

ASK “PASTOR M.”
FALL 2006 EDITION

by Jackson Morro
 (“Pastor M.”)

Question #1: As a child, I was always told (by my “meme and pepe”) that when Jesus died on the cross he had a mission: to go into hell and get the keys to heaven to let people in. My mom agrees with this having had done a lot of research on the matter.

My problem is, my current pastor says this is a fable, it never happened. My Bible study teacher says it wasn't hell, it was a holding place next to hell called paradise.

I thought heaven was paradise. What is your opinion and where (if possible) can I find the answer in scripture?

Thank you,

A.F., Westport, Mass.

Dear A.F.,

You have touched on a very interesting area of Jesus' ministry, His descent into the lower parts of the earth and the prison house of death (Sheol in OT Hebrew and Hades in NT Greek). There is currently some debate and, in my opinion, unnecessary confusion about what happened between the cross and the resurrection. I will do my best to clarify directly from scripture what actually happened.

Jesus' descent into the prison house of death is not a fable or myth. It was a real activity and necessary part of His total ministry. It was, as it were, an “interim” ministry between His earthly ministry and His current ministry as Risen Lord and Great High Priest.

1. Jesus tasted physical death for us. His physical body died on the cross and was placed in the tomb. He had foretold this would happen in Matthew 12:40. Jesus first of all allowed Himself to be subjected to being buried and “forgotten” by the world. It outwardly looked like it was “all over.” The Romans felt they had gotten rid of a troublemaker; the Pharisees and Sadducees nervously hoped He was gone; His own disciples lost hope and felt that perhaps God had forgotten or rejected Him (Luke 24:18-32).

Jesus willingly underwent the experience of people saying “He's gone – it's over,” the way we and our loved ones go through the experience of being taken away and seemingly lost to the world because of the separation of

physical death. But as we know, this physical burial was only an apparent but not real loss. Jesus went through this to show that all of us who are in Christ, like Him, are not “lost” or forgotten because of the phenomenon of physical death, but like Him, are active and alive even though the world sees us as “dead.” His bodily resurrection on Easter Sunday was confirmation of His (and our) victory.

2. In the spirit, Jesus descended into Hades or Sheol. This is an undeniable scriptural truth (1 Peter 3:18; Romans 10:7; Ephesians 4:9; Acts 2:24, 27).

Sheol, or Hades, at that time, had two basic compartments where humans who died could go – Gehenna, the place of torment where sinners and those who rejected God would go, and Paradise, or Abraham’s Bosom, where those who were counted righteous because they believed in the God of the Covenant, would go. Their righteousness by faith in the God of the Old Testament was good enough to keep them out of Gehenna, but not good enough to allow them into heaven and the direct presence of God (only the blood of Jesus could do that). Hence, the Old Testament saints like Abraham, David and Samuel went down to Sheol but were not in a place of torment, but rather in hopeful expectation of their full liberation by God’s Messiah. (The whole story of Luke 16:22-31 takes place in Sheol.)

3. Jesus descended into Hades of Sheol alive in the spirit (1 Peter 3:18). Jesus descended as a conquering victor. Unfortunately, some Christians teach He went down to hell in an unrighteous state and endured suffering and torment at Satan’s hand for three days and three nights because He had to suffer in hell to pay for our sins. This is an erroneous teaching. Jesus paid for everything on the cross (Colossians 2:14) and said, “It is finished” (tetelestai in the Greek – “paid in full, perfected”) (see John 19:30). He also said, “Father, into thy hands [not Satan’s] I commit My spirit.” (Luke 23:46) He had also told the repentant criminal on the cross next to Him, “This day [Friday afternoon] you will be with Me in Paradise [or Abraham’s Bosom].” (Luke 23:43) So Jesus descended into Hades in a position of spiritual righteousness, power and authority.

4. Jesus proclaimed His victory. We read in 1 Peter 4:6 where He “preached” to the disobedient spirits in prison from the time of Noah. This verse is sometimes translated Jesus “preached” and this could give a mistaken impression that He was giving some people or spirits a “second chance.” A more exact translation is that Jesus “proclaimed” His victory. The “proclamation” gives more of a sense of a loud shout that all in Sheol could hear that reverberated and shook every part of Sheol. Jesus proclaimed that His sacrifice had defeated death and hell.

5. Jesus publicly (before all who were in Sheol or Hades – including

Gehenna, Paradise and even Tartarus [the part of darkness reserved for fallen angels; 2 Peter 2:4]), took the keys of Death and Hades away from Satan and rendered him powerless toward all who are in Christ (Colossians 2:15, Hebrews 2:14, 15, Revelation 1:18). It was a very humiliating and shaming moment for Satan, a cruel, dictatorial taskmaster over his fallen angels, demons and lost souls, to be exposed as weak and spiritually defeated. This moment was a further fulfillment of Matthew 16:18 that the gates of hell would not prevail against Christ's Church. Jesus, the chief cornerstone of the Church is the first to pull open the gates of Hades and set the captives free.

6. Jesus then liberated the righteous OT saints in Paradise and brought them to heaven (Ephesians 4:8,9); He offered His blood on the altar in heaven (Hebrews 9:11-14) and the spirits of the OT saints entered heaven. Jesus was then bodily raised from the dead on Easter morning.

Because of space limitations, I've had to deal with this subject here in brief form. I do intend to treat this subject in depth in a future book entitled *The Interim* as soon as my current pastoral duties allow! God bless you, Angie.

Question #2: My question is a tough one. My nephew keeps asking me, "Where did God come from? How did He start? Who created Him?" What should I tell him?

- Mike, Rome, NY

Indeed, Mike, that is a tough question – God's origin. I remember several years ago, watching an interview on PBS when British journalist David Frost was interviewing evangelist Billy Graham. Frost asked Rev. Graham what are some questions he was going to ask God when he finally saw Him in heaven. Graham replied, "I think my first question will be, 'God, where did YOU come from?'" So, if Billy Graham still wonders, you can see the depth of the mystery (for us in time) of God's "origin."

We know from scripture that God is "holy" – He is "The holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 43:14). The very quality of "holiness" is "transcendence" – being above and beyond created limitations. "Having a beginning" is a limitation of creatures. God Himself declares, "I, even I, am the Lord; and there is no savior beside Me... Even from eternity I am He." (Isaiah 43:11,13) In the Psalms it is written, "Even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God." (Psalm 90:2)

I think one of the best concepts God has given us in scripture concerning His being is when Jesus said, "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even

so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself.” (John 5:26) In Exodus, God revealed Himself to Moses as “I AM,” or “I Am that I Am,” or “I Am because I Am.” Because we personally have experienced a beginning we tend to think about all things as having a beginning. As humans, we received our biological existence through our parents, who received theirs through our grandparents, etc. etc. We may drive a 1997 Chevrolet, which had an origin in 1997 but still exists today. This is knowledge based on our experience. But God tells us about Himself in terms of revelation, rather than in terms of our experience. Revelation is God telling us about His personal experience of Himself which is beyond our experience. He tells us that He has life in Himself, in fact He is Life. He didn’t get life from someone else, He always had it.

So who made God? Nobody made God, because then He wouldn’t be God. If somebody made God, then the one who made God would be God.

Where did God come from? How did God start? Well, God exists in a condition called “eternity” or “forever.” “Forever” is easy enough for us to grasp when we think of the future because we now enjoy life and being and can picture the possibility of this experience continuing and, in fact, as Christians, we know intuitively in our spirit, life will last forever. It can be more difficult thinking of “forever” in terms of the past because our own experience is that we ourselves had a beginning. But this is where God is different from us – Our forever goes forward to the future and God’s forever also stretches out to the past as well as forward to the future. This is truly the best way to approach this subject and trust that God will give your nephew the spiritually intuitive knowledge that is required.

The human race itself has grappled with this question of God’s origin throughout its existence. This is why we have all the different mythological attempts by various cultures to explain the origin of God. But the true answer has been given us by revelation from God Himself. And we have a stirring deep within ourselves for eternity because God has also set eternity in our heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11). (In our heart, not our mind.)

When talking to your nephew:

1. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide him into spiritual understanding of God’s being.
2. Talk about how nobody made God because then He wouldn’t be God. God is the “boss” and He doesn’t have a “boss.”
3. Talk about “forever.” Ask your nephew what he thinks “forever” means. Then explain how “forever” is both future and past.

Try not to make the conversation just one way, but ask him what he thinks and try to help him develop the basic idea of God’s eternity. I think he’ll

“get it” and then when we get to heaven, like Billy Graham, we’ll get the rest.

God bless you, Mike.