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**Title** The Harrowing of Hell: Salvation for the Dead in Early Christianity

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**Abstract** One of the largest theological issues throughout Christian history is the fate of the unevangelized dead: Will they be eternally damned? Will they be lesser citizens in the kingdom of God? Will they have a chance to accept Christ postmortally? These issues are related to the soteriological problem of evil. The belief of the earliest Christians, even through the time of the church fathers Origen and Clement of Alexandria, was that postmortal evangelization was possible. One of the origins of this belief is seen in apocalyptic Judaism, in which righteous gentiles are not left to suffer eternally but, however, are given a lesser status than righteous Jews. Early Christian doctrine goes even further through the belief of Christ's preaching in Hades—all people have a chance, through accepting Christ, to be save in the same state. Later, however, many Christian theologians such as Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin rejected this doctrine and contended that righteousness and unrighteousness are fixed at death.

*Christ's Descent to Limbo*, by Fra Angelico (1387–1455). Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

# The Harrowing of Hell

## SALVATION FOR THE DEAD IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

DAVID L. PAULSEN, ROGER D. COOK, AND KENDEL J. CHRISTENSEN[1]

"Lord, are there few that be saved?" (Luke 13:23). This question has troubled thinkers from Christianity's beginning. The faithful readily accept that, save Jesus Christ, there is "none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Yet, the same loyal followers of Christ wrestle with the puzzling reality that countless numbers of souls have lived and died never having heard of Jesus Christ, let alone having had an adequate chance to accept the salvation he offers. What is their fate in the eternities? Are these forever excluded from salvation? Thomas Morris, philosophy professor at Notre Dame, describes this unexplained "scandal" in his book *The Logic of God Incarnate*:

> The scandal . . . arises with a simple set of questions asked of the Christian theologian who claims that it is only through the life and death of God incarnated in Jesus Christ that all can be saved and reconciled to God: How can the many humans who lived and died before the time of Christ be saved through him? They surely cannot be held accountable for responding appropriately to something of which they could have no knowledge. Furthermore, what about all the people who have lived since the time of Christ in cultures with different religious traditions, untouched by the Christian gospel? . . . How could a just God set up a particular condition of salvation, the highest end of human life possible, which was and is inaccessible to most people? Is not the love of God better understood as universal, rather than as limited to a mediation through the one particular individual, Jesus of Nazareth? Is it not a moral as well as a religious scandal to claim otherwise?[2]

This "scandal," otherwise known as the soteriological problem of evil, is the logical incoherence of the Christian triad of ideas that (1) God is perfectly loving and just and desires that all his children be saved, (2) salvation comes only through an individual's acceptance of Christ's salvific gifts, and (3) countless numbers of God's children have died without having a chance to hear about, much less accept, those saving gifts. Would a truly loving and just God condemn his children simply because they had never heard of his Son? Some very influential Christian thinkers have answered in the affirmative,[3] and, consequently, some critics have labeled Christianity as a religion of damnation rather than salvation.[4]

This pessimistic position has not always prevailed in Christianity.[5] Indeed, in early Christian thought, as well as in apocalyptic Judaism that preceded it, the merciful doctrine of salvation for the dead, known to early Christians as the "harrowing" of hell,[6] was advanced as the divine solution to the problem. In this paper, which is the first of a three-part series, we (1) trace the origin and development of this idea in early Christianity and its formal articulation in the Apostles' Creed; (2) set forth the rejection of the doctrine, first by Augustine and later by the Reformers, and their reasons for rejecting it; and (3) conclude with a brief survey of some contemporary solutions to the soteriological problem of evil. In the sequels to this paper, we explore the doctrine of baptism for the dead in early Christianity and elaborate on the restoration of the doctrines of the harrowing of hell and baptism for the dead in modern revelation.

## Christian Precursors of Postmortem Rescue of the Dead

The writers of the New Testament texts are often described by contemporary Near Eastern scholars as *Jewish* or *apocalyptic* Christians to differentiate them from *classical* Christians, who appear in the second century AD and whose views begin to prevail from that time on. They were part of what scholars now call Second Temple Judaism, or Judaism as it existed from the return of the exiles from Babylon to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple by the Romans (516 BC–AD 70). Their writings have a heavenly focus, describing in detail multiple, storied heavens and the ranks of angels that reside in each; the fall of some of those angels and their introducing evil to the earth; and the apocalyptic ascent of chosen prophets and priests to the highest heaven to witness and participate in the proceedings of the divine council of God. In addition, their writings also detail the coming destruction of the world and the paradise that God will establish, the resurrection of the dead and their exaltation in the hereafter, and the fiery, eternal punishment that the wicked will suffer for sins committed in mortality.[7] As a direct descendant of apocalyptic Judaism and its unique views,[8] early Christianity took an avid interest in the final condition of the dead and in reconciling this final state of affairs with God's justice.

In the apocalyptic Jewish tradition, of which the New Testament writers who inaugurate the apocalyptic Christian tradition are a part, God is unequivocally understood to be a transcendent, all-powerful, embodied being who seeks the advancement of all mankind. He is otherworldly in that he physically resides in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly temple located in the highest heaven, but his transcendence should not be confused with being exterior to the universe, for he fully exists within space and time.[9] From his exalted throne he controls the universe, his unmatched power extending to each and every corner and affecting all that dwell therein.[10] Acting on behalf of his children, he shows them abundant mercy and love balanced with justice as he also punishes those who have lived corrupt lives in mortality.[11]

A theological impasse is created, however, when one attempts to reconcile the loving and merciful God of apocalyptic Judaism with the harsh, eternal punishment of Sheol (Greek *hades*), even if its inhabitants merit some measure of retribution. In approximately 400 BC, Enochian Jews began writing the *Book of Watchers*, a portion of the larger text now known as *1 Enoch*. These are the first apocalyptic Jews to describe portions of Sheol as being a place of extreme punishment for the wicked. They describe the "scourges and tortures of the cursed forever" (*1 Enoch* 22:10) and the flaming "abyss" into which the fallen angels are thrown and burn forever (*1 Enoch* 21:1–10).[12] Prior to this time, some expounders of Israelite religion understood that *all* mortals reside *permanently* in Sheol after this life, and it appears that their existence after this life could be good or bad, depending upon their

*Christ in Limbo*, by Benvenuto di Giovanni. Samuel H. Kress Collection. Image courtesy of the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

conduct during mortality.[13] But Enochian Jews treat a portion of Sheol as a *temporary* holding place for the spirits of the righteous departed, placing the righteous in a place of rest and light and the wicked in places of darkness and confinement, but not physical punishment.[14] They also taught of the righteous leaving Sheol, their resurrection from the dead, and their subsequent existence in an Edenlike paradise (*1 Enoch* 22:1–14; 24:1–25:6).

Although these ideas were commonplace in apocalyptic Judaism by the end of the Second Temple period, awareness of the theological dilemma created by the Enochian Jews' view of Sheol's eternal punishment also emerges in writings near the end of that period.[15] Texts from the apocalyptic Jewish tradition dated to the late first century BC or early first century AD draw attention to the soteriological problem as their authors attempt to reconcile the endless torment of the underworld with the existence of a loving and merciful God. The *Book of Parables*, generally considered an Enochian work of the late first century BC or the first century AD, records that even the archangel Michael at first recoils at the "harshness of the judgment"

of the fallen angels. He exclaims to Raphael, "Who is there who would not soften his heart over it, and . . . not be troubled by this word?" Michael finds some comfort knowing that the worst punishments are reserved for the fallen archangels alone: "for no angel or human will receive their lot" (*1 Enoch* 68:2–5). Still, the question remains: How can a loving and merciful God justify tormenting *any* of his creations, especially if this torment is "without end"?

This dilemma is addressed in *4 Ezra*, an apocalyptic Jewish work dating to the first century AD. In the text, an angel shows the ancient prophet Ezra the "furnace of hell" where the disobedient are destined to live after this life and the paradise and exaltation reserved for the righteous. He tells Ezra that the wicked will "wander about in torments," while those who follow God will be "guarded by angels in profound quiet," having bodies whose faces will "shine like the sun, and . . . be made like the light of the stars" (*4 Ezra* 7:36, 80, 95, 97)—a literal exaltation of the righteous to an angelic status.[16] Ezra laments, however, that he cannot reconcile God's overabundant goodness and mercy with what seems to be an overly rigorous justice. If all have sinned and become unclean, then how is it that any deserve salvation at all? How can the final judgment be just with its division of those entering paradise and those entering hell? Ezra ends his lament with a plea to God for mercy for the disobedient:

> What does it profit us that we shall be preserved alive but cruelly tormented? . . . And if we were not to come into judgment after death, perhaps it would have been better for us. . . . It would have been better if the earth had not produced Adam, or else, when it had produced him, had restrained him from sinning. For what good is it to all that they live in sorrow now and expect punishment after death? . . . For in truth there is no one among those who have been born who has not acted wickedly, and among those who have existed there is no one who has not transgressed. For in this, O Lord, your righteousness and goodness will be declared, when you are merciful to those who have no store of good works. (*4 Ezra* 7:65–67, 69, 116–17; 8:35–36)

Additionally, it should be noted that a part of the soteriological problem of evil is at least somewhat mitigated in apocalyptic Judaism in that it does not consign righteous Gentiles to the punishments of Sheol. The Enochian text known as *Enoch's Dream Visions*, written approximately 164 BC during the persecutions of the Jews under Antiochan rule, speaks of the eventual victory of righteous Judaism over the gentile nations and the building of a vast, new temple complex to replace Jerusalem and its temple. It is the first apocalyptic Jewish text that explains the full angelic exaltation of righteous Jews in the paradisiacal world that will be created on the earth, with the righteous being symbolically described as "sheep" that are "white" and their wool "thick and pure," a transformation from their previous mortal state, where they were plain sheep. Significantly, righteous Gentiles, symbolically described as the "animals on the earth and all the birds of heaven," are subservient to the exalted Jews who reign over the earth from the temple complex, they "falling down and worshiping those sheep . . . and obeying them in every thing" (*1 Enoch* 90:28–32). Though still not granted the same status as righteous Jews, these Gentiles are not subject to the same fiery punishment that the fallen angels, wicked kings, and apostate Jews receive in Sheol (*1 Enoch* 90:20–27).

This is significant because the righteous Gentiles are not immediately consigned to eternal punishment; they apparently do not need to fear torment in Sheol. They continue to live on the earth, and they seemingly learn of and follow the God of the Jews, for he rejoices over them (*1 Enoch* 90:38). Indeed, a transformation is also available for them as the wild animals are "changed, and they all became white cattle" (*1 Enoch* 90:37), but it is also clear that their eternal status will be as everlasting inferiors to the exalted Jews, for they are white *cattle* as compared to the brilliantly white *sheep* that rule over them.[17] This partially, but not fully, solves part of the soteriological problem. A more complete resolution of the problem would demand that even the righteous Gentiles could be fully redeemed and exalted, the position that apocalyptic Christians would later adopt.

## Apocalyptic Christianity

Apocalyptic Christians, having inherited from apocalyptic Judaism the idea that the just are saved and the wicked condemned, were also troubled by

this soteriological problem, but they advanced a unique solution during the first century AD: God will show an abundance of mercy by redeeming from Sheol all who can and will be saved. They affirm that Christ descended to the underworld as a divinely empowered spiritual being, smashed its gates, preached repentance to the captive disobedient, and began the salvific rites that would open for them the gates of heaven.[18] So, apocalyptic Christians solved the soteriological problem by (1) conceiving the punishment of those in Sheol as temporary and (2) conceiving God as offering repentance to the unevangelized and wicked of Sheol.[19]

Believed to be the oldest image in existence of Paul the Apostle. Late 4th-century fresco found in the Catacomb of Santa Tecia in Rome in 2009. © Photographic Service "L'Osservatore Romano."

Comments made by Paul the apostle show that salvation for the dead had been on the minds of apocalyptic Christians since its earliest days. The first reference is found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, likely written about AD 60.[20] He refers to Jesus's triumph over all things, even over "captivity" itself, and briefly describes Christ's descent to hades: "He [Jesus] had also descended into the lower parts of the earth" (Ephesians 4:8–10 NRSV). Extant interpretations of this passage include Jesus's victory over sin and his triumph over the captivity of hades. If Paul is referring to the latter, then by overcoming captivity Jesus freed the prisoners of the underworld.[21] Indeed, Christ's triumph over all things heavenly and earthly—elaborated in detail by Paul as the Father having lifted Jesus above all angelic "rule and authority and power and dominion" and "put all things under his [Jesus's] feet" (Ephesians 1:21–22 NRSV)—would not be complete unless Jesus also triumphed over the captivity of the underworld. If this interpretation is correct, then the fact that Jesus's descent is mentioned without any additional comment implies that this is an idea familiar to Christianity's formative years.[22]

Another apocalyptic Christian text written at about the same time as Paul's letter to the Ephesians, 1 Peter,[23] gives additional insight into Christ's redeeming the repentant captives of hades. In the passage quoted below, Peter explains that Christ was made "alive in the spirit," presumably meaning that between his death and resurrection Jesus descended to hades and there opened the way for salvation of the dead. There he preached to those who had died in sin the hope that even disobedient spirits may be redeemed and returned to God:

> For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.[24] . . . For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does. (1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:6 NRSV)[25]

*Saint Peter,* by Pompeo Batoni (1708–87). National Trust Photo Library / Art Resource, NY.

Peter seems to have a vindication of God's justice in mind when writing these passages. If God did not arrange for Christ to proclaim the good news to the captives and allow those who could yet be redeemed to be freed, then his goodness would be suspect. A truly just and merciful God must give full opportunity for all to repent and live righteously, including the multitudes that died at the time of Noah. Despite their actions, God patiently waits for the spiritually dead to change so that he may grant them mercy, both now and in hades. It is not merely escape from Sheol but exaltation that Peter promises,[26] for the captives are freed so that they might "live in the spirit as God does" (1 Peter 4:6). God is no respecter of persons according to Peter (see 1 Peter 1:17), and he includes the deceased among those to whom God shows an abundance of mercy.

Given Peter's stand on redeeming the dead, it should be no surprise to find that other apocalyptic Jews of the same time period attempted to solve the problem as well. A description of an opportunity for repentance for those in hades is found in the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, a work dating roughly to the first century AD and preserved by Christians.[27] In it, the Old Testament prophet Zephaniah is given a tour of the multiple heavens[28] and of hades, and he prays to God for compassion for those undergoing torment in the underworld (*Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 2:8–9). Later he sees a multitude of the exalted righteous, including Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (*Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 8:1–9:5), who also pray to God for mercy for the inhabitants of hades (*Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 11:1–6). The sufferings of the underworld are deserved, according to the author, but the petitions of the exalted righteous are an appeal to God's compassion, for he can choose to show mercy and forgive whom he will.[29] Zephaniah also sees some inhabitants of hades who are blind and is told by his angelic escort that they are "catechumens [one who receives instruction in preparation for baptism] who heard the word of God, but they were not perfected in the work which they heard." Zephaniah asks, "Then do they not have repentance here?" with the angel replying, "Yes . . . until the day when the Lord will judge" (*Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 10:9–12). As the exalted righteous pray on behalf of all of the inhabitants of hades, it is understood that all—not just the catechumens—have a possibility of either some sort of escape from hades or relief from its torments. However, the author does not explain when or how this redemption will take place.

The book of Revelation, likely written in AD 96 during the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian, explains the release of the underworld's captives as Christ having overcome death and opening up hades. Christ says to John that he is the "living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades" (Revelation 1:18 NRSV). And at the great judgment, death and hades will give up "the dead that [are] in them, and all [will be] judged according to what they had done" (Revelation 20:13 NRSV).[30] Then all those who have not turned to God, those whose names are not written in the book of life, will be thrown with death and hades into a lake of fire, identified as the "second death" (Revelation 20:11–15). Those who have fully turned toward God, however, now belong to Christ, the holder of the keys of death and hades. John, who adheres to a view of salvation similar to Peter and the author of the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, states that *all* who turn to God will be exalted.[31]

Another early Christian text provides convincing evidence for interpreting Ephesians, 1 Peter, and Revelation as portraying Christ's descent to Sheol and freeing its captives. This text, known as the *Odes of Solomon*, is a collection of Christian hymns connected to the Johannine community of the late first or early second century AD.[32] In the text, the Christian author speaks as if he were Christ and describes Christ's original descent from God and the highest heaven and his subsequent descent to Sheol: "He who caused me to descend from on high, and to ascend from the regions below" (Ode 22:1).[33] He indicates that "I opened the doors which were closed" (Ode 17:9), followed by the claim that "I shattered the bars of iron, for my own iron(s) had grown hot and melted before me" (Ode 17:10). The shattering of the bars refers to Christ destroying the infamous gates of hades, and the melting of his binding chains caused by the fierce heat radiating from his fiery, divine glory that is once again revealed. The opening of the door is best explained as Christ allowing for vicarious baptism[34] for the dead, baptism being the door to salvation for apocalyptic Christians, rather than a further reference to the gates of the underworld, as that which is shattered need not be opened.[35] Christ then states, "I went toward all my bondsmen in order to loose them, that I might not abandon anyone bound or

binding" (Ode 17:12), revealing his intent to free the prisoners who belong to him.

In Ode 42, Christ again details his descent to the underworld and his triumphant overcoming of death and Sheol. Christ is a departed spirit, so he descends to Sheol as do all departed spirits in the apocalyptic Jewish tradition.[36] But the Son of God cannot be contained by either death or hell. His eternal nature repulses death, it being as "vinegar and bitterness" to death. Additional information about the shattering of the gates of hades is also revealed. It is Christ's very appearance, the blinding, divine light that streams from his face, which penetrates and overcomes Sheol, for the utter darkness cannot withstand effulgent, celestial light. Christ shatters the gates, Sheol is breached, and the captives are set free:

> Sheol saw me and was shattered,
> and Death ejected me and many with me.
> I have been vinegar and bitterness to it,
> and I went down with it as far as its depth.
> (Ode 42:11–12)

Shattering Sheol is equivalent to the breaching of an otherwise inescapable prison. The *Book of the Watchers* attempts to describe the spirit world, explaining that four immense, hollowed-out chambers hold the spirits of the departed as they wait for the final judgment. One chamber, which is illuminated and has a fountain of water, is designated as the abode of the righteous. In this chamber the righteous spirits call upon God, with one petitioner described as "the spirit that went forth from Abel, whom Cain his brother murdered." But even for the righteous, Sheol is impossible to escape, for the chambers are hewn out of "a great and high mountain of hard rock," and the author describes the chambers as "deep" and their walls as "very smooth" to help his readers understand that one could never climb out of the abyss (*1 Enoch* 22:1–7). The world of the departed spirits, therefore, is divided between a place of reward and other places dedicated to confinement. The unrighteous dead in the *Odes of Solomon* are in a vast chamber reserved for the disobedient as they wait for the final judgment, but Christ's opening of Sheol allows for release.

Ode 42 next speaks of Christ's spiritual body and his formation of a community of the righteous among the dead. The author explains that death could not long endure Christ's blazing countenance, and it first releases his feet and then his head. Additionally, Christ has a face and speaks with lips. Clearly, the author holds that the departed Christ retains some kind of material embodiment, a spiritual body, one with head, feet, lips, and a face, and others with a similar spiritual embodiment run to him and cry out for mercy. Theirs would be an inferior embodiment, however, for their faces do not shine with effulgent light, and they cannot effect their own release from Sheol.[37] Christ then makes a proclamation to the departed spirits, offering them the eternal life of the righteous even as they stand in the world of the dead:

> Then the feet and the head it released,[38]
> because it was not able to endure my face.
> And I made a congregation of living among his dead;
> and I spoke with them by living lips;
> in order that my word may not fail.
> (Ode 42:13–14)

The response of the captives is a wholehearted turning to God. They cry out and plead for Christ's pity and kindness. They have wallowed in the shadows of Sheol, chained in an endless darkness that could never be lifted, but Christ, the Light,[39] now brilliantly illuminates the most penetrating darkness and offers them the promise of escape:

> And those who had died ran toward me;
> and they cried out and said, "Son of God, have pity on us.
> And deal with us according to your kindness,
> and bring us out from the chains of darkness."
> (Ode 42:15–16)

In another possible reference to baptism for the dead, Ode 42 records that the departed spirits ask Jesus to open the door for them and for their salvation to be *with* the Savior. Their plea for an opening of the door indicates that this is a future event; therefore, like Ode 17:9 (above), it is not the shattered gates of Sheol that need to be opened, but an acknowledgment that they need the way opened for a vicarious baptism to take place. Note, in fact, that even though Christ now stands in their midst, they request the door to be opened so

*Christ Descending into Limbo,* number 11 from the Large Passion woodcut series by Albrecht Dürer. Courtesy Kulturgeschichtliches Museum Osnabrück, L 153-12-12.

that they may "go forth to [him]," an indication that they are in some sense still separated from him; the gates of the heavens are still closed to them. Vicarious baptism will allow them to enter the Way,[40] the Christian path to salvation, ending that separation.

Interestingly, they do not desire salvation alone, meaning an entrance into one of the heavenly realms; they request that they be saved *with* Jesus, the appointed Savior. This is similar to the request of the apostles James and John that they may have the right to rule at Christ's right and left hands, with Jesus explaining that the right to assign those *thrones* of honor belongs to the Father (Mark 10:35–40). It also echoes Paul's assertion that the righteous will be exalted over all angels to *rule* at Christ's right hand.[41] Indeed, in an earlier Ode, Christ proclaims, "upon my right hand I have set my elect ones" (Ode 8:18). The dead who are being freed understand that to be saved by Jesus equates to being exalted with him:[42]

> "And open for us the door
> by which we may go forth to
> you,
> for we perceive that our death
> does not approach you.
> May we also be saved with you,
> because you are our Savior."
> (Ode 42:17–18)

The final verses of Ode 42 indicate that Christ will fulfill all their requests. He hears their pleas and responds to their sincere faith by internalizing it. In a reference to the Christian rite of *anointing* or *chrism*,[43] by which the redeemed are made holy and heavenly, Christ then places his name on the foreheads of the initiates in the new community of the righteous by using olive oil.[44] The chrism connects the initiates to Christ as they now permanently bear the divine name that has been given to Christ by the Father.[45] They now belong to him; indeed, Christ says, "they are mine":[46]

> Then I heard their voice,
> and placed their faith in my heart.
> And I placed my name upon their head,
> because they are free and they are mine.
> (Ode 42:19–20)

The placement of the chrism on the foreheads of the departed spirits offers direct evidence that vicarious baptism will soon follow for them. Second-century AD Christian texts, the most important being Syrian baptismal documents, indicate that chrism was directly related to baptism. The initiate would be presented for baptism, and he or she would be marked with oil on the forehead by the bishop or presbyter either in a prebaptismal or postbaptismal anointing, or in anointings both before and after baptism. The chrisms, however, are not done independent of baptism—they are done at the same time. Syrian baptismal documents also record that a chrism for the entire body took place as part of the rite.[47] Additionally, it can be argued that the chrism can be traced back to the first century and the very first Christians. Specifically referring to the chrism placed on the forehead, Gabriele Winkler connects the rite of anointing to the apostolic era:

> Christian baptism is shaped after Christ's baptism in the Jordan. As Jesus had received the anointing through the divine presence in the appearance of a dove, and was invested as the Messiah, so in Christian baptism every candidate is anointed and, in connection with the anointing, the gift of the Spirit is conferred. Therefore the main theme of this prebaptismal anointing is the entry into the eschatological kingship of the Messiah, being in the true sense of the word assimilated to the Messiah-King through this anointing.[48]

Given that the Christian author of the Odes would be familiar with both baptism and chrism and would understand that one accompanies the other, as well as the fact that he specifically refers to the chrism given to the repentant dead of Sheol, it can be reasonably concluded that the pleading of the repentant dead for Christ to open the door (Ode 42:17) refers to the vicarious baptism of apocalyptic Christianity. They, like all Christians, will receive the rites necessary for entrance into God's kingdom, but that process has begun in the world of spirits as they now bear his divine name.

As a product of the Johannine Christian community of the late first or early second century AD, the *Odes of Solomon* serves as a strong indicator of the antiquity of the doctrine of the harrowing of hell. The scattered references found in Ephesians, 1 Peter, and Revelation are enough to make a strong case that apocalyptic Christians understood that God will not torture the repentant for eternity, be these captives evangelized or not, but the explicit description of Christ's descent and release of the captives seems to confirm this interpretation.

The apocalyptic Christian text commonly called the *Epistula Apostolorum*, or "Epistle to the Apostles," also recounts the harrowing of hell. Dated to the early second century, the Christian author reports a dialogue between the resurrected Jesus and the disciples concerning Christ's descent and rescue of the disobedient dead that lie chained in the darkness of Sheol.[49] Christ claims that he will loosen their chains and bring them back to the light. Important is the fact that Jesus will accomplish what seems to be impossible by their release, for the wicked lie in utter despair with no hope for rescue. But as nothing is impossible to God, the empowered Christ will enter Sheol and deliver them. Note that the text also identifies Sheol as the place of Lazarus, implying that the world of spirits is divided into realms of places of punishment and reward. Apparently, the chambers dedicated to the righteous and the wicked will all be emptied through Christ's ministrations:

> Truly I say to you, that I have received all power from my Father *that I may bring back those in darkness into light and those in corruptibility into incorruptibility and those in death into life, and that those in captivity may be loosed*, as what is impossible on the part of men is possible on the part of the Father. I am the hope of the hopeless, the helper of those who have no helper, the treasure of those in need, the physician of the sick, the resurrection of the dead. . . .
>
> On that account *I have descended to the place of Lazarus, and have preached to the righteous and to the prophets, that they may come forth from the rest which is below and go up to what is (above)* . . . (; in that I stretch out) my right hand over them . . . [of the baptism (Eth.)] of life and forgiveness and deliverance from all evil, as I have done to you and to those who believe in me.[50]

Another such text is the *Gospel of Bartholomew*, or *Questions of Bartholomew*, as M. R. James says the manuscripts call it, which purports to be an

exchange between the apostle Bartholomew and the resurrected Christ. Christ tells Bartholomew about his descent into hell, how the angels announce his coming, and how the devils react:

> Then I went down into Hades that I might bring up Adam and all those who were with him, according to the supplication of Michael the archangel . . .
>
> And the angels cried to the powers saying, "Remove your gates, you princes, remove the everlasting doors for behold the King of glory comes down." . . .
>
> And when I had descended five hundred steps, Hades was troubled saying, "I hear the breathing of the Most High, and I cannot endure it." . . .
>
> Then did I [Christ] enter in and scourged him [Hades] and bound him with chains that cannot be loosed, and brought forth thence all the patriarchs.[51]

In a similar text that was supposedly authored by Bartholomew and that James calls *The Book of the Resurrection of Christ by Bartholomew the Apostle*, James summarizes the harrowing of hell after Christ's burial as follows: "Then Jesus rose and mounted into the chariot of the Cherubim. He wrought havoc in Hell, breaking the doors, binding the demons Beliar and Melkir and delivered Adam and the holy souls."[52]

The *Shepherd of Hermas*, likely dating from the early to mid-second century AD, is another apocalyptic Christian text that further describes the rescue of the dead from hades. Like the *Odes of Solomon*, the author of the portion of the text known as the *Parables* indicates that a vicarious baptism is given to the repentant dead:

> It was necessary . . . for them to come up through water in order to be made alive, for otherwise they could not enter the kingdom of God, unless they laid aside the deadness of their former life. So even those who had fallen asleep received the seal of the Son of God and entered the kingdom of God. . . . The seal, therefore, is the water; so they go down into the water dead and they come up alive. (Shepherd of Hermas, *Parable* 9.16.2–4)[53]

Righteous Christians who have passed on participate in rescuing the dead: "when these apostles and teachers who preached the name of the Son of God fell asleep . . . they preached also to those who had previously fallen asleep, and they themselves gave them the seal of the preaching" (Shepherd of Hermas, *Parable* 9.16.5). Additional instances of this rite's performance include a group in Asia Minor who baptized the living using the names of the dead,[54] as well as the Marcionites who would ask an already baptized, living follower a baptismal question in behalf of a departed and then baptize that follower, with "the benefits accruing to the dead person."[55]

In sum, apocalyptic Christianity inherited the soteriological problem of evil from apocalyptic Judaism, but in its formative years set out to find a solution to the problem, which is that God personally sent his Son to redeem mankind, with an overabundance of mercy offered so that even the repentant wicked who have passed on are offered salvation. And unlike other versions of apocalyptic Judaism, there is no distinction in these early Christian texts between the level of salvation offered to Jews and the unevangelized. All are freely offered redemption upon accepting Christ. The result is that the soteriological problem of evil and suffering is greatly mitigated.

## The Apostles' Creed

These themes from Peter and apocalyptic Judaism are echoed in the Apostles' Creed, which is the oldest Christian creed[56] and is still used today as part of the baptismal liturgy of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran churches.[57] The Apostles' Creed acknowledges a belief in "God, the Father almighty" and in "Jesus Christ, his only Son" who "descended into Hell."[58] This latter phrase is central to untangling the soteriological knot, for with it comes the possibility of evangelizing those who had passed from mortality. Indeed, this was the very purpose of its insertion, as one scholar illuminates:

> This article expresses the faith of the primitive Church in two beliefs: First, it meant that God had not left anyone without the chance of salvation but had sent Jesus into hell in order to save those who had not known him on earth. The article was inserted in the Creed because

> the Creed is a brief outline of the saving acts of Christ, and the descent into hell is an important part of his saving work. It is important to remember that hell to the early Church was not the ghastly place of torment it was to become in the mind of the medieval Church.[59]

Rather, the abode for departed spirits was known as a "resting place . . . until Jesus came."[60]

Consider how the Apostles' Creed has influenced contemporary Catholic thought. According to one Catholic writer, the doctrine of the descent into hell involves a place of four divisions:

> Hell as a whole may be differentiated into at least three species: gehenna, purgatory, and sheol; according to a long-standing theological view, there is also a limbo (from the Latin *limbus*, meaning *edge* or *threshold*) for unbaptized children, the *limbus puerorum*. Although it may sound strange to the contemporary ear, one can use the generic name in reference to each species: the hell of the damned (gehenna), the hell of purification (purgatory), the hell of the Fathers (sheol), and the hell of the children. Though these four abodes of the dead are very different in character, *hell* in all these cases can be represented with the generic Latin neuter, *infernum*.[61]

The Limbo of the Father, where "all the holy men and women who died before the death of Christ" rest, "ceased to exist after Christ's descent."[62] It was these who Christ descended to rescue: "Jesus did not descend into hell to deliver the damned, nor to destroy the hell of damnation, but to free the just who had gone before him."[63] The Limbo of the Children, however, "remains a topic of unresolved theological understanding."[64]

According to popular legend, the Creed was originally dictated from the Twelve Apostles themselves, though researchers trace the origin to confessions of faith in early baptismal rites.[65] Researchers do not know the precise authorship and occasion of its writing, only that it likely originated out of Rome between AD 150–75, when there was "every reason for the formation of some creedal statement to guard against the misconceptions of Christianity which were widely prevalent and were causing serious trouble."[66] It thus came to be known as the "Rule of Faith" and was used as a check against heretical interpretations of the scriptures.[67]

Yet despite heresy, "there was no more well-known and popular belief . . . and its popularity steadily increased."[68] Irenaeus, writing near the end of the second century, strongly confirmed the doctrine of the descent, teaching that Christ "descended into the lower parts of the earth to seek the sheep that was lost," a clear indication of the salvific nature of his visit there.[69] In Irenaeus's mind, "a strict theodicy demanded that those who lived before . . . should share in the Gospel."[70] Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215) agrees, stating that "it is not *right* to condemn some without trial, and only give credit for righteousness to others who lived after the coming of the Lord."[71] Emphasizing even more clearly the evangelic purpose of Christ's descent, Clement further states that "Christ went down to Hades for no other purpose than to preach the gospel."[72]

Origen (ca. 185–254) taught that Christ visited and preached to the dead: "When he was in the body he convinced not merely a few . . . and that when he became a soul unclothed by a body he conversed with souls unclothed by bodies, converting also those of them who were willing to accept him or those who, for reasons which he himself knew, he saw to be ready to do so."[73] Origen defended this idea against Celsus, who argued that the descent was mere mythology.[74]

The Creed was still used widely and considered authoritative in the fourth and fifth centuries. Tyrannius (ca. 400), who translated many of Origen's works into Latin, wrote a full, original commentary on the Creed in which he notes that one of the apostles' main intents for writing the Creed was for "future preaching . . . [and to be] handed out as standard teaching to converts."[75] He also acknowledges that there are some variations of the Creed circulating among the various churches, some without the phrase "descended into hell." Tyrannius comments, however, that "the fact that He descended to hell is unmistakeabl[e]"; he cites scriptures confirming the idea[76] and affirms that Christ descended for the purpose of preaching to and redeeming the souls in hell.[77]

Many other church authorities confirm the doctrine of the Creed that Christ descended into hell. Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315–86) affirms that Christ "descended . . . beneath the earth, that from

thence also He might redeem the just."[78] Ambrose (d. 397) wrote that the "substance" of Christ visited the underworld to "set free the souls of the dead, to loose the bonds of death," and to "remit sins."[79] Cyril of Alexandria (ca. 370–444) taught of the descent and of its saving benefits to the departed as "the fullest of all proofs of Christ's love for mankind."[80] In a letter written to a Spanish bishop, Turibius, in 447, Pope Leo the Great affirms the descent.[81] Though the idea was noticeably absent in the Council of Nicaea in 325,[82] the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Council of AD 381 denounced any who did not affirm the descent,[83] the fourth Council of Toledo in AD 633 made it a point to insert language describing the descent into their writings,[84] and the phrase became a part of the universally accepted version of the Apostles' Creed in the eighth century.[85] Later, the Council of Sens (AD 1140), supported by Pope Innocent II, condemned an error that had begun to creep into the church and was attributed to Peter Abelard, namely that "the soul of Christ per se did not descend to those who are below [*ad inferos*], but only by means of power."[86] Of special interest to Latter-day Saints, many leaders of the early Christian church professed a belief in a descent into hell by quoting scriptures that have since been lost.[87] The harrowing also appears as the subject of popular art and literature, including the great *Divine Comedy*. Georgia Frank traces the harrowing of hell from its earliest appearances in the New Testament, to "numerous sermons and legends in late antiquity," and to its survival "well into the Middle Ages."[88] It is also mentioned, though sparsely, in the writings of various Catholic scholars as late as the thirteenth century.[89] Rather than Christ's rescue of the imprisoned dead being an aberration in Christian thought, both its antiquity and longevity show it to be a normative Christian belief.

## Rejection of the Harrowing of Hell by Augustine, Aquinas, and the Reformers

The ideas and implications of the harrowing did not endure in good favor for everyone within Christianity. The writings of Augustine of Hippo in the fourth and fifth century vigorously reject any idea of a posthumous salvation,[90] despite his being fully aware of the popularity of the doctrine for lay people as well as for prominent writers[91] and despite his

Saint Augustine, ascribed to Jan van Scorel. Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

own unequivocal acceptance of Christ's descent into hell.[92] For Augustine, the passages in 1 Peter made no reference to hades. He took the phrase "in the days of Noah" to mean just that: the spirit of Christ preached to the disobedient antediluvians before the flood. Augustine further extended the metaphor to mean that any disobedient spirits "in prison" simply referred to being "in the darkness of ignorance."[93] They had not physically died, but were, rather, spiritually dead.[94]

Augustine strived to explain away this particular doctrine for at least three principal reasons. First, he felt it would undermine the authority generally of the church in this life. Second, he thought that "another" chance was unnecessary, for no one who had died since the resurrection had any excuse for not learning of and accepting Christ.[95] And third, he felt it would defeat the purpose of missionary work in mortality, concluding that "then the gospel ought not to be preached here, since all will certainly die."[96]

Interestingly, Augustine struggled with the idea of a posthumous rescue. For example, he interprets Matthew 5:25–26—about coming to terms with one's accuser quickly "lest . . . thou be cast into prison"—as a metaphor for the final judgment, but he is "troubled" by the phrase "till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing."[97] Could someone escape from an eternal prison? Augustine would like to say no, and so he tentatively tries to reinterpret the length of punishment by applying the use of

John Calvin. Bridgeman-Giraudon / Art Resource, NY.

the word *until* in Psalm 110:1 to the same word in Matthew, but ultimately concedes that "it is better to escape [the possibility of being sent to eternal punishment] than to learn its nature."[98] Indeed, any serious delving into the possibility of a temporary hell approaches heresy for Augustine, for "if mercy leads us to believe that the punishment of the wicked will come to an end, what are we to believe concerning the reward of the just, when in each case eternity is mentioned in the same passage?"[99] Privately, Augustine wished that holy writ did not even mention a descent into hell.[100]

Although Thomas Aquinas believed that Christ descended to hell, he concluded that it served no salvific purpose. Evangelizing has no effect in hell since repentance is no longer possible after death, and repentance is impossible because individuals' characters become set at death—the righteous will forever remain righteous, and the unrighteous will forever remain unrighteous.[101] Although Aquinas taught that repentance is not possible after death, he affirmed that in mortality all people can believe and be saved. Nevertheless the beliefs necessary for salvation differ, depending on the times, places, and conditions in which people live. For example, an acceptance of the Trinity is required of those who live after the time of Jesus.[102] So, although Aquinas and Augustine differed as to whether Christ descended to hell, they agreed that evangelizing and thus repentance did not exist after death.

Under Augustine's influence,[103] Protestant Reformers also denied Christ's descent to hell. John Calvin, for example, completely rejects any notion of Christ visiting hell to save anyone. For Calvin, the idea of a "descent into hell" is simply a reference to the intense suffering that Christ endured on the cross. Calvin explains it away, much like Augustine, into metaphor by referring to Isaiah's prophecy of Christ's sufferings in chapter 53: "There is nothing strange in its being said that he descended to hell, seeing he endured the death which is inflicted on the wicked by an angry God."[104] He calls any objections to that explanation (specifically, the question as to why the Creed mentions Christ visiting hell *after* his burial when his suffering *preceded* it) mere "trifling" and dismisses the popular idea that Christ literally visited hell to save souls as "nothing but a fable" and "childish."[105] The Church of the Palatinate as well as the catechism of Geneva took a similar view.[106]

Martin Luther was just as firm in closing the door on the possibility of salvation after death. He denied "the existence of a purgatory and of a Limbo of the Fathers in which they say that there is hope and a sure expectation of liberation. . . . These are figments of some stupid and bungling sophist."[107] Luther also interprets 1 Peter metaphorically, taking the "spirits in prison" to mean those in mortality who do not respond to the gospel message.[108] In the aftermath of the Reformation, Christ's descent into hell would be reduced to an obscure minority view, with but few witnesses to the once-ubiquitous doctrine.[109]

One might understand why religious leaders would want to squelch the notion of repentance after death: congregants can live immorally now and convert later. Thus, Augustine and others would declare that only this life determines our status in the next.[110] How do Mormons respond to this problem since we affirm repentance after death?

Martin Luther, by Lucas Cranach the Elder. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

We address this issue in a subsequent paper wherein we set out the latter-day restoration of postmortem evangelization. A further complication for religious leaders who believe in repentance after death is the implication that "the theory of postmortem evangelism takes the wind out of the sails of missions."[111] As one researcher surmises, the acceptance of postmortem salvation would "weaken the appeal of the Christian preachers to the terrors of the Lord, and . . . make the condition of the heathen preferable to that of Christians. It would involve, *e.g.*, the possibility of salvation without baptism, without the knowledge of what Christ had done, and this would clash with the dogma which Augustine [and others] maintained so tenaciously."[112] However, although denying posthumous repentance restored urgency to evangelism, it did so at the cost of exacerbating the soteriological problem of evil. It was "common for ministers such as Augustine and Calvin to speak of the *massa damnata* as though it pained God not at all to damn anyone."[113] Sadly, some view God as so powerful and emotionally detached that, as one British philosopher points out, "for God a billion rational creatures are as dust in the balance; if a billion perish, God suffers no loss."[114]

Additionally, the Reformers' rejection of Christ's harrowing comes not from one belief but from a package of theological commitments. It would be nearly impossible to teach the doctrine of predestination if people had an opportunity to progress after death.[115] Furthermore, they "looked on the popular belief as traditional, not scriptural, they wished to wrest out of the hands of their opponents a belief which seemed to them to give some support to the Romish theory of purgatory, and to the practices which grew out of it."[116]

## Divine Perseverance and Other Contemporary Views

Despite Christianity's well-nigh universal rejection of the harrowing and its implications, the idea that salvation is possible for mankind even after death can still be found among a few contemporary theologians. Most notably, Gabriel Fackre, Abbot Professor of Christian Theology, Emeritus, at Andover Newton Theological School, supports a view he calls "divine perseverance," or the idea that "those who die unevangelized receive an opportunity for salvation after death. God condemns no one without first seeing what his or her response to Christ is."[117] He resolutely defends this position, which is strikingly congruent with the Latter-day Saint notion of postmortem evangelism, in his coauthored book *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized.*

In the book, Fackre defends his view against two competing contemporary theologies: *restrictivism* espoused by Ronald H. Nash and *inclusivism* championed by John Sanders. *Restrictivism* affirms that salvation requires that one accept Christ before death.[118] *Inclusivism* proposes that some may be saved who did not know about Christ's atonement, provided they respond in faith to the general revelation of God's goodness that he gives to all of his children in some measure.[119]

Fackre begins by explaining that his view follows directly from what we know of God's attributes, "that the power of God is, mysteriously, the way of the cross, the 'weakness of God.' The ultimate power is not machismo but the divine

vulnerability. . . . God's love is *patient* and *persistent*. It outlasts us. It is a 'weakness' that is stronger than our rebellion. God's weakness is a powerful powerlessness, a victorious vulnerability."[120] In other words, Fackre emphasizes that we do not truly know the goodness of God or his love for us.[121] Fackre's argument sketches an appealing model of God. God's love is so great, so far beyond our mortal comprehension, that God eternally "persists" in his attempt to gather his children. Indeed, what else could we expect from a being who possesses infinite love? Surely he does not draw a temporal "line" of love in eternity. Thus, because divine love endures, God will always persist in his evangelistic efforts until he gathers everyone. Fackre believes that this also follows from the justice of God. Since we are not accountable (condemned) for knowledge we do not have,[122] everyone will have the opportunity in this life or the next to hear the good news.[123]

A second tier of Fackre's argument is based upon God's sovereignty. He states emphatically that "Christ can 'do all things.' No limits can be set to the triune God, except self-chosen limits."[124] In an effort to reach lost souls, Christ uses his power "to breach the very walls of death to make a 'proclamation to the spirits in prison' (v. 19 [of 1 Peter 3]). Christ's implacable power and love will persist to and through the final barrier of death. Even this last enemy is not strong enough to prevent the declaration of the Word."[125] Damnation, then, is not a failure on God's part but a failure of the individual.

To prepare us to accept Christ's gospel, Fackre believes that God enlightens humankind (like the LDS notion of the "light of Christ"). In Noah's day, God established the Noahic covenant, or the rainbow promise: "In Judaism, the rainbow promise has reference to the light given to those outside God's special saving covenant with the Jewish people. That is, God will judge human beings . . . by the response they make to the universal hints of what is true and good and holy given from Noah's time on."[126] And from Christ on "God gives to 'all flesh' an awareness of basic moral and spiritual standards and expectations."[127]

Finally, Fackre rests his case for postmortem evangelization upon the very same elements within the doctrine of the harrowing found in 1 Peter and the Apostles' Creed that have been previously discussed. Christ's preaching to and releasing souls from hell, he claims, is further evidence of God's love and divine perseverance.[128] For these reasons, Fackre asserts that "Christ came to rescue us from the death that is 'the wages of sin'" and that this "stunning offer is made to 'everyone who believes,'"[129] regardless of when a person receives that opportunity. Another assertion is equally stirring, stating that "divine perseverance will not deny the saving Word to any, and will contest all the makers of boundaries, including the final boundary [death]."[130]

With Fackre, the celebrated Anglican theologian Frederic W. Farrar similarly emphasizes the love of God and how the soteriological problem of evil conflicts with this. He also observes the teachings of 1 Peter 4:6 and observes this poignancy: "Every effort has been made to explain away the plain meaning of this passage. It is one of the most precious passages of Scripture, and it involves no ambiguity. . . . For if language have any meaning, this language means that Christ, when His Spirit descended into the lower world, proclaimed the message of salvation to the once impenitent dead."[131]

Besides Fackre, many others have answered the question, What about those who have never heard the gospel? Both Thomas Aquinas and Norman Geisler believe that the message of the gospel will be sent to anyone who responds positively to the light they receive from God. Luis de Molina's *middle knowledge* view maintains that God, because he knows how anyone would respond in any situation, may save those who would have believed in his Son had they heard his message. The Roman Catholic *final option* theory affirms that Christ "encounters all people at the moment they are dying," giving everyone the opportunity in this life to accept or reject him. Others maintain an optimistic *universalism* that God will save the vast majority (some say absolutely all) of his children, though the method is less important than this result. *Pluralism* maintains that all religions are valid ways of obtaining salvation. And finally, others hold that the Bible does not support a conclusion in any form.[132]

## Conclusion

God "sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). The doctrine of the harrowing of hell explains how this can be despite

the fact that so many have died without hearing the Son's message of salvation. This doctrine was present in apocalyptic Judaism and in apocalyptic Christianity, and Christ taught the doctrine to his disciples. It was also confirmed by the church fathers and in the Apostles' Creed. Subsequently, it was rejected first by Augustine and later by Reformers such as Calvin and Luther, This led, regrettably, to its almost universal disappearance from the teachings of modern-day Christendom.

In a sequel to this paper, we will describe the restoration of the doctrine in the vibrant revelations of Joseph Smith and Joseph F. Smith and its further elaboration in Mormon datum discourse. These latter-day revelations and teachings disclose once again how Christ reopened the gates of hell to "let the prisoners go free," thus once again resolving the soteriological problem of evil. ■

**Notes**

1. David L. Paulsen is a professor and Roger D. Cook an adjunct instructor, both in the Department of Philosophy at Brigham Young University. Kendel J. Christensen is a BYU undergraduate majoring in sociology with a minor in philosophy. BYU undergraduates Michael Hansen (philosophy), David Lassetter (English), and, especially, Zachary Elison (philosophy), and Aaron Tress (philosophy) have each made valuable contributions to both form and content. Shirley Ricks (Maxwell Institute) and Laura Rawlins (director of BYU Faculty Editing Service) have skillfully edited the document. The authors gratefully acknowledge the generous funding for the project provided by the BYU College of Humanities and Department of Philosophy.
2. Thomas V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 174–75. For more on this topic, see David L. Paulsen and Brent Alvord, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of the Unevangelized," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 171–204.
3. The list includes Tertullian, Augustine, Philip Melanchthon, Blaise Pascal, John Calvin, and others. See John Sanders, *No Other Name* (1992; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 74–79. Representative statements from Augustine and Calvin illustrate the point: "Many more are left under punishment than are delivered from it, in order that it may thus be shown what was due to all." Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950), 783. Calvin asserted grimly and simply that "the vast majority of mankind will be lost." F. W. Farrar, *Mercy and Judgment* (London: MacMillan, 1894), 58.
4. Charles Darwin remarked, "I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine." *Autobiography* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958), 87.
5. For an excellent exposition on the loss of the baptismal ordinance for the dead, see Hugh Nibley's "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 100–167. Our discussion here draws on Nibley's work but focuses more on the history of the belief in Christ's visit to hell, the work he was believed to have accomplished there, and its implications for the soteriological problem of evil. In a subsequent article, we will examine the scholarly work on baptism for the dead that has been published since Nibley's piece.
6. One meaning of the term *harrowing* is "to break up land by pulling a harrow over it." It is this imagery, Christ's "breaking up" and delivering souls from hell, that is evoked by the term in this context; see *Encarta World English Dictionary*, s.v. "Harrow." CD-ROM (Microsoft Corporation, 2000).
7. Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 9–72; Christopher Rowland, *Christian Origins: An Account of the Setting and Character of the Most Important Messianic Sect of Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1985), 56–64; Matt Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 7–80, 119–256; Adam H. Becker and Annette Y. Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 1–158; Oskar Skarsaune and Reidar Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 3–416; John J. Collins, *Apocalypticism in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Routledge, 1997), 1–162; James C. Vanderkam and William Adler, eds., *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 1–100, 129–38; John J. Collins, *Seers, Sibyls and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism* (Boston: Brill Academic, 2001), 3–127, 261–383; John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–255; James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 47–69.
8. Adler points out the scholarly consensus that "primitive Christianity" not only preserved the apocalyptic Jewish texts but also that the movement "took root on the same soil that produced the Jewish apocalyptic literature"; see *Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage*, 2. In *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, Collins states that "Apocalyptic ideas undeniably play an important role in the early stages of Christianity" (1; see 256–79).
9. *1 Enoch* 1:4; 14:8–21; 46:1; 60:2; 71:5–10, 13; *2 Enoch* 22:1–7; 24:1–5; 25:4; 39:5; 44:1–2; *Life of Adam and Eve* 12:1–15:3 (*Vita*); *Life of Adam and Eve* 22:1–25:1; 33:1–5 (*Apocalypse*); *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 6:11–15; Daniel 7:9–10; Revelation 4:2–5, 7; 11:19; 21:3–4. All texts from *1 Enoch* in this paper are taken from George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. Vanderkam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004). Other pseudepigraphic texts (e.g., *4 Ezra*) are taken from James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983, 1985).
10. *1 Enoch* 41:9; 84:2–3; *2 Enoch* 47:3–6; 53:3; 66:1–4; Matthew 10:29.
11. *1 Enoch* 47:1–4; 61:13; 63:1–8; *2 Enoch* 8:1–10:6; Daniel 12:2–4; 1 John 3:1–10; 4:7–16; Revelation 3:14–22; 11:16–18.
12. See also *1 Enoch* 54:6; 63:10; 90:26–27; 103:5–8.
13. Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 26–28, 33–35, 69–97; Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 134–40.
14. Gloria Frank contrasts and compares the "graphic punishments" of the dead generally found in apocalyptic works (such as *4 Ezra* and *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, both quoted below) with apocalyptic Christian texts associated with Christ's release of Sheol's captives: "Unlike apocalypses with graphic punishments of the wicked dead, the dead whom Jesus visits endure no bodily torment. Instead, their suffering is temporal in nature: the misfortune of having lived before the coming of Christ into the world. And so these righteous ones remain captive in hell's dark abode until their liberation

by Christ, less punished than detained." "Christ's Descent to the Underworld in Ancient Ritual and Legend," in *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, ed. Robert J. Daly (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 212. Even the thirst of the rich man in Luke 16:19–26 is not so much active punishment as it is a result of confinement. Frank seems correct in this claim. Sheol for apocalyptic Christians is confinement as all await final judgment.

15. See, for example, *2 Enoch* 8:1–10:6; *4 Ezra* 2:35–48; 7:36; *2 Baruch* 51:1–16.
16. In writing about this transformation where the faces of the righteous shine like the sun, Segal implies that this is a change to the angelic life: "The faces of the abstinent are said to shine above the stars, confirming that the ascetic life leads to the angelic life, that cleanliness is next to godliness"; see *Life after Death*, 494. Additionally, Alan F. Segal in *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 30–72, explains that both apocalyptic Judaism and apocalyptic Christianity affirm that God will transform the bodies of the righteous so that they take on an angelic nature. Segal argues that Paul believed that the resurrected bodies of believers will mirror that of the resurrected Christ. Other Jewish apocalyptic texts detail the brilliant light and the associated exaltation that the exalted righteous will have in the hereafter: Daniel 12:3; *2 Baruch* 51:1–10; *1 Enoch* 104:2–4; *2 Enoch* 22:6–10; *Ascension of Isaiah* 7:25; 8:10–15; 9:6–10; 1Q28 IV.
17. The animal symbolism in *Enoch's Dream Visions* 90:1–36 puts in place a hierarchy of humanlike beings that range from the holy to the profane. The holy angels of heaven are portrayed as *men*, while the slightly less holy prophets, Jewish leaders, and the exalted righteous are portrayed as *white sheep*. The Jewish population in general is described as *sheep*, but they are promoted to the status of white sheep after the judgment and resurrection. The unholy Gentiles are portrayed as *animals of the earth* and *birds*, but in the hereafter they become *white cattle*, a level of holiness less than that of the exalted white sheep. Fully unclean are the evil kings and rulers of the earth, portrayed as *dogs*, *eagles*, *vultures*, *kites*, and *ravens*—animals seen as unclean in the Jewish tradition.
18. A full narrative of the more dramatic events of the harrowing was written by early Christians in the Gospel of Nicodemus. The full text can be found at www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelnicodemus.html (accessed 8 March 2010).
19. As one researcher comments, "This doctrine means symbolically that either in this life or in the life beyond death all men are offered the gospel of the truth and the love of God." William Barclay, *The Apostles' Creed for Everyman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 132.
20. The authorship of Ephesians is debated by some contemporary scholars who attribute it to an unknown apocalyptic Christian of the late first century who is a disciple of Paul. Regardless of its authorship, the text shows that salvation for the dead was a major concern of Christians in the first century. In the Word Biblical Commentary on Ephesians, Andrew T. Lincoln gives an informative survey of this debate. Relevant to this paper, Lincoln explains that "our implied author, 'Paul,' emerges as a Jewish Christian" (lxi). The identity of the author, however, remains uncertain: "In all probability, it is submitted, a later follower of Paul writing in his name is responsible for the portrait of Paul that can be constructed from the letter by the reader and for its other features," says Lincoln; "for what it is worth, this is now the consensus view in NT scholarship, though a sizable minority continues to uphold Pauline authorship" (lxii). Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), lix–lxxiii. Markus Barth confirms the heritage of the writer, who "reveals by his thorough acquaintance with Israel's Bible and with Philonic, rabbinical, apocalyptic or Qumranite methods of Scripture interpretation that he was a Jewish Christian." Barth, *Ephesians 1–3*, in *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 40.
21. This reading of Ephesians 4:8–10 as referring to Christ's descent to hell is a common one; see Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4–6*, in *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 433 n. 45; and Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 244, for a selection of eminent commentators who have given it this interpretation. But see Barth, *Ephesians*, 433–34; and Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 244–48, who favor alternate readings.
22. In "Christ's Descent to the Underworld," Frank states that Ephesians 4:9 and a more obscure reference in Romans 10:7—"Who will descend into the abyss? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)"—allude to "Christ's underworld sojourn" (215). She therefore traces the earliest reference to Christ's descent to an undisputed letter of Paul and claims that "the idea was picked up by later Pauline communities" (215).
23. The authorship of 1 Peter is also disputed, with many contemporary scholars ascribing it to a disciple of Peter in the late first century. Similar to Ephesians above, even if a late first-century date is accepted, the text shows major soteriological concerns regarding the dead. In the Word Biblical Commentary, J. Ramsey Michaels writes regarding 1 Peter: "The clear impression is that the readers of the epistle are Jewish Christians" (xlv). He also explains that the epistle can be considered apocalyptic in a "limited sense" due to its status as a Diaspora letter to Israel (xlix). Michaels ultimately holds that "the discussion of the authorship of 1 Peter is a futile discussion if its purpose is anything approaching absolute certainty" (lxii). Michaels, *1 Peter* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988), xxxi–lxxiv.
24. The *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* 6:15 explains that the spirits of all mankind are "in the abyss and Hades, the one in which all of the souls are imprisoned from the end of the Flood, which came upon the earth, until this day." In 1 Peter 3:18–21, the descent of Christ to preach to the captive spirits is linked with baptism: "But again Peter's association of baptism with the Descent and the preaching to the spirits should be noted because the linking of these two ideas may constitute a cryptic reference to the offering of baptism to the dead, and even to vicarious work for the dead." M. Catherine Thomas, "Visions of Christ in the Spirit World and the Dead Redeemed," in *The New Testament and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. John K. Carmack (Orem, UT: Randall Book, 1987), 304–6. Frank writes that Christ "journeyed to hell during the interlude between his death and resurrection. There the Savior preached to the dead, baptized them, defeated Death, and liberated the just, including Adam and the patriarchs" (211). She, quoting 1 Peter 3:19, additionally argues that 1 Peter offers the "purpose for the journey. . . . Christ 'went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison.'" Frank, "Christ's Descent to the Underworld," 215.
25. All 1 Peter citations in this paper are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).
26. 1 Peter 1:5; 2:9; 5:1, 4–6. See Stephen Finlan, "Can We Speak of *Theosis* in Paul?" in *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*, ed. Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 68–80.
27. The texts now called the Pseudepigrapha, including *1 Enoch* and the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, are the primary sources for understanding apocalyptic Judaism. The first Christians were fully immersed in the apocalyptic Jewish tradition, with the New Testament *Epistle of Jude* (14–15) even quoting a passage from the *Book of the Watchers* (1:9), showing the immediate connection early Christians had with other apocalyptic Jews. Interestingly, the Pseudepigrapha and other Hellenistic Jewish texts were preserved by Christians, rather than by the Rabbinic Judaism that emerged from the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70) and the Bar Kochba

war (AD 132–35). But this should come as no surprise, for first- and second-century AD apocalyptic Christians continued to think of themselves as the true path *within* Judaism, rather than as a completely new religious tradition, while Rabbinic Jews, descendants of Pharisaic Judaism, divorced themselves from the apocalyptic tradition entirely. See Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 1–255. Stephen Robinson has objected to the way apocryphal sources are sometimes used. He asserts that we ought not to use these texts as proof that LDS doctrines are true, but we may use them as evidence of what early Christians believed. He writes: "The apocrypha *do* often prove that ideas peculiar to the Latter-day Saints in modern times were widely known and widely believed anciently, but this is not the same as proving that the ideas themselves are true, or that those who believed them were right in doing so, or that they would have had anything else in common with the Latter-day Saints." "Lying for God: The Uses of Apocrypha," in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1986), 133–54, 148. It is in this sense that we use these texts.

28. "And a spirit took me and brought me up into the fifth heaven. And I saw angels who are called 'lords,' and the diadem was set upon them in the Holy Spirit, and the throne of each of them was sevenfold more (brilliant) than the light of the rising sun. (And they were) dwelling in the temples of salvation and singing hymns to the ineffable most high God." *Apocalypse of Zephaniah* A, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 508.
29. See Romans 9:18. The apocryphal book 2 Maccabees, written in the late second to early first centuries BC, records the prayers of Judas Maccabee and his army on behalf of Jews who died in idolatry, as well as his collecting two thousand drachmas to be delivered to the temple as an atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from sin (see 12:39–45 NRSV). In addition, the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus* contains a section entitled "Christ's Descent into Hell." The text gives a third-century AD interpretation of the period of time allowed for the dead of Christ's day to repent, and it places John the Baptist in hades preaching repentance to its captives: "[Christ] sent me to you, to preach that the only begotten Son of God comes here, in order that whoever believes in him should be saved, and whoever does not believe in him should be condemned. Therefore I say to you all that when you see him, all of you worship him. For now only have you opportunity for repentance because you worshipped idols in the vain world above and sinned. At any other time this is impossible." James K. Elliot, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 186.
30. See also the claim of *1 Enoch* 51:1 that "Sheol will restore what it has received."
31. Revelation 2:7, 10, 17, 26–28; 3:4–5, 9–12, 20–21; 4:4; 5:8; 7:3, 9; 14:1; 20:4.
32. The *Odes of Solomon* has, sadly, received scant attention from Near Eastern scholars. However, a recently published critical edition of the Odes is Michael Lattke, *The Odes of Solomon* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009). This hopefully will begin to remedy the neglect. See pages 1–14 for the provenance and likely dates for the text.
33. See also Odes 28:10 and 29:4. The translation of the *Odes of Solomon* that we use is from James H. Charlesworth, trans., *Odes of Solomon,* in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1985).
34. That the harrowing of hell and vicarious baptism are tied together is nothing new to Christianity. Richard E. DeMaris, "Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:29): Insights from Archaeology and Anthropology," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114/4 (1995): 672. John Tvedtnes shows that "though most Christians stopped baptizing for the dead in the early centuries after Christ, documentary evidence makes it clear that the practice was known in various parts of the Mediterranean world." John Tvedtnes, "Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity," in *The Temple in Time and Eternity* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 72. Scriptural evidence for the practice is 1 Corinthians 15:29, and Michael Hull writes that modern scholarship acknowledges its historicity: "With reference to our verse, the designation 'vicarious baptism' is simple: living persons . . . were baptized in the place of dead unbaptized persons. The *raison d'être* for this seemingly aberrant custom? To secure the (presumed) benefits of baptism for those who died without baptism. Since it is widely held that 'none of the attempts to escape a theory of vicarious baptism in primitive Christianity seems to be wholly successful,' the vast majority of exegetes and commentators hold that 15:29 is a reference to some form of vicarious baptism—even those who reject such a reading acknowledge its preponderance—and it is aptly labeled the 'majority reading.'" Michael F. Hull, *Baptism on Account of the Dead (1 Cor 15:29): An Act of Faith in the Resurrection* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 10–11. As part of the scholarly consensus, one work explains, "The normal reading of the text is that some Corinthians are being baptized, apparently vicariously, in behalf of some people who have already died. It would be fair to add that this reading is such a plain understanding of the Greek text that no one would ever have imagined the various alternatives were it not for the difficulties involved." Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 763–64. The *New International Commentary on the New Testament* is of the same opinion: "The objection that the apostle could not have meant anything like a baptism for the benefit of others is exegetically out of place." Frederik W. Grosheide, "Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 372. And in his master's thesis on the topic, John Pryce-Davies writes, "All interpretations which seek to evade vicarious baptism for the dead are misleading," in "Theological Significances of 1 Corinthians 15:29 in the Life of the Christian Community" (RHD thesis, Griffith University, 2005), 123, quoting Albrecht Oepke, "Βάπτω," in *A Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:542.
35. See the arguments on Odes 42:17 and 42:20 (below) for further evidence that Ode 17:9 refers to vicarious baptism for the dead. The Odist further refers to the inhabitants of Sheol waiting for Christ's death and his escape from it, with the understanding that his escape will open the way for the escape of all: "And the chasms were opened and closed; and they were seeking the Lord as those who are about to give birth; . . . and the end of their labor was life" (Ode 24:5, 8; see also 31:1).
36. See *1 Enoch* 102:4–103:4.
37. Luke 16:19–26 speaks of an impassable chasm that separates the righteous dead from the disobedient in hades. The rich man who was wicked in life wishes for Lazarus to cool his tongue with water, to temper his torment for a moment, but he is told that "they which would pass from hence to you cannot" (v. 26). Note that both of the departed are thought to retain a kind of material embodiment despite the fact that they are spirits.
38. The Odist's worldview holds that a soul will first depart the body's furthest extremity, the feet, exiting the head only at the final point of death. Death's release of Christ follows the same pattern.
39. See Odes 10:1, 6; 11:13, 19; 15:2; 21:3; 36:3.
40. See Odes 11:3; 33:8; 39:7; John 14:6; Acts 9:2; 24:14.
41. See Odes 19:5; Luke 20:36; 1 Corinthians 6:3; Ephesians 2:6, 20–21; Hebrews 1:14; Revelation 4:4.

42. See Odes 3:7; 11:16–19, 23; 17:1, 4; 20:1, 7–9; 29:8; 31:4; 33:12–13; 38:17–19; 39:7–8; 41:4, 6.
43. T. W. Manson lists Galatians 4:6–7; Romans 8:15–16; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; 1 John 5:7–8 as passages relating to the chrism, with 1 John 5:7 linking chrism with baptism; see Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 165, but 1 John 2:20 should also be added to his list.
44. Ezekiel 9:4–6 is the source of the Christian chrism: "'Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of those who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it.' To the others he said in my hearing, 'Pass through the city after him, and kill; . . . but touch no one who has the mark" (NRSV). The Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*, an apocalyptic Christian text of the second century AD, elaborates on the chrism, explaining the heavenly nature of the rite: "But He is called *Christ* by a certain excellent rite of religion; . . . Although indeed He was the Son of God, and the beginning of all things, He became man; Him first God anointed with oil which was taken from the wood of the tree of life: from that anointing therefore He is called *Christ*. Thence, moreover, He Himself also, according to the appointment of His Father, anoints with similar oil every one of the pious when they come to His kingdom, for their refreshment after their labours, as having got over the difficulties of the way; so that their light may shine, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, they may be endowed with immortality." *Recognitions of Clement* 1.45, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 8:89. Compare the first-century AD *2 Enoch*, where an anointing with heavenly oil transforms Enoch into a brilliantly shining angelic being and which recounts Enoch's eventual exaltation to God's left hand (22:8–10; 24:1–2).
45. The book of Revelation explains that those who conquer will personally receive the chrism from Christ: "I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name" (3:12 NRSV).
46. In a clear reference to a premortal existence, the Odist indicates that God knew those who would be faithful and placed the chrism on their faces: "And he who created me when yet I was not knew what I would do when I came into being" (Ode 7:9); "and before they had existed I recognized them; and imprinted a seal on their faces" (8:13).
47. Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 163–74; Edward C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 3rd ed., rev. and exp. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), xvi, 9, 14, 23–62; Alastair H. B. Logan, "The Mystery of the Five Seals: Gnostic Initiation Reconsidered," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51/2 (May 1997): 193–99.
48. Gabriele Winkler, "The Original Meaning of the Prebaptismal Anointing and Its Implications," *Worship* 52 (1978): 36.
49. Helmut Koester, *From Jesus to the Gospels: Interpreting the New Testament in Its Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 149; and Montague R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, ed. J. K. Elliott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 556, cites Carl Schmidt as reporting a second-century date of composition. Speaking of the harrowing of hell, Hugh Nibley wrote: "The central theme [of the forty-day ministry] is the Descensus, a mission to the spirits below closely resembling the Lord's earthly calling. He brings the *kerygma* [proclamation of salvation through Christ] to all, and those who accept it follow him out of the depths into the light, receive baptism, and hence mount up by degrees to realms of glory." "*Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum*: The Forty-day Mission of Christ—The Forgotten Heritage," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 16.
50. The text here is taken from James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 570–73; see vv. 21 and 27.
51. See *Gospel of Bartholomew*, vv. 9, 11, 13, and 20 in James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 656–57.
52. James, *Apocryphal New Testament*, 669.
53. Jeffrey Trumbower, in *Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), also cites this as evidence for early Christians baptizing on behalf of the dead. He further elaborates, saying that "we should not be surprised at the appearance of these traditions, since Christianity was a new religious expression embedded in a culture where the boundaries between the living and the dead were often quite permeable" (see pp. 33–34). William Wall (1647–1728), a British priest in the Church of England who wrote extensively about infant baptism, held the Shepherd of Hermas in high regard but seemed perplexed by the idea of baptism for the dead within it. Writing about the section of the text from which the above passage is quoted, he says: "The Passage itself, which represents the Patriarchs and Prophets of the Old Testament to stand in need of Baptism, and of the Apostles preaching the Name of Christ to them after they were dead, before they could be capable of entering the Kingdom of God, does indeed seem strange to us, and is the oddest Passage in all the book; . . . yet *Clemens Alexandrinus*, who liv'd about one hundred years after this Book was written, cites this Passage, and takes it for real matter of fact. And those texts, 1 Pet. 3. 19; and 4. 6, which speak of *the Gospel being preached to them that were dead*, though they be now by most Protestants understood in another sense, were by most of the ancients understood in a Sense like to this." *The History of Infant Baptism* (London: Rivington, 1705), 1:5:52–53. "This Passage does also lead one to think anew of Paul's mentioning a Practice of some Men in those times being *baptized for the dead*. A thing that has never yet been agreed on in what sense it is to be understood" (ibid., 53). "Whether these were true Visions, or only the author's Sense given under such a Representation, still the Scope of the place is to represent the Necessity of Water-Baptism to Salvation, or to Entrance into the Kingdom of God, in the Opinion of the then Christians, *i.e.* the Christians of the Apostles times. Since even they that were dead before the Institution of Baptism in the Name of Christ, are in way of Vision represented as incapable of the Kingdom of God without it" (ibid., 54). Helmut Koester has written that the Shepherd of Hermas, at specifically *Similitudes* 9.16.5, "speaks about the descent to Hades of the apostles and teachers for the preaching and baptism of the dead." *Introduction to the New Testament: History and Literature of Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 2:258. Carolyn Osiek also supports this view: "The absolute necessity of baptism is implicit here, and these verses, without saying so, present a good argument in favor of baptism in the name of the dead, apparently already an act of piety in first-century Corinth [see 1 Corinthians 15:29]. . . . This is a version of the tradition of the 'harrowing of hell,' usually said to be performed by Christ during the period of his burial. Here, the apostles and teachers are sent to be the agents by which this soteriological mission is accomplished. . . . Whereas for the living, the problem has been to get the baptized to take on the life of virtue, here with the pre-Christian dead, the problem is the opposite: they practiced virtue in their lives, but had not received baptism. Through the apostles and teachers, this problem is solved." Helmut Koester, ed., *Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 238.
54. Trumbower, *Rescue*, 38.
55. Trumbower, *Rescue*, 36. Though, in these examples, Trumbower points out the dead beneficiaries had to have shown a desire to be baptized before the Marcionites would consider performing it.
56. James Orr, "The Apostles' Creed: The Oldest Creed," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1960), 1:204.

57. Heidi J. Hornik and Mikeal C. Parsons, "The Harrowing of Hell," *Bible Review* 19/3 (2003): 19. The tradition of the harrowing remains alive in Eastern Orthodoxy with its "preservation of certain opportunities for the dead in the next world." Russian Eastern Orthodox scholar Sergey Antonenko, quoted in Marvin R. VanDam, "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Ukraine," *Meridian Magazine*, ldsmag.com/ancients/080227ancient.html (accessed 16 March 2010). The Catechetical Sermon of John Chrysostom, which specifically mentions the harrowing, is also read every year during the Orthodox Pascha (Easter) services. See Orthodox Church of America. www.oca.org/FSsermons-details.asp?SID=4&ID=10 (accessed 16 March 2010).
58. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Chicago: Loyola, 1994), 49–50. "The creeds that do not explicitly mention the Descent into hell may be divided into two groups based on the different formulations of the Resurrection article. In both we will find that Christ's descent is implicit in the profession of His resurrection." See Alyssa Lyra Pitstick, *Light in Darkness: Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Catholic Doctrine of Christ's Descent into Hell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 10–11.
59. Gardiner M. Day, *The Apostles' Creed: An Interpretation for Today* (New York: Scribner, 1963), 81.
60. Hornik and Parsons, "Harrowing of Hell," 20.
61. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 14. For a critique of her work, see Paul J. Griffiths, "Is There a Doctrine of the Descent into Hell?" *Pro Ecclesia* 17/3 (2008): 257–68.
62. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 15–16.
63. See "The Catechism of the Catholic Church," quoted in Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 16.
64. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 16.
65. Orr, "Apostles' Creed," 1:204.
66. Arthur McGiffert, *The Apostles' Creed: Its Origin, Its Purpose, and Its Historical Interpretation* (New York: Scribner, 1902), 9.
67. McGiffert, *Apostles' Creed*, 9–10.
68. John A. MacCulloch, *The Harrowing of Hell: A Comparative Study of an Early Christian Doctrine* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1930), 45.
69. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 88. Irenaeus references Matthew 22:40; Ephesians 4:9; and Psalm 86:13 as justification of this view.
70. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 91.
71. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 6.6, in *Patrologiae Graeca* (*PG*) 9:272.
72. *Stromata* 6.6, in *PG* 9:268, quoted in Nibley, "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times," 102, 118.
73. Origen, *Contra Celsus* 2.43, trans. Henry Chadwick (London: Cambridge, 1953).
74. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 105.
75. Tyrannius Rufinus, *Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, trans. J. N. D. Kelly (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1955), 29–30.
76. Namely Psalms 16:10; 30:3, 9; 69:2; Luke 7:20; and 1 Peter 3:18–20. See Rufinus, *Commentary*, 61. He also states that, even in the versions that omit the phrase, the meaning of the descent is contained "precisely" in the affirmation "buried." Rufinus, *Commentary*, 52. Tyrannius finds allusions to Christ's descent all throughout the scriptures, especially in the Old Testament. He writes, "No prophet, no lawgiver, no psalmist is silent on this theme: almost without exception, the sacred pages all refer to these events [the death of Christ, his descent into hell, his liberating the captive spirits there, and his resurrection]." Rufinus, *Commentary*, 63.
77. Rufinus, *Commentary*, 61. Tyrannius sees it as a fulfillment of Psalm 29:4.
78. E. H. Plumptre, *The Spirits in Prison and Other Studies on the Life after Death* (New York: Bible House, 1884), 86–87.
79. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 120.
80. Plumptre, *Spirits in Prison*, 94.
81. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 19.
82. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 75.
83. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 71; see also Plumptre, *Spirits in Prison*, 86.
84. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 71.
85. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 71.
86. Pitstick, *Light in Darkness*, 20. The Fourth Ecumenical Lateran Council (1215) and the Second Council of Lyons (1274) may also be taken as confirmations of the doctrine.
87. Barclay explains, "In connection with [Christ's preaching to the dead] there is one interesting fact which no one has ever been able to explain. The early Christian thinkers always aimed to clinch every argument with a quotation from Scripture. In particular they were always eager to produce a passage from the prophets which the actions of Jesus fulfilled. Now when Justin Martyr and Irenaeus speak about this doctrine between them they quote no fewer than six times a proof text, attributing it sometimes to Jeremiah, sometimes to Isaiah. The text is: 'The Lord God remembered his dead people of Israel, who lay in the graves, and he descended to preach to them his own salvation.' That indeed would be a precise prediction of this interpretation of the descent; but the odd thing is that that text occurs in no known part of the Old Testament in any language or in any manuscript. Where Justin Martyr and Irenaeus got that text is one of the unsolved mysteries" (*Apostles' Creed for Everyman*, 128). Martyr taught: "From the sayings of Jeremiah they have cut out the following: 'I [was] like a lamb that is brought to the slaughter: they devised a device against me, saying, Come, let us lay on wood on His bread, and let us blot Him out from the land of the living; and His name shall no more be remembered.' And since this passage from the sayings of Jeremiah is still written in some copies [of the Scriptures] in the synagogues of the Jews (for it is only a short time since they were cut out), and since from these words it is demonstrated that the Jews deliberated about the Christ Himself, to crucify and put Him to death, He Himself is both declared to be led as a sheep to the slaughter, as was predicted by Isaiah, and is here represented as a harmless lamb; but being in a difficulty about them, they give themselves over to blasphemy. And again, from the sayings of the same Jeremiah these have been cut out: 'The Lord God remembered His dead people of Israel who lay in the graves; and He descended to preach to them His own salvation.'" Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 72, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:234–35. And Irenaeus likewise taught: "It was for this reason, too, that the Lord descended into the regions beneath the earth, preaching His advent there also, and [declaring] the remission of sins received by those who believe in Him." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.27.2, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:499.
88. Frank, "Christ's Descent to the Underworld," 211; see 211–26.
89. Plumptre, *Spirits in Prison*, 95. Although, it should be mentioned, they talked about it in a more limited form, due to Augustine's writing as well as to the theory of purgatory. Another reason for its lack of discussion was probably because of the apparently shrinking need for such an idea. The church was so successful in Aquinas's time, for example, that he thought there "was only a handful" of unevangelized persons. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 19. Also of note is a controversy involving Antonius when he defended the traditional interpretation of the doctrine against two philosophers trying to teach that Christ's descent was simply figurative. See Hornik and Parsons, "Harrowing of Hell," 22.
90. Trumbower, *Rescue*, 126. Of note, however, is the fact that Augustine's contemporary and correspondent Jerome taught "the old tradition in its completeness." Plumptre, *Spirits in Prison*, 93.
91. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 51; see also Farrar, *Mercy and Judgment*, 75–79.

92. "It is clearly shown that the Lord died in the flesh and descended into hell. . . . Who, then, but an unbeliever will deny that Christ was in hell?" from Augustine's letter to Evodius, 164, in *The Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine Letters*, vol. 3, trans. Sister Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1953), 383.
93. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 50–51.
94. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 57.
95. Augustine does not deny that Christ visited hell—but he was firm that whatever work of salvation that happened there was possible only for those who died *before* his resurrection.
96. Augustine, *Epistula* (*Letters*) 164.4.13, quoted in Trumbower, *Rescue*, 132, 140.
97. Trumbower, *Rescue*, 128.
98. Trumbower, *Rescue*, 129.
99. Trumbower, *Rescue*, 131.
100. Augustine states in a letter that "if the holy Scripture had said that Christ after death came into the bosom of Abraham, without naming hell and its sorrows, I wonder if anyone would dare to affirm that He descended into hell." *Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine Letters*, 3:386.
101. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 3.52.1–8, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 3 vols. (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947).
102. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 2.2.3–8. For a discussion on other medieval thinkers who shared Aquinas's view of a nonevangelic descent and a universally accessible message, see Sanders, *No Other Name*, 159–62.
103. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 51 and 186 n. 19; see also Trumbower, *Rescue*, 3, 108.
104. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957), 1:443.
105. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:442.
106. Plumptre, *Spirits in Prison*, 96
107. Martin Luther, "First Lectures on the Psalms (Psalm 86)," in *Luther's Works* II (St. Louis: Concordia, 1976), 175, cited in Hornik and Parsons, "Harrowing of Hell," 26.
108. MacCulloch, *Harrowing of Hell*, 52.
109. Plumptre, *Spirits in Prison*, 97. Plumptre cites Jeremy Taylor and Bishop Samuel Horsley as notable exceptions in the mid-seventeenth and late-eighteenth centuries, respectively (see 97–99).
110. Trumbower, *Rescue*, 108.
111. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 209.
112. Plumptre, *Spirits in Prison*, 92.
113. Sanders, *No Other Name*, 55, 72.
114. Peter Geach, *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 128, quoted in Sanders, *No Other Name*, 72.
115. Interestingly, even Augustine seems to entertain some form of this logic. "Christ, knowing that the world was so full of unbelievers . . . , was justly unwilling to appear or to preach to them who He foreknew would believe neither in His words nor in His miracles." *The Fathers of the Church: Saint Augustine Letters*, vol. 2, trans. Sister Wilfrid Parsons (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1953), 158.
116. Plumptre, *Spirits in Prison*, 95.
117. Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized*, ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 13.
118. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 12, 25.
119. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 36.
120. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 78, emphasis in original.
121. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 81.
122. Fackre makes reference to Romans 10:14, which states: "How are they to believe in One of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone proclaim Him?" Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 79.
123. Fackre is quick to point out, though, that "No preaching by Christ to the dead is going to make it 'easier' for the dead than the living." Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 154.
124. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 81.
125. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 83.
126. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 90.
127. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 90.
128. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 86–87.
129. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 92–93.
130. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 93.
131. *The Early Days of Christianity* (1883), 78, quoted in Tad R. Callister, "Joseph Smith—Prophet of the Restoration," *Ensign*, November 2009, 36.
132. Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, *What about Those Who Have Never Heard?* 13–15. For more detailed information on any of these views, see ibid., 157 n. 6.