



Did Jesus Go To Hell?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

Q&A NUMBER: 60

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Did Jesus go to Hell? Specifically, this question usually relates to the time between Jesus' death and resurrection? Many people contend that Jesus spent this time in Hell, some even concluding that He was preaching the gospel to those who were there at the time. So, let's evaluate what the Scriptures teach us concerning the time Jesus spent between His death and His resurrection.

Examining Some "Proof Texts"

Let's spend some time at the beginning of this study evaluating a few of the theories that are proposed concerning this time between Jesus' death and resurrection. Some of the confusion can be first traced to the writing known as the "Apostles' Creed." This statement of faith was written about 150 years after all the apostles had died. Therefore, it is not a writing from any of the apostles, nor is it a God-inspired writing. Still, as this man-made creed has been adopted by many as expressing the truth, it has led to further confusion about our subject. The creed states concerning Jesus, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord: Who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, whence He shall come to judge the living and the dead."

Now, let's examine a few of the passages that are used to claim that this belief originates from the Scriptures rather than from man. First, let's consider Acts 2:25-28. This passage records Peter's quotation from Psalm 16:8-11 about Jesus. "I foresaw the Lord always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence."

Peter demonstrates plainly in the following verses that this passage was referring to Jesus Christ and His resurrection. Unfortunately, it was the common practice of the *King James Version* of the Bible to call “Hades,” “Hell.” So, the *King James Version* says that Jesus’ soul was in “hell” in Acts 2:27. But, this is simply an improper translation. The Greek word in Acts 2:27 is properly translated “Hades,” rather than “Hell.” Furthermore, Jesus Himself indicated that He would not be going to Hell when He died. In Luke 23:43, Jesus told a thief hanging on a cross beside Him, “today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

Second, consider 1 Peter 3:18-22. “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, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

There are many who believe that this verse teaches Jesus as going into Hell in order to preach to those who died during the flood. Please note that a similar point is argued from 1 Peter 4:4-6. This preaching is said to have taken place during the time between Jesus’ death and resurrection. However, notice that the passage (1 Peter 3) says that Jesus preached by the Spirit to those who were disobedient during the time of Noah. But, when did this preaching take place? Was it after Jesus died on the cross? The text does not force us to that conclusion. Instead, it is in harmony with these passages and the rest of the Scriptures to believe that those who Jesus preached the gospel to by the Spirit were *now* “dead” or “in prison,” but were alive whenever the preaching took place. For instance, 2 Peter 2:5 says that Noah was a “preacher of righteousness.” This thought is similar to a man saying, “I met my wife ten years ago.” Obviously, he did not literally meet his wife ten years ago. Instead, he met the woman who would later become his wife. In the same way, those who are now dead and in prison had the gospel preached to them while they were alive on this earth.

Third, consider Matthew 12:39-40. “But He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.’”

Note that a similar argument is made from Ephesians 4:8-9 and Romans 10:7. The focus of the objection relative to Matthew 12:40 is in the language of Jesus being “in the heart of the earth.” But, consider that this passage does not indicate anywhere that this refers to Hell. Instead, the more natural conclusion is to say that this refers to Jesus’ body being put into the earth whenever it was buried in the tomb.

A Difference Between “Hades” And “Hell”

Having briefly considered a few passages used to prove that Jesus went to Hell, I now want to examine the question with a view of the rest of the Bible’s teachings. For, all Scripture must harmonize. Therefore, we cannot interpret the passages we have been considering in any kind of way that would cause them to contradict any other Bible passage. Therefore, we need to consider that the Bible plainly teaches there to be a difference between “Hades” and “Hell.”

“Hades” is described in the Scriptures as being the temporary realm of the dead. It is where those who have died are today. For instance, Luke 16:19-31 depicts two individuals as entering the Hadean realm. In this place, there was both a place of comfort and a place of torment. In between the two, there is said to be “a great gulf fixed” so that those on one side of the Hadean realm cannot pass over to the other side. Then, in Revelation 20:13-14, those who are in Hades presently are pictured as being brought out of Hades for the final Judgment. And, the passage states that Death and Hades will be “cast into the lake of fire.”

While Hades is a temporary realm in which the dead reside (with a section of comfort and a section of torment), Hell is an eternal abode for those who God judges to be wicked. Along with Hades being cast into the lake of fire, Revelation 20:15 says that “anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” Revelation 21:8 adds even more to help our understandings about this lake of fire. “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” All those who reject the message of the gospel of Christ will spend eternity in this place (see 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 and Matthew 25:31-46). This is the place the Bible calls “Hell” in other passages (see Matthew 10:28). And, please note that the Scriptures nowhere teach us that there are men and women who are presently in Hell. Instead, the Bible teaches that those who have died are presently in Hades, awaiting the final Judgment.

Jesus Went To Paradise In Hades When He Died

Now, it is essential to understand the distinctions between Hell and Hades in order to properly answer the question at hand. When we understand that these are two very different places, we must conclude that Jesus did *not* go to both whenever He died. So, let’s allow the Scriptures to demonstrate precisely where Jesus went when He died.

Once again, Acts 2:27 identifies that Jesus’ soul went to “Hades” during the time between His death and resurrection. Now, since Jesus went to Hades, He did not also go to Hell. In fact, with this passage failing to identify Jesus as going to Hell, there is no other passage that states such.

Then, it is also important to understand what Jesus experienced while He was in Hades. Remember (as we established from Luke 16), there are two sections in Hades. One part is comfort (where Lazarus went, see Luke 16:22, 25) and one part is torment (where the rich man went, see

Luke 16:24, 25). But, even in Hades, Jesus *did not* experience any suffering or teach lost souls. Instead, the Scriptures plainly teach that Jesus went to Paradise. Recall that Jesus told one of the thieves being crucified beside Him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Jesus was clearly in the Paradise section of Hades.

Jesus Had No Need To Go To Hell

To go just a little deeper in answering this question, let’s now consider whether the Scriptures teach about any kind of a need for Jesus to go to Hell. First, understand that the Scriptures teach that Jesus’ earthly suffering was sufficient in paying the price due by the sinner. Jesus did not need to experience Hell in order to provide the perfect sacrifice for sin. Instead, this was accomplished in His earthly sufferings and death. For instance, Romans 5:9-11 teaches that we are “justified by His blood,” “saved from wrath through Him,” and “reconciled to God” through “the death” of Jesus Christ.

The righteous who had died prior to Jesus’ death were saved by His blood. These were in Paradise in Hades because they had lived according to the law God had given them to live by. And, in doing what God required them to do for forgiveness (i.e. offering animal sacrifices), the blood of Jesus Christ saved even them. For instance, Romans 3:25 says that in God’s forbearance, God “passed over the sins that were previously committed.” Therefore, the dead who lived according to the laws of God were in Paradise in Hades and did not need the gospel preached to them after Jesus died.

Furthermore, the wicked who had died prior to Jesus’ death could not change their condition. Those who were in torments in Hades would not have benefited from having Jesus visiting them in Hades or preaching to them. Listen carefully to what Jesus taught us about the rich man who was in torments in Hades. Luke 16:26 indicates that his fate was sealed after his death. He could not pass to the other side of Hades. Therefore, there would be no benefit of Jesus going to torments in Hades.

Conclusion

Jesus did not go to Hell. Instead, the Scriptures clearly teach that Jesus went to Paradise in Hades whenever He died. Those who were dead prior to Jesus’ death had an opportunity to please God. If they chose to rebel against Him during their earthly lives, they will be forever separated from God. Furthermore, Jesus Christ had no need to go to Hell. The blood that He shed was powerful enough to save mankind from his sins!

Discovering God’s Word Bible Study Series

Study Number: QA60

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