

Did Jesus Go To Hell After He Died?

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I. Introduction

Some think that Jesus went to hell after He died to either suffer further for our sins or to witness to the dead who are in hell. Was Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross insufficient, did He have to suffer further for our sins after He died? Do some people get a chance to believe in Jesus after they die?

II. Did Jesus Go to Hell After He Died.....Is There a Way to Avoid Hell After You Die?

Where does the idea that Jesus went to hell come from? It originates with the Apostles' Creed. But the Creed is not in the Bible nor was it written by the apostles. It's called the Apostles' Creed because it contains a good summary of the apostles' teaching. The Creed contains the phrase "He descended into hell" a reference to Jesus. Did Jesus go into hell after He died? To answer this, we need to look at several issues:

What does the word "hell" mean? In the Old Testament the word used for the place where the dead go (which is sometimes translated "death," "grave," or "hell") is Sheol. It simply means "the place of the dead." The New Testament word for Sheol is Hades, which also means "the place of the dead." Hades has two compartments, a good side and a bad side, and sometimes the word Hades is used to refer to the bad side of Hades, which is where the dead suffer, Luke 16:19-23. Further confusion comes from the fact that people use the word "hell" to refer to both Hades and the Lake of Fire. But there's a difference between these two: Hades is a temporary place for the dead, the Lake of Fire is the permanent place for the dead who forever suffer the results of their final judgment, Revelation 20:11-15. This final judgment is ultimately to determine who has eternal life; whoever lacks life is cast into the Lake of Fire, 20:15. So it all depends on what people mean by the word "hell." Do they mean Hades or the bad part of Hades or the Lake of Fire?

Where did people go when they died in Jesus' day? They went to Hades and as mentioned, it had two sides: Paradise/Abraham's Bosom (Luke 16:22) and Torments (Luke 16:23). However, Hades no longer has two sides. It still exists today as the temporary place for the dead, but it only holds those who lack eternal life. Today, those who have eternal life, when they die go directly to heaven to be with the Lord, 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23.

Did Jesus go to "hell" when He died? The correct way to say it is that Jesus went to Paradise/Abraham's Bosom, Luke 23:43. In other words, Jesus did not go to the Torments side of Hades, but to the Paradise side. Thus, the belief that Jesus went to hell to further pay for our sins is not true for two reasons: first, Jesus didn't go to the suffering side of Hades. Second, Jesus' death on the Cross fully paid for the sin of the world; there was no need for Him to suffer again. He made one sacrifice which completely paid for our sins, Hebrews 9:23-28; 1 John 2:2.

What about the idea that Jesus witnessed to the people in hell after He died? There are three passages that are used to say that Jesus went to hell: Psalm 16:10; Ephesians 4:8-10 and 1 Peter 3:18-20. The first two say nothing about Jesus witnessing. The third says Jesus preached, but the question is, "To whom?"

Psalm 16:10 says, “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” The Person referred to here is Messiah, Jesus (Acts 2:22-28). And since a few translations say “hell” instead of “Sheol,” some people think that Jesus went to “hell.” But as we noted above, Jesus went to the Paradise side of Sheol, Luke 23:43. Further, this passage says nothing about Jesus witnessing to anyone in hell.

Ephesians 4:8-10, in 4:9 it says, “He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth.” The question is, what does “descended into the lower parts of the earth mean”? There are four options:

1. Christ’s descent into Hades following His death.
2. Christ coming to earth when He first left heaven, i.e., His First Coming.
3. Christ’s descent to live a human life and experience a human death like all men, including going to Hades (the Paradise side of Hades) after He died where all dead people went.
4. Christ’s death and burial.

Some say that option 1 is correct, thus, they say that “lower parts of the earth” = Hades. But if this is what 4:9 means, it adds nothing to the context of 4:7-12, much less Ephesians 4. One is left wondering, “What does Jesus going down to Hades have to do with Ephesians 4 which is talking about the unity of the Body of Christ (the Church) and gifted believers being urged to become productive members of that Body because they’re now part of that Body?”

Option 2 makes more sense in the context of Ephesians 4:7-12. That is, the picture 4:7-12 paints is that of Messiah, Jesus descending to earth, defeating Satan, taking his captives (unbelievers) away, giving them (now believers) to the Church after the Holy Spirit gives them each a spiritual gift according to Christ’s design (4:7), and Jesus ascending back up to heaven after His victory. What supports this is the quoting of Psalm 68 in 4:8, which describes this same scene, i.e., Psalm 68 is about God descending from heaven to earth to defeat His enemies, receiving the gifts of the spoils of war, giving those gifts to His army, and ascending back up to heaven after His victory. Finally, even if you could prove that 4:9 refers to Jesus going down to hell, it says nothing about Him witnessing to anyone.

1 Peter 3:19, this verse comes the closest to saying that Jesus “witnessed” to people in hell. But is that what it says? What God says in 3:18-22 is to encourage those suffering unjustly in 3:13-17. So He says to them in 3:18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.” He’s telling them that His Son went through the same thing, but in the end God delivered and placed Him over the very powers that sought His suffering. Thus, Jesus was resurrected by the Holy Spirit and by that same Spirit He “went and preached to the spirits in prison,” 3:19. But who are these spirits?

Who are the “spirits” in 1 Peter 3:19? The word “spirits” can refer to humans (James 2:26) or demons (Matthew 8:16), so which is it? The next verse tells us; they were the “spirits” who were disobedient in the days of Noah. The entire human race was disobedient in Noah’s day, but this singles out a special group He calls “spirits.” Who were they? They were the “sons of God,” fallen angels who decided to have sexual relations with the women of earth (Jude 6-7). This produced a wicked race that corrupted the whole world, Genesis 6:1-5. So, the “spirits” that Jesus preached to were fallen angels, demons.

Where is the prison that Jesus went to in order to preach to these spirits? This prison may be in a special part within the bad side of Hades, the Torments side, Luke 16:23. The reason it might be in Hades is that God talks of Hades as the home/headquarters of Satan and his demons, e.g., Matthew 16:18. Or this prison might be in a different location altogether which has nothing to do with Hades. According to Jude, these fallen angels got sent to a place where they are “in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day,” Jude 6-7. This may be why God calls it a “prison” in 1 Peter 3:19, i.e., because these demons are in “chains.”

Did Jesus “witness” to these demons or “preach” to them? Jesus “preached” He didn’t “witness” to them. The Greek word used for “preached” in 1 Peter 3:19 is *keyrusso*, which means “to announce,” “to proclaim aloud.” It’s not the word *euangelizo* which means “to announce good news,” “to proclaim the Gospel,” as Jesus does in Luke 20:1.

Can you believe in Jesus after you die? Unfortunately not. The Bible says, “...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,” Hebrews 9:27 (John 8:24). But if you believed in Jesus, you won’t face this judgment, John 5:24-29 (Revelation 20:11-15).

III. Conclusion

And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.