

Join us for

Wednesday Night Bible Study



Berea Christian Church

Our Teacher

Pastor Rob Stovall

Wednesday – May 6, 2020

“Did Jesus Spend Saturday in Hell?”

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In anticipation of our upcoming series on the Apostles' Creed, I wanted to briefly treat on of the most misunderstood and controversial elements with the body of this ancient confession. As a confession of faith, the Creed is a secondary standard, in contrast to Scripture – our primary authority. As the moon reflects the light of the sun, so the Creed reflects the light of Scripture, and is usually an accurate and helpful summary of basic Christian orthodoxy – with the notable exception of the clause under present consideration.

The Apostles' Creed says, “[He] was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he arose again from the dead.” There are many meanings given to this phrase. I simply want to ponder the traditional interpretation that Christ went to the place of the dead to preach the gospel to Old Testament saints that he might set them free for the full experience of heaven. This is the view of the Catholic Catechism and many Protestants as well. I don't think this is what the New Testament teaches.

The view is based mainly on two passages in 1 Peter.

Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ([1 Peter 3:18-20](#))

They are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does. ([1 Peter 4:4-6](#))

With regard to [1 Peter 3:19](#), I take these words to mean that Christ, through the voice of Noah, went and preached to that generation, whose spirits are now “in prison,” that is, in hell. In other words, Peter does not say that Christ preached to them while they were in prison. He says he preached to them once, during the days of Noah, and now they are in prison. I think this is suggested as the more natural understanding of the passage in view of what Peter said earlier about the spirit of Christ speaking through the prophets of old.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ([1 Peter 1:10-11](#))

With regard to [1 Peter 4:6](#), I take “preached to the dead” to refer to those who, after being preached to, have since died. He is not referring to preaching to them after they have died. The context suggests this kind of understanding, as J.N.D. Kelly explains:

They [the Christians] may well have been exposed to scoffing questions from pagan neighbors, and anxious ones from one another, “What is the gain of your having become Christians, since you apparently die like other men?” The writer's answer is that, so far from being useless, the preaching of Christ and his gospel to those who have since died had precisely this end in view, that although

according to human calculation they might seem to be condemned, they might in fact enjoy life eternal.” ([A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude](#), 175)

I would say, therefore, that there is no textual basis in the New Testament for claiming that between Good Friday and Easter Christ was preaching to souls imprisoned in hell or Hades. There is textual basis for saying that he would be with the repentant thief in Paradise “today” ([Luke 23:43](#)), and one does not get the impression that he means a defective place from which the thief must then be delivered by more preaching.

For these and other reasons, it seems best to me to omit from the Apostles Creed the clause, “he descended into hell,” rather than giving it other meanings that are more defensible, [the way Calvin does](#).

