

Creeds of the Kehillah ~ Part 8

The Apostles' Creed ~ Part 7

This post will continue our closer look at the **Apostles' Creed** to learn more about what we affirm that we believe.

AND IN JESUS CHRIST, GOD'S ONLY SON, OUR LORD:

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

On the third day he rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again to judge the living and the dead.

HE DESCENDED INTO HELL. ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD

"If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there" ~ Psalm 139:8 (CJB). ¹ The message of the Bible is that death is not the end. Death does not defeat **God's** promise. Death is not separation from **God**. In **Yeshua**, **God** has dwelt among the dead. The Living has embraced the dead. Death has been incorporated into life.

Several of the **Brit Hadashah** authors describe **Yeshua's** death as a descent into the world of the dead.

"This is why it says, "After he went up into the heights, he led captivity captive, and he gave gifts to mankind." ⁹ Now this phrase, "he went up," what can it mean if not that he first went down into the lower parts, that is, the earth?" ~ Ephesians. 4:8–9.

¹⁸ For the Messiah himself died for sins, once and for all, a righteous person on behalf of unrighteous people, so that he might bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but brought to life by the Spirit; ¹⁹ and in this form, he went and made a proclamation to the imprisoned spirits. ~ 1 Kefa 3:18–19.

Therefore, God raised Him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name; ¹⁰ that in honor of the name given Yeshua, every knee will bow - in heaven, on earth, and under the earth - ¹¹ and every tongue will acknowledge that Yeshua the Messiah is Adonai - to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9–11 (emphasis added).

The dead are not lost forever. They are not condemned to silence. In **Yeshua**, ***the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who listen will come to life.*** ~ John 5:25. Because of Him, the emptiness of death has been filled with **God's** fullness.

The **Son of God** has taken our nature to Himself. He allows our fallen nature to drag Him down. He descends to the very abyss of the human condition. He traces our plight right back to the root and takes hold of us there. He embraces our humanity at the point of its total collapse into nothingness.

Because He shares our nature, He can fall with us into death; because He is the Son of God, he can fill death with his presence so that the grave becomes a source of life. In **Yeshua**, the dead are united to **God** and are alive in the strength of that union. The resurrection is not just an isolated miracle that happens to **Yeshua**. It

¹ All scripture quotations are from the Complete Jewish Bible.

happens to us - to Adam and Eve, to me, to the human family. As **Yeshua** rises, the whole of humanity rises with Him.

In the ancient church, the message of **Yeshua's** triumph over death produced some peculiar attitudes toward the dead. **Believers** would assemble for prayer in tombs. They would worship **Yeshua** among the bones of the dead. **Believers** would raise the bodies of martyrs in the air and parade them through the streets like trophies. At funerals, they would gaze lovingly on the dead and sing psalms of praise over their bodies. Such behavior shocked their pagan neighbors. According to Roman law, the dead had to be buried miles away from the city not to be contaminated. But **Believers** placed the dead right at the center of their public gatherings. The earliest church buildings were just big mausoleums erected over the remains of the martyrs. In the words of John Chrysostom, "*tombs with life, tombs that give voice.*"

When new **Believers** were preparing for Baptism, they would gather in the presence of the dead, and there they would receive instruction in the ancient catechism. Even today, the **Apostles' Creed** makes the most sense when you imagine the words echoing among the bones of the catacombs. The creed is marked everywhere by a courageous acceptance of the facts of human mortality, coupled with straightforward confidence in the ultimate triumph of life - a triumph that has already happened once and for all in the person of **Yeshua**.

Where others see only defeat, **Yeshua's** followers see a paradoxical victory. Where others see only contamination, we see the sanctification of human nature. Where others see only darkness and despair, we see broken gates. Where others see an end, we see new beginnings. Death is serious: but not as severe as life. It has been placed in the broader context of meaning. We bury our dead under the sign of the cross. We lay our bones to rest not in horror but peace. The dominant sound at a **Believer's** funeral is not mourning but the singing of praise.

Death is no longer the ultimate power in this world. In the ancient church, the martyrs were seen as extraordinary proof of that. In the death and resurrection of **Yeshua**, death itself was altered.

By nature, we are all on the way from birth to death. But by grace, we are traveling in the opposite direction. The **Believer's** life is a mystery that moves from death to birth. In the beginning, we are baptized into **Yeshua's** death; and at the end, we are born into the resurrection life. We are born as though dying; we die as those who are being born. ²

Death, where is your victory?

Death, where is your sting?

~ 1 Cor. 15:55 (CJB)

In my next post, we will continue to unpack this second article of faith that **Yeshua is Adonai** in the **Apostle's Creed**.

² The Apostles' Creed: A Guide to the Ancient Catechism.