

TITLE: DID JESUS GO TO HELL?

TEXT: 1 PETER 3:19-20

INTRO: 1 Peter 3:19-20, and the false ideas that have been attributed to this passage, present us with some questions regarding Jesus death. Did Jesus go to Hell when He died? If not, where did He go, and what did He do? What did Peter mean here? We can know based on **1)** what Peter said here, **2)** what Peter said elsewhere, and **3)** what other inspired writers said.

I. WHAT IS THE OVERALL CONTEXT OF 1 PETER 3?

- A. In ch. 2-3, Christians are to render proper submission: to government authorities (2:13-17), servants to masters (2:18-25), husbands & wives (3:1-7), and one to another (3:8-12). All of this was so we would be prepared to suffer (3:13-17).
- B. He then gives the example of Christ's sufferings for us, the just for the unjust (v. 18). And the *reason* He suffered was to offer pardon to all – “*that he might bring us to God*” (i.e., reconciliation).
- C. Next Peter gives an example of this pardon Jesus offered. “*By which (Spirit) he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.*”

II. WHO ARE THE SPIRITS?

- A. This is answered clearly in v.20. They are the spirits “*which sometime (in time past) were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in days of Noah....*” So Jesus preached to the wicked people of Noah's day.
- B. But when, where, & how did Jesus preach? It is these questions, when answered incorrectly, that bring about the false ideas.

III. WHEN, WHERE, & HOW DID JESUS PREACH? To answer one is to answer all.

- A. Peter doesn't say. He says Jesus was put to death in the flesh, but made alive by the Spirit, by (or in) which He went and preached.
- B. Some assume that the preaching then must have occurred while He was dead – Jesus went to “prison” and preached the gospel to the spirits of Noah's day, giving them the opportunity to repent. There are several problems with this view.
 - 1. Peter doesn't say this. Peter doesn't intimate this. Peter says **nothing** to cause us to believe this. He says Christ preached by the Spirit to the spirits of Noah's day who were disobedient, and that these spirits are in prison.
 - 2. What is the prison, & is this where Jesus went? Peter doesn't define it here. But we know these spirits are there **at the time Peter writes**. We know these people are dead (considering when they lived). So this prison is a prison for the dead (spirits).
 - a. ***Luke 16:19-31** – Both die; Lazarus went to Abraham's bosom; the rich man “died & was buried” (v. 22). In Hades (not Hell) the rich man **1)** was in torments, **2)** desired to be comforted, **3)** could see Abraham & Lazarus, **4)** couldn't cross the great gulf dividing these two realms of Hades, **5)** desired to warn his living brothers, **6)** but there was no returning (not even for Lazarus). All dead parties are stuck where they are. Eternal destiny is set at death; there are **no 2nd chances** (no Purgatory)! Opportunity to repent is only in **this life!** **Heb 9:27**—*it is appointed unto men once to die, then the judgment.*
 - b. **2 Peter 2:4**—This ‘torment’ area of Hades is called Tartarus. “*God spared not the angels...cast them down to Tartarus.*”
 - c. **Luke 23:43**—The area of Lazarus is Paradise. Jesus told the penitent thief, “*Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*”
 - 3. Jesus Himself told us where He went – Paradise. So He didn't go to Tartarus, much less Hell.
 - 4. Many other questions and points inconsistent with Scripture arise with this false view:
 - a. Did Jesus preach only to those of Noah's day? If so, why the respect of persons (**1 Pet 1:17; Col 3:25**)?
 - b. Did they repent? If so, why wouldn't we be told? If not, why not (especially considering the conditions there)? We know the rich man would've repented!
 - c. Will Jesus go back again and preach to **ALL** lost souls? Again, if not, why the respect of persons?
 - d. If we'll have an opportunity to obey *after* this life, then why this life? This would defeat the purpose of this life!
 - 5. There is no respect of persons because all people are given the same opportunity **in this life** to obey God.
- C. *What happened in Noah's day?* Jesus preached by the Holy Spirit that was in Noah, through Noah's mouth (**2 Pet 2:5; Heb 11:7**), to the wicked people of Noah's day, giving them the opportunity to repent; an opportunity that knocked for 120 years (**Gen 6:3**). They rejected Noah (& Christ), died in the flood, and have since been in “prison” (Tartarus), awaiting final judgment (**Heb 9:27**).
- D. *What happened at Christ's death?* Over 2000 years later, Jesus was crucified and was dead for 3 days, at which time He was in Paradise, not Tartarus or Hell. He did **not** preach to any spirits in Tartarus, giving them the opportunity to repent.
 - Jesus didn't go to Hell. No passage of Scripture says this explicitly or implicitly. He defeated death for us by going to Hades (the realm of the dead) and returning, never to die and return there again (**Acts 13:34**).
- E. These facts are consistent with the whole of Scripture. Second chance theology is not. Rather it is very dangerous – it gives false hope that one can ignore the gospel call in this life and repent in the next.

CONCLUSION: WHY THIS EXAMPLE?

- A. Remember the context. Christians are to be prepared to suffer for Christianity. Christ is the ultimate example of suffering, and for the ultimate cause – to reconcile all humanity. God's love and patience with humanity is so great that He even offered pardon to the people of Noah's day. There is probably no better example of God's longsuffering than this. Never has the world been so wicked in such overwhelming majority (all but 8 – v.20). And God gave them 120 years to repent!
- B. Hades is real and so is Hell. Even in Hades (Tartarus) there is “torment” and “flame.” And once you're there, you'll never escape it. How ought we then to live?
- C. Jesus didn't preach to anyone in Hades. Rather, He preached (earnestly pleaded), and still does, with all humanity, to obey and be saved while we are alive. Through Peter, He preaches to us today in this Scripture, reminding us of the amazing longsuffering of God in continuing to wait for us. As long as life continues, the door to that spiritual ark is still open.