

Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 44-Did Jesus Go to Hell for You?

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: The last time you saw that Christ's **suffering for you guarantees you a better death in the future ...and therefore, a better life now**. You can face death without dread. You can live with assurance, not anxiety! Isn't that wonderful?

But today you will see Question 44 of the Heidelberg Catechism, quoting the Apostles' Creed, saying **that Jesus "descended into hell."** It is kind of an interesting statement! Well, what does that mean? That phrase has caused quite a bit of consternation in the past and even today. But it is a true doctrine. Today you will **hear why it was important the Jesus "descended into hell."**

Our headings are:

What does Christ's Descent into Hell Mean?

What does Christ's Descent into Hell Mean to You?

Our goals are: **That you will be refreshed with the fuller knowledge of your deliverance from sin, and that you will be equipped to face any crisis or temptation that comes up in your life.**

44 Q. WHY DOES THE CREED ADD, "HE DESCENDED INTO HELL"?

A. To assure **me in times of personal crisis and temptation** that Christ my Lord, by suffering **unspeakable anguish, pain, and terror of soul**, especially on the cross but also earlier, has delivered me from the anguish and torment of hell.

What Does Christ's Descent into Hell Mean?

1. There are 2 aspects of Christ's descent into hell.

a. Christ endured "hellish" suffering for you. This is the view of the Continental Reformed churches, like we are.

b. Christ entered into the grave. This is the view of the Reformed Churches of England who were called Presbyterians.

2. Christ's descent into hell - a reference to his "hellish" suffering.

a. Jesus Christ suffered unspeakable (hellish) spiritual anguish during his life and especially at the end. Anguish is excruciating or severe distress. Nowhere was his anguish clearer than in Gethsemane. Jesus' anguish was so severe that **his sweat became as drops of blood** (Luke 22)...and he pleaded for his friends to stay and pray with him.

Matthew 26:36 Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." **37** And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be **sorrowful and deeply distressed**. **38** Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, **even to death...**

About 750 years before Isaiah spoke of Jesus' anguish. **Grief was the Lord's friend...**the one always around.

Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected by men, **A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief**. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. **4** Surely **He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows...**

Christ's mental anguish was exacerbated by the fact that the ones he came to redeem cared nothing for him.

Even his friends abandoned, denied, and betrayed him, and he suffered innocently.

b. Jesus Christ suffered unspeakable physical pain during his life and especially at the end. Isaiah 53. His physical suffering was exacerbated because he suffered at the hand of the ones he came to redeem. We've talked about this recently.

c. Jesus Christ suffered terror of his soul during his life and especially at the end when his Father rejected him. Nothing was closer to hell than to be rejected by the Father!

Matthew 27: 45 Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. **46** And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, **"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"**

No wonder Jesus prayed that if it were possible that the Father might take away his cup of suffering.

3. Christ's "descent into hell" – was his time in the grave.

Presbyterians say Christ's descent into hell was his time in the grave. They say so because "grave" and "hell" were often used interchangeably in the Scriptures. **Look at the same word. The 2nd example was about Christ's death.**

Psalms 49:15 But God will redeem my soul from the power of the **grave**. For He shall receive me.

Psalms 16:10 For You will not leave my soul in **Sheol**. Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

In the Jewish mind, it was common to use the grave as hell, and hell as the grave. Why? There was no worse place in their minds than the grave where they were buried, so they used "grave" to describe **hell – the place of eternal torment – the worst place in the future.**

The Jews also use the word Gehenna, a place outside of Jerusalem where they burned garbage and pagan

sacrifices, to refer to hell – the place of eternal torment. The fire kept burning.

Some Gentiles used “tartarus” – a place where they would continually burn refuse – as the word of hell. (Greek mythology.) There was no worse place in their minds, so “tartarus” was appropriate.

Other Gentiles used the Greek word “hades” – the Greek word for “grave,” to refer to hell – the place of eternal torment. (Hades = Pluto – god of the dead.) The grave was the worst place in the Gentile’s mind, so it was appropriate to use it for hell.

Let me prove once and for all that hades did not always refer to the place of eternal torment! Hades was thrown into the place of eternal torment. Hell can’t be thrown into hell. The grave was destroyed!
Revelation 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Today we got our word “hell” from the English noun “hill.” To the English mind, to be buried under a large pile of dirt – a hill - **was the worst place imaginable**, so we used “hill” for “hell,” the **place of eternal torment**. You still see thousands of “hells” through the UK where ancient people were buried.

So hades does not have to be the place of eternal torment. It simply referenced his time in the grave.

4. I believe both the continental and the Presbyterian views are correct; one does not negate the other.

Jesus did **face hellish suffering**. Jesus had to **go into the grave**. The Apostles’ Creed likely meant both. The literal hell is a place to permanently keep the wicked away from God; Jesus didn’t have to go there.

5. There are a couple of notable errors regarding Jesus’ “descent into hell.”

a. Joyce Meyer, a popular TV personality, teaches Jesus had to suffer on the cross to be born again (but Jesus did not need redemption.), that he had to go to the literal hell to be tormented by the demons for you, and after the torment, the Father had to order the demons to let him go (but Jesus had power to lay down his life and take it up again).

That would make a nice fairy tale! It is a corrupted biblical account. That’s all. Meyer is a teacher to avoid.

b. Roman Catholics believe Jesus had to go to a fiery hell to preach to OT saints who died without hearing the Gospel. Here is the verse they misuse!

1Peter 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, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,

But Hebrews 11, says **OT believers already had faith so this disproves their theory.** Further, **if you are eternally damned, you can’t be saved. (After death comes the judgment.)** Apostle Peter was not referring to those in eternal hell **but to the souls of those who were trapped in sin – a spiritual prison.** Peter was comparing “spiritual prisoners” with those who do evil. **(Parallelism) 1Peter 3:17.**

What Does Christ’s Descent Into Hell Mean To You?

1. You were in Christ in his descent into hell!

Since you were united/baptized in Christ in his descent into hell, his benefits are counted as yours.

Romans 6: 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. Since you were united/baptized in Christ in his *descent into hell*, when you go through personal crisis in life, you need not worry.

No crisis then can destroy your soul or your faith. The ultimate punishment for your sin has been paid. Your debts have been paid in full. **Who worries about debts if he has no debts?**

3. Since you were united/baptized in Christ in his *descent into hell*, when you are tempted to sin against God by lusts of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, you have the strength to say no to sin...just like Jesus did when he was tempted in the wilderness.

So flex your spiritual muscles and say no to sin.

4. Since you were united/baptized in Christ in his *descent into hell*, you now have rest – a rest no one can take away.

You can look forward to that eternal rest in heaven.

Hebrews 4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. 9 There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. 10 For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His.

You are dead to any and all eternal consequences of sin. Hallelujah.

5. Since you were united/baptized in Christ in his *descent into hell*, death's sting has been removed for you.

You need not fear death.

1Corinthians 15:54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." 55 **"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"**

6. In sum, since you were united/baptized in Christ in his *descent into hell*, you can now live victoriously.
Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, **but Christ lives in me;** and the *life* which I now live in the flesh **I live by faith in the Son of God,** who loved me and **gave Himself for me.**

The more you kill sin, the more you will bring glory to God and the greater the blessing you will receive. (Do you see how wonderful Christ's suffering and death is to your life now?) So live victoriously.

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**

Conclusion:

You were united with Christ when he suffered and was tormented, and you were buried with him in the grave, so what he achieved is credited to your account through faith. Jesus went through hell for you.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Are you thankful as you should for your new life in Jesus? Revelation 1:18 "*I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.*

2. Stop every day and say: "Thank you Lord for going to hell me."

3. Confidently go about your duties knowing you will never have to pay for your sins. Don't live a defeated life overwhelmed by sins. Shed that load off of your back. Serve the covenant community. Send the message of salvation to the lost. Sing songs of praise. Share your goods. Smile.

Finally: If you are not a Christian, I pity you! I pity you because I know you will have to suffer and die for your sins...in the worst possible way. **But the Lord's love for the world says that if you knock and invite him, he**

will come in and have fellowship with you forever. That means, pray and ask him to come into your life. He will give you salvation that was purchased by Christ's blood.