

## Transcript 88

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions Podcast, so it's the time of year again Easter from really Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday is the busiest time of year for Got Questions every single year for as long as I can remember, and one of the most frequently asked questions we receive is where was Jesus for the three days between his death and resurrection, and a very closely related question, did Jesus go to hell between his death and resurrection? So that's what we're going to be covering today. So with me on today's episode we have Jeff, who is the managing editor of BibleRef.com and Kevin, the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries. We're going to be discussing these issues and one of the most interesting things about this is that main passages, whether in Ephesians or First Peter, of they're very very controversial.

Shea Houdmann

There's a lot several different interpretations held by evangelicals, and so we're going to cover those in brief. But I think maybe the main point we want to get across is these issues are really not that important. Obviously, the death and resurrection of Christ the most important doctrines of the Christian faith where Jesus was, where his spirit soul was in between that, not that consequential, but we're not saying there's something the Bible is not important. It's important, but in terms of salvation, there's not something really worth fighting about arguing about, or definitely not worth dividing over. So hopefully you detect that spirit when we discuss some of the different views and even express which ones we think is most likely. So Kevin, why don't you start us off and dive into the First Peter passage a little bit.

Kevin Stone

Uh, sure, yeah. First Peter Chapter 3 is one of those passages that comes under a lot of scrutiny and causes some debates and discussions about what what exactly Peter is talking about here when he says, and this is verses 18 through 20, says Christ also suffered once for sins. The righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh. But made alive in the spirit. And if I could just stop right there and say praise the Lord for his substitutionary death on the cross. It is through his death that we are saved. He brings us to God. He makes the unrighteous righteous. He gives us that gift of eternal life. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

Kevin Stone

But then Peter continues. He says this, in which referring to the spirit in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey when God patience waited in the days of Noah while the Ark was being prepared, so that last part there after Peter talks about the death and resurrection of Christ, he says this about Jesus proclaiming to the spirits in prison. Who formally did not obey during the days of Noah when God was being very patient with them, so there are a couple different views on what Peter's meaning is here.

Kevin Stone

What's what's Peter actually talking about? One idea is that sometime between Jesus death and resurrection, while his body was in the grave, Jesus, you know, in the spirit went to hell or hades. That place of the dead that the place of torment and he made an announcement of some type to spirits who were imprisoned there. So within this interpretation there are a couple of different interpretations as well. A couple different branches. You can go. One is that Jesus was speaking to demons, demonic spirits.

Kevin Stone

Another one is that Jesus was proclaiming something to the human spirits. Now these can't be human spirits that were in paradise that were in the blessed side of the place of the dead because Peter says that they are spirits in prison and there's no way that paradise could be called a prison. And so these would have to be cursed souls. These would have to be those that are in the torment side of Hades or Sheol.

Kevin Stone

So what to make of this idea? Well, was Jesus talking to the demonic spirits? Did he go to hell and talk to some spirits who are imprisoned there right now that were involved probably in some grievous sin before before the flood. Back in Noah's day, these demons had done something very bad and are now imprisoned in Hell and Jesus went and preached something to them. It could not have been a message of redemption because demons cannot be saved. These are fallen angels, and so this theory would say that Jesus is declaring his message of victory over Satan. He basically goes to hell and says to these demons that are imprisoned there, I won, your master, Satan has lost and it's final. So that's one idea.

Kevin Stone

Perhaps Jesus was talking to human spirits who were in hell in that torment region of Hades, and probably saying the same thing, declaring his victory over Satan in both of those cases, whether Jesus was going to hell to talk to demons or going to hell, to talk to unsaved humans and torment, I would ask the question why oh why in the world would he do that?

Kevin Stone

What would be the point of doing that? That brings us to a second interpretation and this happens to be my position. This is what I personally believe Peter is talking about when he talks about the spirits in prison. He's talking about the spirits who are currently in hell, but Peter is not saying that Jesus made a special trip to hell to preach or proclaim anything. Rather, Peter is giving a parenthetical statement here about something that Jesus had done previously in history, namely that he had in the spirit, preached to people in Noah's day while they were still living on Earth before they got put in prison so that wicked generation of Noah's day heard the message they heard the gospel they heard the good news that they could be saved. Just get on the ark.

Kevin Stone

There is a judgment coming, won't you trust God and get on the ark so that wicked generation heard the message. And as Noah was preaching that, Peter says that was the spirit of Christ. That was a spirit of Christ preaching to that wicked generation, saying it is time for you to get saved.

Kevin Stone

But now, as Peter writes this, now those spirits are in prison. Because they refused Noah's message. In fact, the the amplified Bible and the new American Standard Bible both add the word now for clarity there and First Peter 3:19 and that contrast it with the long ago of verse 20. I put together this paraphrase here just to kind of this is how I understand this verse. Jesus was put to death in the flesh. He was made alive in the spirit. And it was through this same spirit that Jesus long ago preached to those who are right now in prison, those who perished in the flood, even though God was very patient with them.

Kevin Stone

So Jesus was preaching to people in Noah's day and he did this through the prophet Noah. It was Christ through the Holy Spirit who was giving Noah the words to say every time he preached and we talk about this same thing we share the gospel with people. We're sharing the word of Christ. It's Christ through the Holy Spirit who is actually speaking through us.

Shea Houdmann

Kevin well explained, and I'd say the position that you just presented is probably the one that I lean towards. But just to give you an idea of how difficult this passage can be, the viewpoint that I was trained with, and definitely by the Youth Pastor, first disciple me and I have no idea why he felt the need to explain this passage to me was that it going back to Genesis six, the sons of God are fallen angels who cohabitated with human females who produced the Nephilim who were demonic human hybrids who eventually were killed in the flood, and then their spirits were sent to hades, hell, whatever you want to call it and then the whole purpose the demons doing that was to try to so pollute the human bloodline so that the Messiah could not come.

Shea Houdmann

And so when Jesus in First Peter three went to preach to these spirits in prison, he was preaching to the departed spirits of the nepheline, to declare a message of victory over them saying your plan didn't work. I'm Messiah. I've completed God's work. Humanity can now be saved. So see all of that and well, each of those points are, I'd say, possible interpretations of the various passages. It's so can get so complicated that so many different points and so many different passes all have to come together and be interpreted a certain way in order to lead to that conclusion. The interpretation that you presented is far simpler. And fits better with the context of First Peter, so that's the direction I'm leaning, but it's so interesting to look at First Peter, it's like OK what was Jesus preaching? To whom was he was preaching? And what exactly was the message that he was preaching? All of those things are so debated. Makes this passage it's very interesting to study, but again, none of these points are truly raised to the level of something that we should fight about or argue over. So and trust me, I'm still very interested in what exactly went on with this, and reading different commentaries in preparation for this it's like wow, there's a lot of different views on this, but the interpretation you just presented is one I, I'm leaning towards as well. So Jeff, why don't you dive into the Ephesians passage? Is this another one that people often point to? It talks about where Christ was and what he may have been doing in between his death and resurrection.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, we're talking about the idea that there are sometimes different ways that you could interpret a passage, and sometimes the problem is just that we want to, we want to drive more detail out of something than is really necessary. Every word that's in the Bible is there for a reason, but just like when we use common phrases and conversation with each other, that doesn't mean that every single phrase has some secondary deep hidden meaning or purpose that needs to be pulled out. Sometimes statements just made for a particular reason and a particular purpose, I think Ephesians fits into that and the passage that catches people, is Ephesians 4:8. There's a part of the letter to the Ephesians where Paul is explaining spiritual blessings. He's talking about the need to walk worthy and the things that they've been given at one point in time he makes a comment where he references, probably Psalm 68:18.

Jeff Laird

And that's where we get this reference from Ephesians 4:8. There's a comment there where as Paul is quoting the Psalm he makes a comment about God ascending on high led captive captives, received gifts, and so on and so forth. And then he goes on to relate that to Jesus. And that's the phrase that gets to people a lot of times is this idea of leading captives or leaving captivity captive? And some people think that that's an interpretation should be that Jesus went and talked to these unevangelized souls from before the Messiah, or from before the flood, or in some particular time period and preached to them and then brought them out of a, you know, a limbo into paradise, or that he spoke to some other group about something. Part of the issue with that is that when you actually look at the the text, there are sometimes differences. Subtle differences in the in the the words that you'll get in the New Testament and the Old Testament when you see a citation of verses and a lot of that's just because of translations. A lot of New Testament writers are citing the Septuagint, which is a Greek translation.

Jeff Laird

So there's subtly different wording, but what we see in Ephesians is not one of those when you get the quotation that Paul uses to say that it's a liberal quotation from the text is one thing. He makes quite a few pretty serious changes. It's clear that he's referencing that text, but Paul is not making an effort to make an exact perfect quotation of that Psalm. He's bringing up the idea and talking about it, but it doesn't seem like Paul's actually trying to cite that passage in direct quotation.

Jeff Laird

So what does that mean? Well, if he's bringing up the idea when you when you see where he's going with the rest of his discussion, Paul talks about the idea of Christ turning enemies into his people. Colossians 1:21 is an example, former enemies, and so on and so forth. And there's a theme behind that where you have this imagery of Christ capturing and then leading those he's captured like a war Lord would capture. Except with Christ it's turning those who used to be against Christ into his friends and his people. And so on and so forth.

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So I think when we see that expression in Ephesians leading captivity captive, I honestly don't think that we're meant to pull every single little tiny nuances and detail out. Paul is certainly not trying to leverage every single jot and tittle of the Psalm when he brings it up, because he's making quite a few different changes when he brings it up. It's just his general idea, and I think that general idea is just that Christ as

a as a victorious conqueror over death and sin is bringing people in. He is leading a host of captives the way a conqueror would. Except these captives are actually people that he is rescuing and redeeming.

Jeff Laird

So just like we can with First Peter, we can dig maybe a little bit too deeply into trying to explain every detail. I think with Ephesians we can end up doing the same thing.

Kevin Stone

Yeah, how about this for another interpretation, Jeff, that the Ephesians 4 passage there, when it speaks of Christ ascending on high. It's just a straightforward presentation of his ascension. His bodily ascension from this world into heaven. The disciples were all watching that. And Jesus had told them, you know, and until I go to the father, you will not receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. So could Paul be talking about the Ascension of Christ and then the giving of gifts to men would be the gift of the Holy Spirit and the the giving of the spiritual gifts through the Holy Spirit. And then the the captivity you know, leading captive captivity captive. You know, that could be a reference, possibly to leading sin and death away. Those he had taken those things captive, he's the victor and he is triumphantly ascending to glory. Just a thought. I've seen that particular interpretation, and I thought I'd throw it out there too.

Jeff Laird

Yeah, I think that's possible. It's it's key for us to remember though that in Ephesians and First Peter again, nothing in the Bible is what we could really call throwaway. You know, there's nothing in there that's not in there for a reason, but sometimes statements are made and they're not giving a lot of context, and they're not giving a lot of clarification and I'm one of the people who believes that the main things are the plain things. If there was something really important for our salvation or our relationship with Christ or the way we interact with others in this idea of where exactly Christ was for those three days between his death and resurrection, or exactly what did it mean to lead captivity captive? I think we would get a lot more explanation than we do because there's already other places in the Bible where we get context and we get background and we get more information. This is just not one of those, so I think those things are possible. There's different ways to interpret, we just have to realize that whatever interpretation we take will affect other things that we think and believe it will affect how we interpret other passages and as long as we're ready for that, and we're OK with it and we don't divide and bicker and argue with each other about things that aren't ultimately important, I think that's OK.

Shea Houdmann

I agree Jeff. And one thing we do want to point out though is one view on where Jesus was that we believe is definitely unbiblical and so many people over the lives, depending what denomination have recited the apostles creed and there's some churches where it's recited very regularly in one of the lines of the apostles creed is that Jesus descended into hell and the way the English language works and the way we understand hell, most people will interpret Jesus descended into hell as Jesus went to hell to suffer for our sins. Obviously, that's what hell is about?

Shea Houdmann

Well, the Bible actually does not teach that Jesus descended into hell. And if you're using the word hell to refer to the realm of the dead, well, then yes, that's possible. But the First Peter passage and the

Ephesians passage actually don't even explicitly teach that Jesus went to the realm of the dead. You look at Jesus on the cross. He tells the repentant criminal who was crucified with them, said today you will be with me, where? In hell? No. In paradise. The not seemed that Jesus went to the realm of the dead, the wicked dead or whatever you want to refer it. If Jesus went to the realm of the dead it was to paradise so that that's a very important passage to to point to and also Jesus on the cross in John 19:30 where he says it is finished.

Shea Houdmann

This is a accounting term that he uses. That essentially means this is paid in full. So Jesus on the cross paid the full penalty for our sins. He did not need. There's absolutely no need for him to go to hell to endure any further suffering in order to pay for our sins. So wherever Jesus soul spirit went for those three days it was not to a place of punishment or torment that is totally unbiblical, there's several prominent teachers, often in the word faith movement, who will teach that Jesus actually was tormented in hell for three days for our sins. That is absolutely not the teaching of the Bible, so let's make that absolutely clear. If Jesus soul Spirit went anywhere during the three days between his death and resurrection, it was to paradise. Not to the realm of the wicked dead, as Kevin explained earlier with the First Peter passage, what would be the point of Christ going to the wicked dead or to the fallen angels to preach to them so wherever Christ went, there's still a lot of mystery.

Shea Houdmann

This is a question that we can't conclusively answer from the Bible. What precisely Jesus was doing for those three days. But one thing we can make abundantly clear that Jesus did not go to hell in the sense of going to the place of torment for three days that is not taught in the Bible and the whole concept is antithetical to what was actually accomplished when Jesus died for us on the cross and declared it is finished, not it will be finished after three days. No, his torment was finished right then and there when he died on the cross.

Kevin Stone

So it's correct to say that Jesus went to Hades but not correct to say that he went to hell as commonly defined. We need to be very careful when defining these terms, sheol and Hades and hell and in fact, we've got an article on our website that goes through those definitions very carefully. And make some biblical distinctions and we would point people to that article.

Shea Houdmann

A lot of questions about what is Sheol what is Hades? What is the grave? What is hell? What is the lake of fire? And all the what these different destinations point to? And there's some overlap, and even some of that sometimes the terms are used interchangeably, and other times they're used to explicitly refer to one particular eternal destination. So be very careful with terms, and I no fault against the apostles creed. I mean, obviously hell is like a translation of what creatures originally written in. I doubt the people who even composed the Apostles Creed meant that Jesus went to hell to suffer, but that's as normally cut wouldn't you say today if someone went to hell you are thinking they're going to the place of the wicked dead to be tormented. They're not thinking of the general sheol, all the grave where there is a division between the righteous and the wicked,

Shea Houdmann

So I hope you see in this conversation that these are some difficult issues that very interesting to study, but ultimately, what we need to focus on around Easter on Good Friday that Jesus died for our sins and his death on the cross is absolutely sufficient to pay the full penalty for our sins that through faith in him through trusting in him alone for salvation, we can be saved. And then three days later, he was resurrected, proving that his death was sufficient to pay for our sins. And that through faith in him, we too will be resurrected to spend eternity with God in heaven with Jesus, of course. So that's the message that we want to focus on.

Shea Houdmann

We talk about the death and resurrection of Christ are the I don't know if I'm exaggerating the two most important doctrines in the Christian faith. What happened in between? Fascinating, interesting to study. It's something the Bible doesn't say a whole lot about, so something we really shouldn't spend that much time worry about. So let's focus here on Good Friday and Easter on the death of Christ, the resurrection of Christ. What that means for us as followers of Christ that through faith in him we can be saved, have our sins forgiven and promised an eternal home in heaven.

Shea Houdmann

Hope our conversation has been helpful to you encouraging to you. Please hear us you should study these passages. There's no nothing in the Bible that's unimportant, but don't spend so much time focusing on what's unimportant that you miss what's truly important. That's the death and resurrection of Christ.

Shea Houdmann

So Jeff, Kevin, thank you for joining me for our conversation today. This is the Got Questions podcast on where was Christ for the three days between his death and resurrection? Got questions? The Bible has answers. And we'll help you find them.