

QUESTION: What did Jesus do between His death and resurrection?

As to what Jesus did between His death and resurrection I do not know completely. Some throughout church history have interpreted 1 Peter 3:19 as meaning that Christ, after His death or resurrection, proclaimed victory to the evil spirits. In this way their new doom was certain. Some have also interpreted this verse to mean that the pre-incarnate Christ spoke through Noah by the Holy Spirit to the people of Noah's day. Because they lived in disobedience they are spirits in prison.

The Apostles Creed reads as follows:

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.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy *catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.

Amen.

Calvin writing about the Creed argued,

"But we must seek a surer explanation, apart from the Creed, of Christ's descent into hell. The explanation given to us in God's Word is not only holy and pious, but also full of wonderful consolation. If Christ had died only a bodily death, it would have been ineffectual. No — it was expedient at the same time for him to undergo the severity of God's vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment. For this reason, he must also grapple hand to hand with the armies of hell and the dread of everlasting death. A little while ago we referred to the prophet's statement that "the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him," "he was wounded for our transgressions" by the Father, "he was bruised for our infirmities" [Isaiah 53:5 p.]. By these words he means that Christ was put in place of evildoers as surety and pledge — submitting himself even as the accused — to bear and suffer all the punishments that they ought to have sustained. All — with this one exception: "He could not be held by the pangs of death" [Acts 2:24 p.]. No wonder, then, if he is said to have descended into hell, for he suffered the death that, God in his wrath had inflicted upon the wicked! Those who — on the ground that it is absurd to put after his burial what preceded it — say that the order is reversed in this way are making a very trifling and ridiculous objection. The point is that the Creed sets forth what Christ suffered in the sight of men, and then appositely speaks of that invisible and incomprehensible judgment which he underwent in the sight of God in order that we might know not only that Christ's body was given as the price of our redemption, but that he paid a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man."

J. I. Packer has noted,

“The English is misleading, for “hell” has changed its sense since the English form of the Creed was fixed. Originally, “hell” meant the place of the departed as such, corresponding to the Greek *Hades* and the Hebrew *Sheol*. That is what it means here, where the Creed echoes Peter’s statement that Psalm 16:10, “thou wilt not abandon my soul to *Hades*” (so RSV: AV has “hell”), was a prophecy fulfilled when Jesus rose (see Acts 2:27–31). But since the seventeenth century “hell” has been used to signify only the state of final retribution for the godless, for which the New Testament name is *Gehenna*.

What the Creed means, however, is that Jesus entered, not *Gehenna*, but *Hades*—that is, that he really died, and that it was from a genuine death, not a simulated one, that he rose.

Perhaps it should be said (though one shrinks from laboring something so obvious) that “descended” does *not* imply that the way from Palestine to Hades is down into the ground, any more than “rose” implies that Jesus returned to surface level up the equivalent of a mine shaft! The language of descent is used because Hades, being the place of the disembodied, is *lower* in worth and dignity than is life on earth, where body and soul are together and humanity is in that sense whole.”

I believe as follows:

I tend to follow the understanding that Christ was in Hades and not hell as we understand it as the final resting place of the Devil. I believe that Jesus’ burial is associated also with His decent into Hades. When Peter preached at Pentecost he quoted Psalm 16: “You will not abandon me to the to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay” (Acts 2:27). Although, Jesus’ body was being preserved from corruption, He was in the realm of the dead. Paul writes, “Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth” (Eph 4:9)? We do not know for certain what Jesus did while in Hades. Perhaps, 1 Peter 3:18-20 does present some light on this topic, but it is to be understood that His decent into Hades was the first stage of His exaltation. When Christ emerged He freely proclaimed, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. [18] I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Rev 1:17-18).