



In Search of the Old Paths

“I Believe in Jesus Christ, Who Descended into Hell”

1 Peter 3:18-22

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In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, the Apostle Paul confirmed the basic scriptural foundation for the statements in the Apostles' Creed regarding Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. ***“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and He was buried, and He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures.”***

- However, the next statement is, without question, the most controversial statement in the Creed: “He descended into hell.”
- Not all denominations even recite the creed, but even some of those who do have omitted that statement, or revised it to say that Jesus **“descended to the dead,”** or **“to the realm of the dead.”**
- When Jesus cried out from the cross, ***“It is finished,”*** His redemptive work to achieve our eternal salvation was finished: His death had paid our sin debt in full –

“For on that cross where Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied.”

- However, His descent into Hades accomplished two other goals that give us the power to live the Victorious Christian Life.

1. Jesus’ Death was Complete to the Point of Separation of His body and Spirit – 1 Peter 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.”

Over the years, skeptics and agnostics have challenged the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ by positing several theories.

- **The swoon theory** said, Jesus did not die on the cross but merely fainted, and, in the coolness of the tomb, he revived Himself and escaped from the grave.
- **The stolen body theory** said that the disciples bribed the guards, removed the stone, and stole Jesus’ body to make it look like He had been resurrected.
- **The hallucination theory** said the disciples were so grief-stricken that they imagined seeing and hearing Jesus after His death.
- **The look-alike theory** said a man who looked like Jesus was crucified and buried, and Jesus just showed up.
 - The Apostle Peter said, the Lord Jesus was put to death in the flesh.
 - The Apostle Paul said Christ died for our sins; He was buried, and rose again according to the Scriptures.
- Jesus’ descent into Hades proved His death to the point of the separation of His body and His Spirit.

There are three levels of the underworld:

- **Sheol/Hades** – in the Old Testament, this was the temporary holding place for the spirits of the dead, both good and evil.
- **Tartarus** – the abyss for fallen angels – demons who were chained and imprisoned in hell.
- **Gehenna** – the Lake of Fire – that final hell, where the occupants will be tormented forever.
- Jesus entered Sheol or Hades, the realm of the dead, and into Tartarus, where the fallen angels were being imprisoned in chains because they refused to remain in their appointed abode, and infected humanity with their evil spirits.

2. Jesus' Death Assured our Victory Over Satan and his Demons – 1 Peter 3:19-20 – “*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.*”

Peter said that while Jesus was dead in the flesh and His body lay in the tomb, He was alive in His Spirit and He went into the realm of the dead to preach to the spirits.

- He began with the demons described in Genesis 6:1-4, who entered human bodies of men, cohabitated with human women, and produced demon-possessed children known as Nephilim – giant-sized men who became known as mighty men.
 - These demonic angels filled the world with wickedness, and while Noah preached for 120 years, while building the Ark, only eight people out of four billion were saved.
 - God said this was the sin that caused Him to release His judgment upon the earth with a worldwide flood.
- Peter also included the evil spirits who inhabited the men of Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - According to Genesis 19, like the men described in Genesis 6, the men of Sodom and Gomorrah were not satisfied with the God-blessed sexual union between a man and a woman, but went after strange flesh, which led to the sin of sodomy, or homosexuality.
 - Just before God released His judgment upon them, two angelic beings, who had taken on human form, entered into Sodom and Gomorrah to deliver Lot and his family.
 - However, the men of Sodom were so evil, they demanded Lot give the men to them for their sexual pleasure.
- Based on 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 1:6, those fallen angels who rebelled against God, and left their proper habitation are imprisoned in “chains of darkness” within Tartarus, and they are still there today, and they will be there until the end of the Millennium, when they will stand before God at the Great White Throne Judgment, and then be cast into the Lake of Fire; Gehenna, what we know as Hell, a place of utter darkness, where they will be tormented forever.

Jesus' message to the demonic spirits was that, contrary to their desires and thoughts, He had conquered sin, Satan, and death.

- Colossians 2:15 – ***“Having disarmed principalities and powers (another term for demons) He (Jesus) made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them.”***

However, Jesus had another message to the souls of those Old Testament Saints who had died in faith, believing God’s promise to send a Savior.

- Ephesians 4:8-10 – ***“When Jesus ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives.”*** The Apostle Paul was referring to the souls of all those in the Old Testament – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, etc., and all those who believed in God’s promise of a Messiah. But the list also included John the Baptist and even the thief on the cross who had received Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord that very day.
- When Jesus ascended back into heaven, He took the souls of these saints with Him, and on the day of the Rapture of the Church, we will join with them.

Now, what does all of this mean to us?

- If we are in Christ, we need not fear death, for by His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus has taken the sting, the fear, or the sorrow out of death. For the believer, death to this life is just the door into the very presence of our Savior and the joys of everlasting life.
- The work of salvation is absolutely complete. Because Christ died for us and took our punishment, it is utterly impossible for a child of God to go to hell. It cannot happen. Our Lord descended into hell so that we might never go there.
- The devil is now a toothless tiger. Though he roams the earth like a roaring lion, his roar has lost its power. ***“Through Christ, hell has been torn to pieces and the devil’s kingdom and power have been utterly destroyed. So, Satan can no longer harm us and his demons cannot overwhelm us.”*** (Martin Luther)