

We started the discussion following up on the beliefs of the Mormons and The Jehovah Witnesses.

The next discussion was about the phrase “he descended into Hell”. We continued discussing when Catholics say Jesus “descended into hell”, they do not mean the place of eternal damnation. The word “hell” in the Creed translates the ancient term Sheol (Hebrew) or Hades (Greek) — meaning the abode of the dead, not the hell of the damned. It refers to the place where the souls of the dead were waiting before Jesus’ resurrection — both the righteous and the unrighteous but separated. (I have a more detailed handout on this for the group). Michael mentioned the "Bardo" (Tibetan for "intermediate state") which refers to several concepts, most notably the Tibetan Buddhist intermediate states between death and rebirth.

Richard mentioned The **Council of Jerusalem** (around A.D. 49 or 50). It is considered the **first council of the Church**. It is described in Acts 15:1–35 and mentioned in Galatians 2:1–1. The council decided that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised or take on the full Mosaic Law. Instead, they should:

- Avoid food sacrificed to idols.
- Abstain from blood.
- Not eat the meat of strangled animals.
- Refrain from sexual immorality.

Key Figures in the council were: **St. Peter**: Spoke about God giving the Holy Spirit to Gentiles without requiring circumcision. **St. Paul and Barnabas**: Shared how God worked among Gentiles through their mission. **St. James** Offered the final judgment.

The rest of our meeting tonight was **UNLIKE** many other meetings. We had our own Council of Nicaea gathering. There were two main topics discussed.

1. **AUTHORS**: The authors of the Gospels,

Tradition: All four Gospels **are rooted in apostolic authority — either written by apostles (Matthew, John) or close companions of apostles** (Mark with Peter, Luke with Paul).

Scholars today: Acknowledge the traditional names but often see the Gospels as products of communities that preserved and wrote down the apostles’ teachings under those names.

I have a handout for discussion for our next meeting

2. **VIRGIN BIRTH:** The writings of St. Paul and his views on the virgin birth.

Paul emphasizes that Jesus is both truly human (born of a woman, descended from David) and truly divine (Son of God). While he doesn't spell out the Virgin Birth, his language is fully compatible with it and was understood that way by the early Church. **I have a handout for discussion for our next meeting.**

3. **RESURRECTION:** The writings of St. Paul and his views on the resurrection versus the apostles.

- Paul stresses that the resurrection is not an optional belief — it's the foundation of the gospel. Corinthians 15:1–4
- Eyewitness Testimony 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 Paul lists appearances of the risen Christ: to Peter (Cephas), the Twelve, more than 500 brothers and sisters, James, all the apostles, and “last of all, to me.” He roots faith in historical witness and not just spiritual experience.
- The Nature of the Resurrection Body 1 Corinthians 15:35–49 The body is transformed: imperishable, glorious, spiritual — yet still real. “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust [Adam], we will also bear the image of the man of heaven [Christ].”

For Paul, the resurrection of Jesus is:

- Historical (witnessed by many, including Paul himself).
- Theological (proof of Jesus' divinity, the basis of salvation).
- Eschatological (guarantee of our own resurrection and the renewal of creation).
- Paul stresses the **theological, transformative, and universal meaning** of the resurrection.
- The apostles stress the **historical and bodily reality** of the resurrection. The resurrection is **physical** and **real in history**—not just a vision or spiritual experience. Proof that Jesus is the Messiah and that death has been conquered.
- Commission: the apostles are *witnesses* (“This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses” – Acts 2:32).

Our next meeting will be October 7th (thanks for pointing that out, Michael!). We will discuss the topic of The Jewish views on the afterlife based on the email from Rich from Prof. Levine. Here is the link.

<https://momentmag.com/is-there-life-after-death/#levine>.