

"Where was Jesus for the three days between His death and resurrection?"

The Bible does not specifically state what happened to Jesus immediately after He died on the cross. Because of this, there is debate surrounding the answer to the question of where He went and what He did.

". . . the idea here is that Jesus was resurrected by the Spirit of God, by whom also he went (presumably after the resurrection) to proclaim triumph over the fallen spirits. For the many views on this text, the three main ones are 1) that between his death and resurrection, Jesus preached to the dead in Hades, the realm of the dead (the view of many church fathers); 2) that Christ preached through Noah to people in Noah's day (the view of many Reformers; 3) that before or (more likely after) his resurrection, Jesus proclaimed triumph over the fallen angels (the view of most scholars today. (In early Christian literature, 'spirits' nearly always refers to angelic spirits rather than human spirits, except when explicit statements are made to the contrary. The grammar here most naturally reads as if, in the Spirit who raised him, he preached to them after his resurrection; further, v. 22 mentions these fallen angels explicitly. The view that these were instead spirits of the dead often rests on 4:6, but the point of 4:6, which caps the section, is that martyrs put to death in the flesh will be raised by the Spirit as Christ was in 3:18.)" [Keener, 718]

Some theologians believe that during the three days between Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, He descended into

Abraham's bosom ([Luke 16:19-31](#)), proclaimed to them the mystery of the gospel, and then led them into heaven to dwell with God. The belief is that they were not permitted to enter into the presence of God in heaven until after the atonement. Once that had happened, Jesus, who had died, descended to Abraham's bosom, proclaimed the gospel, and then led its residents into heaven.

[First Peter 3:18-22](#) describes a necessary link between Christ's suffering (verse 18) and His glorification (verse 22). Only Peter gives specific information about what happened between these two events.

[1 Peter 3:18-19](#) states, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison."

The word "preached" in verse 19 is not the usual word in the New Testament to describe the preaching of the gospel. It literally means to herald a message. The word "proclamation" in Greek is kerusso. It means to proclaim and is a different word than "euaggelizo" which means to preach the gospel.

So Christ heralded his triumph. Not evangelism (euaggelizw), but heralding. Cf. Rom. 5:18-19; Gen. 3:15; Col. 2:15; Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8.

Options as to what: 1) Victory. Christ proclaimed victory over these disobedient spirits that had once tried to thwart his coming by destroying the human line. That was a triumph of victory that these demons cannot share in. In being a proclamation of victory, it was for them one of defeat. It would be like a commanding general entering a POW camp where thousands of the enemy are housed. He announces, "The battle is over. We have complete victory!" To the POWs it's a message of defeat (same for the fallen angels). But, for us, it's a message of victory (cf. the victory parade/Roman Triumph). We can suffer because we are destined for glory!

Jesus suffered and died on the Cross, His body being put to death, and His spirit died when He was made sin. But His spirit was made alive and He yielded it to the Father. According to Peter, sometime between His death and His resurrection Jesus made a special proclamation to "the spirits in prison."

Therefore, it is most probable that Jesus was not preaching the gospel to those in Hades/Spirit prison so they could be saved, but was instead proclaiming the truth to them. After all, the Bible says, "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment," ([Heb. 9:27](#)).

When Jesus was made alive in the spirit, it is not saying that His spirit died and then it became alive again. "Made alive in the spirit" is contrasted with "put to death in the flesh." He first lived as mortal men but "...He began to live a spiritual 'resurrection' life, whereby He has the power to bring us to God. Furthermore, some Bibles (NIV, KJV, and NKJV) render the verse as "made alive by the Spirit," referring to the Holy Spirit's

work with Christ. "By the Spirit" translates one word, pneumati, which could refer to the third Person of the [Trinity](#) as the agent of Christ's resurrection.

But who were the ones in spiritual prison? Peter also referred to people as "souls" and not "spirits" (3:20). In the New Testament, the word "spirits" is used to describe angels or demons, not human beings, and verse 22 seems to bear out this meaning. Also, nowhere in the Bible are we told that Jesus visited hell. [Acts 2:31](#) says that He went to "Hades" (New American Standard Bible), but "Hades" is not hell. The word "Hades" refers to the realm of the dead, a temporary place where they await the resurrection. [Revelation 20:11-15](#) in the NASB or the New International Version give a clear distinction between the two. Hell is the permanent and final place of judgment for the lost. Hades is a temporary place.

Some believe the people to whom Jesus proclaimed himself who were alive at the time of Noah's flood and who were killed in the flood. Others believe it is all humanity who died before the time of the cross. There seems to be support for the former position in [2 Pet. 2:4-5](#),

"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly."

Needless to say, this passage also raises many questions and much debate can be found as to its precise meaning. That Jesus

simply presented the facts concerning His work on the cross to those in spiritual prison, we can look to [Eph. 4:8-10](#) for possible support.

"When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men. 9 Now this expression, 'He ascended,' what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things...

Our Lord yielded His spirit to the Father, died, and at some time between death and resurrection, visited the realm of the dead where He delivered a message to spirit beings (probably fallen angels; see [Jude 6](#)) who were somehow related to the period before the flood in Noah's time. Verse 20 makes this clear. Peter did not tell us what He proclaimed to these imprisoned spirits, but it could not be a message of redemption since angels cannot be saved ([Hebrews 2:16](#)). It was probably a declaration of victory over Satan and his hosts ([1 Peter 3:22](#); [Colossians 2:15](#)). [Ephesians 4:8-10](#) also seems to indicate that Christ went to "paradise" ([Luke 16:20](#); [23:43](#)) and took to heaven all those who had believed in Him prior to His death. The passage doesn't give a great amount of detail about what occurred, but most Bible scholars agree that this is what is meant by "led captivity captive."

Conclusion:

Jesus Descended into Hell. When Jesus descended into hell, he entered not Gehenna but Hades; in other words, he really died,

and it was from a genuine, not a simulated death that he rose (Acts 2:31-32). 1 Peter 3:18-20 tells us briefly what Jesus did in Hades:

First, by his presence he made Hades into Paradise (a place of pleasure) for the penitent thief and, presumably, for all the others who died trusting him during his earthly ministry, just as he does now for the faithful departed (Luke 23:43; Phil. 1:21-23; 2 Cor. 5:6-8).

Second, he perfected the spirits of Old Testament believers (Heb. 12:23; 11:40), bringing them out of the gloom which Sheol (the pit) had hitherto been for them (Ps. 88:3-6, 10-12) into this same Paradise experience. This is the core of truth in the medieval fantasies of the harrowing of hell. Third, “he went and preached (presumably announcing his kingdom and appointment as the world’s judge) to the spirits in prison” who had rebelled in antediluvian times (presumably the fallen angels of 2 Pet. 2:4-10 who are also the sons of God in Gen. 6:1-4). Some have based on this one text a hope that all humans who did not hear the gospel in this life, or who, having heard it, rejected it, will have it savingly preached to them in the life to come. Peter’s words provide no warrant for this inference: a first, non-saving announcement to a group of fallen angels does not imply a second saving announcement to the whole host of unsaved human dead. Had Peter believed in the latter, surely he would have said it straightforwardly. [Your Father Loves You by James Packer, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986]

So, even though we cannot precisely determine where Jesus was and what He did during those three days, it seems apparent that

He presented the gospel message (not to have them get saved) to those in spirit prison and possibly also to those in Abraham's bosom. It does seem that He was preaching victory over the fallen angels and/or unbelievers. What we can know for sure is that Jesus was not giving people a second chance for salvation. The Bible tells us that we face judgment after death ([Hebrews 9:27](#)), not a second chance. There isn't really any definitively clear answer for what Jesus was doing for the time between His death and resurrection. Perhaps this is one of the mysteries we will understand once we reach glory.