

*He descended into hell*  
*Did he?*



*Bible Study series*  
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# *He descended into Hell*

## *Did He?*

Most Christians, though of different denominations mention this in a way or another whether in mass or in the apostolic creed.

So how much of that is true?

First, before we discuss this subject, I would like to mention right from the very beginning that there is not even one single verse in the New Testament that says directly or indirectly that Jesus descended into hell.

So, where did this notion come from?

We Christians, believe that the Holy Scripture is written by Godly men inspired by the Holy Spirit as mentioned in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16; 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:20, and in Rev. 22:18, 19. Anything else whether mass or apostolic creed is composed by the earlier fathers of the church.

This means that the Holy Scripture is the word of God while all the others are the words of men.

This also means that the Holy Scripture is infallible, while everything else is fallible. So, if the apostolic creed or mass mentions that Christ descended into hell, it may not be true. Listen to what Jesus Christ told the thief while He was on the cross: **“Today you shall be with me in paradise”**. He did not tell him that today you will be with me in hell; or wait for me here till I descend into hell for a while and come back.

However, the early fathers built their thoughts on three verses in the writings of Paul and Peter which were utterly misunderstood and misinterpreted.

Here they are:

- 1) **Ephesians 4:9** which reads **“Now this, He ascended- what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?”** And here they are mistaken, because Paul is saying that this Christ who ascended to heaven, must have first descended from heaven (His place of Origin before incarnation) to the earth before He can ascend again to His natural place which is heaven. And by this statement he is confirming to the Ephesians, the Deity and Humanity of Jesus Christ. Something else, why did they interpret the lower parts of the earth as being hell, while we know that hell means spending eternity away from God; while eternal life is spending eternity in the presence of God?

Further more; there is nothing in the Holy Scripture that tells us where the physical hell exists, let alone the lower parts of the earth.

- 2) **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3”18b – 19** which reads **“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.”** Please notice that the first Spirit in this verse is written in capital “S” indicating God the Holy Spirit, while the second spirits is written in small “s” indicating the souls of those who are imprisoned by sin. They interpreted this verse as Jesus Christ after death, went to Hades and preached to the dead there. They forgot that Jesus Christ came specifically for the purpose of setting free all those who are imprisoned by sin.

Several centuries before Christ’s incarnation, Isaiah prophesied about this saying **“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, and to set at liberty those who are oppressed.”** (Is. 61:1). And Jesus Himself read it in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:18).

So, the incarnated Son of God Jesus Christ, descended to this world, not to hell as they say, to give liberty and to deliver those who are imprisoned by sin.

- 3) **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:5** which reads **“For this reason, the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.”**

Here, they have completely missed it. **First** of all, the verse says that the gospel **was** preached to those who **are** dead, but it does not say by whom. We know that the gospel had been preached in the far past by people like Noah, Jonah, Elijah and Elisha...etc.; and in the new era, it has been preached first by Jesus Himself, then by the disciples, then by the apostles, and has been preached till now, and it will be preached in the future by all those who serve God each in his or her own capacity.

So, it is not necessarily preached by Jesus as it is interpreted in this verse **Secondly**, please pay attention to the tenses; **“was preached”** and **“who are dead”**; the first is in the past tense, and the second is in the present tense which means that the gospel was preached to those who once were alive and now they are dead, and this fits perfectly well with the men in the past such as Noah and the others.

**Now**, what caused all this confusion?

This goes back to the misuse in some few words in the Holy Scripture and what the Jews believed in, in the past.

These words are: Hell, Hades, and Gahanna. Let us discuss them one by one:

## **Hades:**

This is a Greek word. Its counterpart in Hebrew is **Sheol**.

It was believed by both the Jews and the Greeks as an underground place where all the dead souls, good or bad, abide till the Day of Judgment.

As we know, there was a Jewish religious sect called the Sadducees who did not believe in resurrection. For them Hades meant the grave (The lower part of the earth). Remember, this is not hell; it is just a burial place. As for those who believed in resurrection, it meant a waiting station till the Day of Judgment.

Now how can this fit in the Parable of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16:19-31, which was told by Jesus Himself and we know that He does not tell lies or fibs? Lazarus died and the angels carried him to the bosom of our father Abraham. The rich man died and was buried. So, from this part of the parable we already see that there are two places, a place where the bad is, and another where father Abraham is. Could this be paradise?

Yes it is, according to the Jews who believed that Hades is divided into two departments: one is paradise and that is where all the good abide and the other is **Hell or Gahanna** where all the bad abide.

Now, the question arises, Hades then is not a waiting station, because the rich man is already judged and condemned and is tormented in the flame as mentioned in verse 24 (please read this parable); while Lazarus is also already judged and now he is rewarded and sits in the bosom of our father Abraham. Because logically if Hades is a waiting station, then we would expect that both Lazarus and the rich man to be there together waiting for their judgment, and from there each will go to his eternal destination as the case may be.

Yet according to Christ's words, they were both judged and each one took his reward or punishment; and in that case Hades is the place where the bad will abide for ever, and so this is hell by our present understanding.

**Now**, let us go back to the apostolic creed. It says "**He descended into hell**". So what department is that according to the Jewish belief? And if we consider that Hell is where the bad abide, then does 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:6 mean that Jesus went there to preach the gospel to the bad? Or did He go there to complete the punishment which humanity rightly deserves as some scholars explain? And how does the preaching benefit those who are already condemned in hell? And if the purpose is to complete the full punishment which we rightly deserve as another sect of scholars says, then how long should he stay there to fulfill this purpose, considering that our sins are beyond human repair, and Jesus took the human nature for that purpose?

**We deserve eternal fire, but He stayed there 3 days.** If what they say makes sense!

And if the purpose of Him descending into hell is to declare the good news of His victory over death as a 3<sup>rd</sup> sect of scholars explains, **How can this help the dead?** One can understand that it helps those who are still alive, but how can it help them? **Isn't all that silly?**

Our early founding fathers obviously were so fascinated by the new teaching (Christianity) that they thought that since Christ has a Jewish background according to the flesh, then everything that the Jews do or believe in must be right. But this is not so, because they believed so much in myth and biblically unfounded doctrines. And had they been perfect, there would have been no reason for Jesus to come, or they would have at least believed in Him, and consequently they would have not killed Him. Yes, He came to save all humanity, but also to correct so much of their wrong belief.

It is quite clear from the Holy Scripture that Jesus died a sacrificial death on our behalf as a “**propitiation**” which means to appease God by fulfilling His justice. At the same time He made us right in the eyes of God and that is “**Righteousness**”, so that God would remember our sins no more and punish us, and that is “**Salvation**” which means that He saved us from eternal damnation. This is the triangle of Christ’s work on the cross.

We should also remember that before Christ came in the flesh, the sacrifice was killed, and that was temporally enough to sanctify the body, but not the soul, how much more the ultimate sacrifice of Christ on the cross would be?

As for the actual punishment He took on our behalf, is quite obvious from His last word on the cross crying to God: “**Why have You forsaken me?**” indicating that God turned His back on Him, and that is the definition of Hell (being away from God).

We must remember also that all the writers of both the Old and New Testaments, were Jews, and what they wrote, though inspired by the Holy Spirit, yet was influenced by their culture, thoughts, and vocabulary available to them at their time. Further more the New Testament was not written in Hebrew (their mother tongue), but it was written in Greek, and we know that expressions in the mother tongue and acquired languages are completely different and sometimes untranslatable.

Now, Paul says: **Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.**” (Philp. 1:23b). How can this fit with Hades in the Jewish understanding? For if he is going to Hades the waiting station, then he will not find Christ there, because the Holy Scripture tells us that Christ is sitting at the right hand of power (Eph. 1:20 & Col. 3:1). Paul is so sure that he will be with Christ that he didn’t even mention Abraham’s name at all. And where is Paul now? Is he sitting with Lazarus in the bosom of our Father Abraham, since we have not seen the Day of Judgment yet?

Friends, if the theory of Hades being the waiting station is correct, then we Christians, our pastors, and our elders are all liars and Hypocrites since

we comfort each other and our friends when they loose a member of their families assuring them that the deceased is now in heaven with Christ singing with the holy angels and the rest of the saints.

There is no doubt in my mind, that once the spirit leaves the body, it goes back to its creator Who decides whether to stay in His presence (and that is eternal life), or to go to eternal damnation (and that is away from God).

I was about nine or ten years old when my mother died. I still remember vividly as I was standing by her bed, that just before her last breath, she smiled joyfully and said: **“I see Jesus, with open arms, He tells me to come and not to be afraid.”** And I ask myself and everyone who reads this, would a lady on her death bed and at her last breath of life lie about something she didn't see? And why should we go far, while the Holy Scripture tells us that Stephen said as he was being stoned by the Jews: **“Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.”** (Acts 7:56)

**Now, The verdict is:**

- 1) Jesus on the cross has fulfilled all the punishment due to us, even to the extent that God turned His back to Him, and that is Hell. So there is no such thing as descending to Hell.**
- 2) Hell, Hades, and Gahanna are all one and the same. It has so many other names which are mentioned in the Scripture such as: The outer Darkness, The Fire and Brimstone, The fire which never quench and the worm which never die, The lake of fire.....etc.**

I plead with all the responsible leaders of the different denominations to abolish this phrase (**He descended into Hell**) from their worshipping procedures; it is neither God's word nor His inspiration.