



Christian Questions

Think about the Bible like you never have before

Dear Bob,

You wanted to know if Jesus went to hell for days after his death, and if so, what was the scriptural reference for this understanding.

Some mistakenly believe that Jesus was alive in spirit form after his crucifixion, even though his body was dead. They cite as their reference 1 Peter 3:18-20: (KJV) ¹⁸ *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:* ¹⁹ *By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;* ²⁰ *Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is eight souls were saved by water.*

Before we address the meaning of these Scriptures, we need to establish through other Scriptures that God and His son Jesus are two separate entities, and that at the time of Jesus' first advent on earth he was a perfect mortal man, not an immortal divine deity.

Colossians 1:15 addresses the separateness of God and His son: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

"Image" in Strong's Concordance means "a faintness as a copy; to resemble or to be like; representation; resemblance." "Firstborn" means to be "foremost in place, order or importance; best, first of all." These definitions clarify the meaning of Colossians 1:15. Jesus is a representation of God, a copy, in that he resembled God. He was God's first, foremost and best creation. Furthermore, if we look at what Jesus says about himself, we can determine who he is. Jesus said, *My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. (John 7:16)*. God and Jesus have separate wills, and Jesus does the will of God. *For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.*" (John 6:38). Jesus said that he and his Father are separate beings and that his Father w (John 14:28; 1 Corinthians 15:28).

After establishing that God and His son are separate beings, we need to determine if Jesus was divine at his creation. If we believe that Jesus was divine there is a problem, because "divinity" means "immortality," and therefore the inability to die. Was his death on the cross an act, or pretense? We think not. In Revelation 1:18 Jesus said, *I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!*

If Jesus was divine, what did Paul mean when he stated, *By one [man] shall many be made righteous (Romans 5:19)* and *By man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:21)*?

There is one God, and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5) If we contend that Jesus was divine when he walked the earth his death is minimized. Since Adam was a perfect man who sinned, only another perfect man who did not sin could redeem not only him, but also his entire race. God knew that Jesus would need to actually die in order to redeem the fallen human race. After Jesus fulfilled his mission, he was resurrected as a divine spirit being. However, that event did not take place immediately upon his death, but on the third day. It was then that Jesus was given the gift of immortality after he died a perfect, sinless, mortal man as a ransom for Adam and the entire human race.

So, how could Jesus who was actually dead *preach to the spirits in prison*? Let us examine 1 Peter 3:18-20 to better understand its meaning.

Verse 18: What does being *put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit* mean? When we look at the oldest manuscripts from the Greek, they say simply, *Put to death flesh, quickened spirit*. The words “in the” and “by the” are arbitrarily supplied by the translators and are misleading. Our Lord was put to death a fleshly or human being and was raised from the dead a spirit being. Therefore, a better translation of verse 18 would be, *He was put to death a flesh being, but quickened [made alive] a spirit being [at his resurrection]*.

Verse 19: *By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison*. How could Jesus preach when he was dead, and who were the spirits in prison?

Verse 20 tells us who these spirits were - they were the fallen or disobedient angels who *kept not their first estate* and were on the earth in the days of Noah when the ark was being built. Jude tells us that since the Flood, God has kept these angels in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day (Jude 6). Even though these angels have been imprisoned or restrained by God, they have been observing God’s plan unfolding on earth. Obviously, Jesus was not able to literally preach to them during the three days that he was dead. **He was, however, able to preach by example through his faith and obedience to his Father, even unto suffering, ignominy and death on the cross.** He was rewarded for his faithfulness when God resurrected him as an immortal spirit being.

In summary, 1 Peter 3:18-20 tells us Christ suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death a flesh being, but quickened [made alive] a spirit being [at his resurrection]. By which also he preached by his example while on earth unto the spirits (fallen angels) in prison [chains of darkness] who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, while the ark was being built. In it only eight people were saved by water.

Did Jesus go to hell for days after his death? The word for “hell” is the Hebrew word “sheol,” meaning “grave” or “pit.” Such an example is found in Job 14:13: *O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave [sheol], that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and*

remember me! Job was talking about being “hidden” in death until the wrath of God is past and he was again remembered in resurrection.

In the New Testament, the Greek word “hades” is used for “sheol.” Sheol means “a state of oblivion or non-existence”. When Jesus died, he was in a state of oblivion, or non-existence, until God resurrected him on the third day. While he was in this state of oblivion or death, he did nothing and went nowhere.

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Sincerely,

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