

Christ preached to the spirits in prison (1 Peter 3:18-22)

written by Alfred Persson | September 9, 2023



18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit (ζωοποιηθεῖς δὲ πνεύματι) :

19 By which also (ἐν ᾧ καὶ) he went and preached (2784 κηρύσσω kerusso) unto the spirits in prison;

20 Which sometime were disobedient (544 ἀπειθέω apeitheo), when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. (1 Pet. 3:18-4:1 KJV)

Many claim the word “preach” means “proclaim doom”. Why Christ would go to a prison in hades and proclaim doom to spirits who surely would have figured that out, is never explained.

Its also inconsistent with Christ’s mission:

The same precise word for preach (2784 κηρύσσω kerusso) is also used in these two verses:

*18 “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim (2784 κηρύσσω kerusso) liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed;
19 To proclaim (2784 κηρύσσω kerusso) the acceptable year of the LORD.”
(Lk. 4:18-19 NKJ)*

Wouldn’t proclaiming (2784 κηρύσσω kerusso) liberty to the captives be more consistent with Christ’s mission than proclaiming doom?

Did Jesus proclaim doom to us?

When physically alive as the Ark was being prepared, the “spirits in prison” disobeyed Noah’s preaching:

who formerly were disobedient(544 ἀπειθέω apeitheo), when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. (1 Pet. 3:20 NKJ)

544 ἀπειθέω apeitheo {ap-i-theh’-o}

Meaning: 1) not to allow one’s self to be persuaded 1a) to refuse or withhold belief 1b) to refuse belief and obedience 2) not to comply with.-Strong’s Concordance

Why couldn’t they believe Noah and obey his preaching? They didn’t believe God would forgive the defilement of the “image of God”, its corruption with the “image of angels”.

There is good reason for disbelief. Its clear God does not like mixed breeding:

‘You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you. (Lev. 19:19 NKJ Compare Dt. 22:9, 11))

Ignorance of God makes room for divine forgiveness (1 Tim. 1:13; Lev. 5:18; Ez. 45:20; Lk. 12:48) in the “age to come” (Mt. 12:30-32).

As these disembodied “men of renown” (Gen. 6:4) were a “special case

Christ made a special trip proclaiming (2784 κηρύσσω kerusso) “liberty to the captives” (Lk. 4:18) because they were not evil, they simply couldn’t believe Noah’s preaching God would forgive their “mixed breeding”:

Formerly they were disobedient. Not when Christ Triumphant appeared clothed in Shekhina glory. They responded to Christ’s preaching giving “the answer of a good conscience towards God” just as did the Church, which reminded Peter of the “like-figure” (499 ἀντίτυπος antitupos) of Baptism: “Buried with Christ and raised up with Him to new life” (Rom. 6:4; Eph. 2:3-7; Col. 2:12-14) through the resurrection power of Christ (1 Pet. 3:21-22). Just as the Church is saved by responding to Christ’s preaching with new life, so were these “spirits in prison.” Christ led them “captives in His train” (Eph. 4:8-10), receiving “gifts” from the formerly rebellious for they were glad the LORD God could now dwell among them (Ps. 68:18).

18 You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive; You have received gifts among men, Even from the rebellious, That the LORD God might dwell there.

19 Blessed be the Lord, Who daily loads us with benefits, The God of our salvation! Selah

20 Our God is the God of salvation; And to GOD the Lord belong escapes from death. (Ps. 68:18-20 NKJ)

8 Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men.”

9 (Now this, “He ascended “– what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.) (Eph. 4:8-10 NKJ)

Therefore, ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι is a “dative of reference” indicating the Holy Spirit is the sphere of existence which enveloped Christ’s human soul (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:31) reviving it (LXX ἐζωοποίησάς Ps. 70:20; Is. 57:15; 2 Cor. 13:4) and ‘in that sphere of the Holy Spirit’ (ἐν ᾧ καὶ) Christ Triumphant (Ac. 2:24; Eph. 4:8-10; Heb. 4:14) went and preached proclaiming (2784 κηρύσσω kerusso) “liberty to the captives (Lk. 4:18) “spirits in prison” who “could not believe” (544 ἀπειθέω apeitheo) Noah’s preaching and so “disobeyed” it.

The antithesis: Jesus was “put to death in the flesh” (by the hand of man), His soul went to Hades/Sheol (Ac. 2:24), but then Jesus is quickened (by the Holy Spirit).

The anthesis is precise because “death of the flesh” is not annihilation as the JW’s suppose.

The Holy Spirit formed a protective life strengthening sphere of power and lifegiving energy around the human soul of Jesus, and “in that sphere of the Spirit” ἐν ᾧ καὶ (1 Pet. 3:19 BYZ), He proclaimed liberty to the

captive spirits in prison.

According to Bible revelation, human souls are weak when unclothed (2 Cor. 5:2-4) in death, only when clothed in the resurrection of the body do both become “immortal” and powerful (1 Cor. 15:42-53). Therefore, as Jesus’ soul was truly human, it was too weak to endure the pangs of Sheol and proclaim liberty to the captives.

Therefore, in Hades Jesus soul was “quickened in the sphere of the Holy Spirit, revived and strengthened”. Then emanating the Shechinah glory of God, Christ Triumphant descends to the lowest hells fully protected from all harm, in brilliant light without variation (Isa. 9:2-3; Jas. 1:17; 1 Tim. 6:14-16), proclaiming liberty to the captive spirits in prison.

The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. (Isa. 9:2 NKJ)

Christ proclaimed liberty to the captives to the glorious end of His earthly ministry, in glorious Triumph over Satan and Death.

45 And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

47 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.

48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.

49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

...

55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:45-49, 55-58 NKJ)

Then Peter returns to the theme of “Christ preaching liberty to the dead”. This time to a different group of unsaved humans, dead folks just like those speaking evil of Christians and mocking the gospel to Peter’s church:

4 In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.

5 They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.

6 For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead,

that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. (1 Pet. 4:4-6 NKJ)

End Note

At Christianforums.com a poster suggested:

“These spirits in prison refers to:

- 1. the deceased patriarchs and the Old Testament saints. (Papists’ Limbus)*
- 2. the people who died in Noah’s flood a long time ago.*
- 3. those who are alive but spiritually dead. (Amplified Bible)*
- 4. the good Christians who died as martyrs.*
- 5. everyone who is dead but all will head to heaven eventually. (Origen, universal salvation)*
- 6. to the general dead. Some to heaven; others to hell.*
- 7. to a selected (or elected) group of dead people who never heard of the gospel when alive but would believe it if they heard it.*

I think options 6 and 7 are most likely.”

None of those options are correct if we focus on the facts given by Peter and Scripture.

The “spirits in prison” were “disobedient...in the days of Noah when the ark was a preparing” (1 Pet. 3:19-20).

That rules out #1, the patriarchs and OT saints weren’t alive then.

#2 and #3 are ruled out because “unregenerate humans” or “spiritually dead” are never called “spirits”.

The tripartite nature of man, “body soul spirit” (1 Thess. 5:23) came into existence when Divine Breath was “breathed into” “dust”(Job 33:4) and the body and soul became animated by spirit (Gen. 2:7). “Soul” often stands for the whole person (Gen. 12:5; 17:14) and “is the immaterial person himself”. When the “soul” becomes weak in animating spirit it diminishes into a “shade or shadow” (**07496** רָפָא rapha’ Is, 26:19) of its former self. But when it is “revived” it is said “his spirit returned” (Gen. 45:27). But when a person’s life is preserved it is his “soul” that “lives” (Jer. 38:17-17). Jesus’ human soul went to hades when He physically died on the cross (Ps. 16:10; Ac. 2:27), OT saints “under the altar” are not normally called “spirits” (Rev. 6:9).

When a believer is “regenerated” he partakes in divine nature (2 Pt. 1:4), that changes their souls, infused with Holy Spirit (“born from above” Jn. 3:3, 7 NRS) they become “new creatures” (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) and can rightly be called “spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb. 12:23).

They can't be either the Nephilim fallen angels or their contemporaries the "sons of God" (Gen. 6:4) who left their habitation to sin with women (Gen. 6:2), because these fallen angels either are in the Abyss (Rev. 9:1ff) or tartarus (Pet. 2:4) and won't be forgiven, and they know they are damned forever.

They both however sired the "men of renown" (Titans of Greek myth, perhaps builders of ancient megalithic sites now being discovered above and under the ocean). These "men of renown" were hybrid human-angel "men". Disembodied, that hybrid nature would make them "spirits" in death.

#4) Christians didn't exist in the Days of Noah to end up as "spirits in prison" and they don't go to prison when they die, they go to "paradise" (Lk. 23:43) which is in "third heaven" (2 Cor. 12:3) beneath the altar of God (Rev. 6:9).

#5) Universalism is incorrect, but even if it were true that wouldn't identify these "spirits in prison" as those physically alive when Noah's Ark was being built.

#6) The dead in paradise/heaven are never called "spirits in prison" in Scripture.

#7) These "disobeyed" Noah's preaching, so #7 is incorrect. "Sometime were disobedient" (1 Pt. 3:20) denotes disobedience that arises from "disbelief", they couldn't "believe" (544 ἀπειθέω apeitheo) Noah's preaching so they disobeyed it:

544 ἀπειθέω apeitheo {ap-i-theh'-o}

Meaning: 1) not to allow one's self to be persuaded 1a) to refuse or withhold belief 1b) to refuse belief and obedience 2) not to comply with

In Genesis 6 Noah, his family, "sons of God" angels, "Nephilim" (fallen ones) and "men of renown" are mentioned. So the "spirits in prison" must be one of these. They wouldn't be Noah and the 7 souls saved with him. They can't be either the Nephilim fallen angels or their contemporaries the "sons of God" (Gen. 6:4) who left their habitation to sin with women (Gen. 6:2), both evil and good angels siring the "men of renown" (Titans of Greek myth, perhaps builders of ancient megalithic sites now being discovered above and under the ocean). These "men of renown" were hybrid human-angel "men". Disembodied, that hybrid nature would make them "spirits" in death.

Genesis 6:4 doesn't suggest these "men of renown" were wicked. Peter says they couldn't believe and so disobeyed Noah's preaching. Its likely they couldn't believe God would forgive the corruption of the image of God they represented. If you study the OT's prohibition against "breeding with another kind" (Lev. 19:19), they had a solid reason "not to believe Noah".

As the "men of renown" who died physically in the flood went to a

“prison” in hades, segregated from other human dead, they became the “spirits in prison” Christ preached liberty to. They are the human dead Christ took with Him as He ascended, depositing them with the other saints in paradise or “Abraham’s bosom” (Lk. 16:22; 32:43; 2 Cor. 12:2, 4; Rev. 6:9).