

"He descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead"

Biblical Evidence 1 Peter 3:18-19

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, ***he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits.***"

This passage provides a scriptural basis for Christ's descent into hell. It explains that after his death, Jesus, made alive in the Spirit, proclaimed the message of salvation to the spirits in prison (understood as the righteous dead). This action affirms that Christ's redemptive work extends to all times and places, offering salvation to all who have died in faith.

Church Fathers

St. Irenaeus: "***Christ descended into the lower parts of the earth, to the patriarchs, to bring them the good news of salvation***" (Against Heresies, IV.27.2).

St. Irenaeus emphasizes the salvific purpose of Christ's descent into hell. By descending to the realm of the dead, Christ proclaimed salvation to the righteous who had died before his coming. This act fulfilled the promises made to the patriarchs and prophets, demonstrating that salvation was now available to all, both living and dead. It highlights the completeness and inclusiveness of Christ's redemptive work.

St. John Chrysostom: "*Hell took a body, and discovered God. It took earth, and encountered Heaven. It took what it saw, and was overcome by what it did not see*" (Easter Homily).

St. John Chrysostom poetically illustrates the paradox of Christ's descent into hell. Hell, which represents death and separation from God, was confronted with the divine presence. Christ's body, which hell received, was also the incarnation of God. This encounter signifies the defeat of hell and death, as they could not withstand the divine power and glory. Christ's descent signifies his triumph over the powers of darkness.

Saints

St. Faustina had visions of Christ's descent into hell, where He brought salvation to the just who had died before His coming: "*Today, bring to Me all devout and faithful souls, and immerse them in the ocean of My mercy. These souls brought Me consolation on the way of the Cross; they were that drop of consolation in the midst of an ocean of bitterness*" (Divine Mercy in My Soul, 1224).

St. Faustina's visions offer a mystical and compassionate perspective on Christ's descent into hell. She portrays Christ's mercy extending to the just souls awaiting redemption. This act of mercy reflects Christ's boundless love and the fulfillment of his promise to save all who have lived faithfully. It underscores the universality of Christ's salvific mission and his deep empathy for human suffering.

Catechism (CCC 631-658)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains that Christ's descent into hell signifies His victory over death and His liberating of the just. It indicates that Jesus truly died and entered the realm of the dead, but as the Savior bringing salvation to the righteous.

According to the CCC, Christ's descent into hell represents *the final act of his redemptive mission* before his resurrection. By entering the realm of the dead, he conquered death and liberated those who had awaited their Redeemer. This act is essential to the Paschal Mystery, showing that Christ's victory over sin and death extends to all humanity, transcending time and space.

Evidence of Jesus' Resurrection: Old Testament Prophecies and Historical Documents

Hosea 6:2: "After two days he will revive us; *on the third day he will restore us*, that we may live in his presence."

This passage is seen as a prophetic hint of the resurrection, emphasizing the significance of the third day.

Jonah 1:17: "Now the Lord provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."

Jesus Himself referenced Jonah's three days in the fish as a sign of His own death and resurrection in Matthew 12:40.

Psalms 16:10: "For you will *not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.*"

Early Christians, including the apostles Peter and Paul (Acts 2:27; 13:35), interpreted this verse as a prophecy of Jesus' resurrection.

Isaiah 53:10-11:

"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, *he will see the light of life and be satisfied.*"

This passage from the Suffering Servant song is seen as foretelling the resurrection, indicating life after suffering.

Evidence of Jesus' Resurrection: Historical Documents

1. Flavius Josephus (Antiquities of the Jews)

There are two references to Jesus in Josephus' "Antiquities of the Jews." The most famous one is known as the Testimonium Flavianum:

"Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day." (Antiquities, 18.3.3)

2. Tacitus (Annals): Tacitus, a Roman historian, wrote about the persecution of Christians by Nero, mentioning Jesus' execution:

"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular." (Annals, 15.44)

While Tacitus does not explicitly mention the resurrection, "*a most mischievous superstition*" is often interpreted as referring to the Christian belief in Jesus' resurrection.

Evidence from Church Fathers

1. St. Ignatius of Antioch (35 – 108 AD)

Writing: Ignatius wrote his letters, including the one to the Trallians, around 107 AD, while he was on his way to Rome for martyrdom.

Comment: *"He was truly raised from the dead, His Father having raised Him; and in the same way His Father will raise us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not have true life."* (Letter to the Trallians, 9:2)

2. St. Irenaeus of Lyons(130 – 202 AD)

Writing: Irenaeus wrote "Against Heresies" around 180-190 AD.

Comment: *"The Christ suffered, and He really was born, and underwent this death; and He really did rise from the dead; and He was taken up into heaven. But if these things are as you say, the Resurrection and the Ascension cannot be really as they are described; for the Holy Spirit has not descended, and the gathering of the church has not taken place, and the Paraclete has not manifested the gift of tongues, and the prophets have not yet spoken, since all these gifts must come from that which is perfect, as St. Paul declares: 'For if that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.'"* (Against Heresies, Book 3, Chapter 3, Section 1)

3. St. Cyril of Jerusalem(313 – 386 AD)

Writing: Cyril delivered his "Catechetical Lectures" around 350 AD.

Comment: *"But He arose on the third day, and having appeared to His disciples, and fulfilled all things written concerning Him, He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father."* (Catechetical Lecture 4, Paragraph 10)

4. St. Augustine of Hippo(354 – 430 AD)

Writing: Augustine wrote "The City of God" between 413 and 426 AD.

Comment: *"For He rose again the third day, the time that He had signified when He said, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Now He was speaking of the temple of His body, of which the apostle says, 'The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.'"* (The City of God, Book 22, Chapter 5)

5. St. Jerome(347 – 420 AD)

Writing: Jerome wrote his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew around 398 AD.

Comment: "*For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale; so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*" (Commentary on Matthew 12:40)