrews 6:7-8) What he didn’t state is the fact that much of the time, there is no fruit at all—nothing terribly evil but nothing particularly good, either.

An incident related by Mark illustrates the principle: **“Now the next day, when they had come out from Bethany, He [Yahshua] was hungry. And seeing from afar a fig tree having leaves, He went to see if perhaps He would find something on it. When He came to it, He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. In response Jesus said to it, ‘Let no one eat fruit from you ever again.’ And His disciples heard it.... Now in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter, remembering, said to Him, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree which You cursed has withered away.”** (Mark 11:12-14, 20-21) Because Yahshua used the occasion to teach on the efficacy of prayer, we often miss the underlying message: if we bear no fruit, we are dead where we stand. Since fig trees often metaphorically speak of Israel, Yahshua was subtly prophesying the coming barren state of the nation, but the message is as universal as it is ominous. As nations and as individuals, we need to examine the fruits of our labors. Is there any? And if there is, are we promoting ignorance, despair, and submission to the world’s system, or are we bringing forth enlightenment, optimism, and inner peace? Are we part of the problem, part of the solution, or just taking up space? The answers have perpetual consequences.

Don’t confuse ritual and religion with faith and a familial relationship with God. It does no good to be “religious” if you deny the reality of Yahweh’s presence when you’re not sitting in a pew. **“There is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops....”** Yahshua spoke these words in reference to the most religious guys in town, the Pharisees. He began by warning his disciples to “beware of their leaven, which is hypocrisy,” in other words, their corruption, hidden from view but evident through its effect. Hardly anybody these days understands that Yahshua hadn’t changed subjects when He went on to say, **“And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear him!”** (Luke 12:2-5) *Who* has the “power to cast into hell?” Most everybody first thinks it’s Satan, and then, after a little thought, decides it’s God. But look at the context: Christ is warning us about the religious elite, those who would “secretly bring in destructive heresies” designed to elevate themselves over their fellow man. And what kind of “power” do they have? The Greek word is *exousia*, meaning the authority to act or rule, the liberty of doing what one pleases. *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* describes *exousia* as the “ability to perform an action to the extent that there are no hindrances in the way, as distinct from δύναμις [dunamis] in the

sense of intrinsic ability.” In other words, no one can throw you into hell if you don’t let them. But those who would have you trade faith for religion, swap grace for either works or license, or exchange Yahweh for a god of any other description are to be feared as you would fear a rabid dog.

In a twisted sort of way, we can feel fortunate that the scribes and Pharisees were around to trouble Yahshua, for they provide the perfect picture of what the denizens of door number three are like: **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!”** A *hypokrites* is literally “one who answers”—an interpreter or stage actor, a pretender. That’s the first key: they *pretend* to represent God while they reinterpret or judiciously edit His word to suit their own purposes. **“For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”** This is key number two: they not only shun Yahweh’s truth themselves, they work to prevent others from benefiting from it. **“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers.”** Key number three is heartless greed mixed with religious display. They don’t care who they hurt as long as they themselves can elevate their own position in some manner. **“Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.”** (Matthew 23:13-14) Greater than *whose* condemnation? Greater than their victims’, who will *merely* be cheated out of eternal life because of the selfish ambition of these false teachers.

\*\*\*

Moses pointed out that Yahweh took a personal, face-to-face role in the administration of His wrath, leading us (again) to the inescapable conclusion that something beyond the death of the mortal body is in store for God’s enemies, just as it is for His friends: **“He repays those who hate Him to their face, to destroy them. He will not be slack with him who hates Him; He will repay him to his face. Therefore you shall keep the commandment, the statutes, and the judgments which I command you today, to observe them.”** (Deuteronomy 7:10-11) Be honest now. When’s the last time you saw Yahweh deal face-to-face with a wicked person in *this* life? It rarely happens, even in scripture, because God tends to leave the window of repentance open until the last possible moment—the Methuselah factor. He is therefore talking about something yet future: the Great White Throne judgment—face-to-face confrontation with the Almighty.

The function of the Great White Throne is *not* to separate the saved from the lost. In the present world, that happens the moment we die: when “absent from the body” the souls of the redeemed are “present” with God (II Corinthians 5:8). In fact, the redeemed of the first six millennia will have received their immortal

resurrection bodies long before the GWT takes place. Thus their status as “saints” will have been established for at least a thousand years. And what about the redeemed of the seventh Millennium? There is no indication that *they* will stand before the GWT either, for those on trial are the “dead” of every age, people whose names are not found in the Lamb’s Book of Life, souls whose fate will be determined by what is written in the books recording their deeds, their “works.” (See Revelation 20:12-13.) The redeemed are *never* condemned by their works, for their shortcomings are covered by the blood of Christ. Evaluated for their rewards, yes. Condemned, no.

If the Great White Throne is not intended to separate the saved from the lost, then what is its purpose? Is Yahweh merely giving unrepentant men an opportunity to explain themselves—to give them their “day in court?” Not likely. Or is some substantial issue being decided, based upon what is found in the books of the deeds of men mentioned in Revelation 20:12? To phrase the question in terms germane to our present topic, does the GWT lead to door number two, door number three, or both?

Let’s review the salient passage. John begins by telling us that the redeemed dead of the Tribulation will be raised to reign with King Yahshua for a thousand years, and then he explains what happened to everybody else: **“But the rest of the dead [nekros: the lifeless, the physically deceased] did not live again until the thousand years were finished.”** (Revelation 20:5) He used the broadest possible term for the “dead.” Because all the redeemed of every age have at this point either received their immortal “resurrection” bodies, or (possibly) are still alive in their mortal ones, the phrase “the rest of the dead” can only mean the lost—and logically, *all* of them, whether or not they embraced Satan’s spirit.

A bit later, John relates what these “dead people” whom God has made to “live again” will experience after the thousand years have passed: **“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.”** To call the throne “white” is an anemic understatement. It was *leukos*: a bright, brilliant light. A fitting place for Almighty God to sit in undiminished glory. **“And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books....”** The word translated “judged” tells the tale. It’s *krino*, whose primary definition is “to separate, put asunder, to pick out, select, or choose.” (*Strong’s*) Its linguistic root means “to part or sift.” What we need to ask ourselves is who is being separated from whom? It’s not the living from the dead—they were *all* dead. Rather, one category of “dead” is being parted from another. Yahweh is making the final determination of each individual lost soul—whether it will

simply remain dead, or will join “its father,” Satan, in eternal anguish. He is determining who will enter door number two, and who door number three.

**“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged [krino again: separated from one another], each one according to his works....”** Only Yahweh could make this decision. From our viewpoint, it’s seldom clear cut. Sure, you could say with some confidence that Muhammad and Hitler were threebies, and your next door neighbor, who’s a nice enough guy but never gives God a second thought, is probably a twofer. But there are millions for whom it would be a tough call. Remember, Yahshua specifically condemned the Pharisees as a class, but both Nicodemus and Paul were Pharisees. It’s an individual call, one soul at a time, requiring the wisdom of Yahweh Himself. That’s what the Great White Throne is all about.

So what are we to make of John’s parting shot on the subject? **“Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”** (Revelation 20:11-15) *Nobody* standing before the GWT will find his name written in the Book of Life. As a result of the findings of this judgment, all of the dead, twofers and threebies alike, will undergo the “second death,” and all of them will be “cast into the lake of fire.” Are their fates identical, then? Is the “lake of fire” synonymous with hell, the abyss, and eternal punishment? Apparently not, based on everything we’ve discovered concerning the three doors.” So what’s up?

It should be obvious that the “lake of fire” is not a literal description of the destination of the lost, but a metaphor, a word picture, of what’s in store for them. Neither death nor Hades could literally be thrown into a “lake” of any kind. But both *limne* (lake) and *pyr* (fire) are the ordinary Greek words for these things, so it is incumbent on us to ponder what the symbols mean. A lake is a specific, finite place with certain defining characteristics. Notice that he didn’t call it a “sea” or an “ocean.” Since *limne* comes from a root word (*leibo*) meaning “to pour,” we are reminded that lakes, unlike other bodies of water, have both an entrance and an egress: water flows in and then out again.

Hold that thought for a moment while we examine what fire represents. Classical Greek thought would have connected *pyr* to the idea of violence and irresistibility, to ritual purification, or seen it as an antidote to evil influences. Fire was employed in the Mosaic law to destroy what was sanctified in order to keep it from profanation. For example, **“If any of the flesh of the consecration offerings, or of the bread, remains until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire. It shall not be eaten, because it is holy.”** (Exodus 29:34) Fire’s consuming power thus prevents contamination; it is what removes the holy (that which is set-apart for Yahweh’s purpose) from the profane. I think we’re getting warm.

Fire is more often used as an image of the judicial wrath of God. For instance, **“Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to Yahweh an offering in righteousness.”** (Malachi 3:2-3) This refining process is primarily one of separation—removing the worthless dross from the pure metal by heating it to a liquid state and letting the impurities float to the top. But here beyond the Great White Throne, the precious metal has already been removed and put in a safe place. So in the case of the “lake of fire,” the separation is that of one kind of dross from another—the merely worthless from the toxic waste—door number two from door number three.

The lake of fire, then, is a graphic portrayal of a place or state where lost souls enter a refining process—a *krino*-judgment that separates the dead from the damned. The lightweight worthless dross floats to the top of the “lake” and spills out into dissipation, annihilation, destruction—what we’ve been calling door number two. But the weightier Satanic spirit-laden souls sink to the bottom of this eternal abyss, never to escape, never to rest, never to forget. The bottom of the lake of fire is door number three.

The lake with which John would have been most personally familiar was, of course, Galilee, which in itself offers some fascinating parallels to the “lake of fire” illustration. The Jordan River flows both into and out of it. (The word “Jordan” is transliterated from the Hebrew *yaraden*, meaning “the descender,” from *yarad*: to go down, descend, decline, or pour out.) Waters that descend from the lake of Galilee end up in the Dead Sea—a place from which there is no outflow, no escape, only dissipation and evaporation—an apt metaphor for the souls of door number two.

From where we sit in heaven’s grandstand, it seems that anyone who enters the lake of fire represents a tragic loss. And it is. But we need to also be aware of the incredible mercy of Yahweh in allowing the victims, the sleepers, and the careless of door number two to be “skimmed off the top” of the lake of fire—to escape the torment of eternal remorse into the relative comfort of nothingness. Yes, they don’t know what they’re missing. Thank God for that.