

## **He descended to the dead**

This is probably the best translation of the phrase, which in older versions read "descended into hell". All sorts of doctrines emerged in the medieval period, such as the so-called "harrowing of hell", where Jesus descended to the realm of the damned to inform them just what they were going to be missing. However, the Greek word used in the oldest versions of the creed is not *gehenna*, the place where "the devouring worm never dies and the fire is not quenched", which was in fact the name of a valley outside the walls of Jerusalem which was used as a rubbish dump in Jesus' day, and where the Romans used to burn the bodies of crucified criminals. The word used in the creed is *hades*, the Greek term for the world of the dead, the underworld which lay beneath this one. The phrase thus means no more or less than that Jesus died. That he was truly dead and not faking. That, having taken it upon himself to offer his life as a sacrifice for the sin of the whole world, he did the job properly and saw it through to the end.