

# CGYG/LIFE Bible Study

## 1 Peter 3:13-22

*What does it mean when Peter says that Christ "went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built"? (1 Peter 3:19-20)*

*A difficult passage, with various interpretations...*

# Questions that need answering

## 1. Who are the "spirits in prison"?

- fallen angels?
- unbelievers who died?
- Old Testament believers who died?

## 2. What did Christ preach?

- the Gospel?
- a message of judgment/call for repentance?
- the completion of His redemptive work?
- final condemnation for those opposing Him?
- a second chance after death for salvation?

## 3. When did He preach?

- in the days of Noah?
- some time between His death and His resurrection?
- after His resurrection?

# Five commonly held views

1. Christ "in spirit" was preaching through Noah in the days when Noah was building the ark. Through Noah, He preached the coming of God's righteous judgment and the need for repentance, to disobedient people who were living on the earth then, but who are now "spirits in prison" (i.e. people in hell)

- this view has been held by some at least since Augustine
- held by some (many?) evangelicals, including John Piper

# Five commonly held views

2. After Christ died, He went and preached to people in hell, to offer them a second chance of salvation

- not really a tenable option, if you believe the testimony of the rest of Scripture about judgment after death

e.g. Luke 16:26; Hebrews 9:27

3. After Christ died, He went and preached to people in hell, proclaiming to them that He had triumphed and that their condemnation was final

- the orthodox Lutheran view

# Five commonly held views

4. After Christ died, He went and proclaimed release to people who had repented before they died in the Flood, and led them out of their imprisonment (in Purgatory) into heaven

- a view commonly held among Roman Catholics since Robert Bellarmine (1586)

## Five commonly held views

5. After Christ died (or after He rose but before His Ascension), He traveled to hell and proclaimed His triumph over fallen angels who had been imprisoned there after sinning by marrying human women before the Flood

- probably the dominant view in modern times
- held by many evangelicals, including John MacArthur
- this view argues that the "sons of God" who married the "daughters of men" in Genesis 6 were angels, and that they were imprisoned for this act of disobedience
  - based on stories in book of 1 Enoch

# More about View #1

## 1. Who are the “spirits in prison”?

- people in Noah’s day who were disobedient → died in the flood and are now “spirits in prison” (i.e. in hell)

## 2. What (and how) did Christ preach?

- Christ “in spirit” preached through Noah (as He also did through the OT prophets – 1 Peter 1:11)
- a message of coming judgment and a call for repentance
- Noah was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5)

## 3. When did He preach?

- “when God waited patiently [i.e. for people to repent] in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”

# More about View #1

Wayne Grudem paraphrases the passage as follows:

*"In the spiritual realm of existence Christ went and preached through Noah to those who are now spirits in the prison of hell. This happened when they formerly disobeyed, when the patience of God was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built."*

# More about View #1

- Overall, View #1 seems to fit best with the context and message of 1 Peter
  - A number of parallels between Noah & his family and Peter's readers emerge:
    - Noah & his family were a small minority of believers surrounded by a large number of hostile unbelievers, as were Peter's readers
    - Noah was righteous in an unrighteous world, as Peter's readers are called to be
    - Noah witnessed boldly to unbelievers around him, as Peter's readers are called to do

# More about View #1

- Overall, View #1 seems to fit best with the context and message of 1 Peter
  - A number of parallels between Noah & his family and Peter's readers emerge:
    - God waited patiently for repentance in the days of Noah, but finally brought about the promised judgment; in the same way, He was waiting patiently for repentance in Peter's day (2 Peter 3:9), but promised that judgment would ultimately come (1 Peter 4:5; 2 Peter 3:10)
    - Noah was rescued in the Ark with only a few others; likewise, Peter's readers would certainly be saved, though few in numbers, in Christ

# Summary

- In this view (Christ preaching through Noah), the passage functions to
  - Encourage Peter's readers to bear witness boldly in the midst of hostile unbelievers (as Noah did)
  - Reassure Peter's readers that though they be few, God will surely save them (as He did Noah)
  - Remind them of the certainty of final judgment and Christ's ultimate triumph over the forces of evil which oppose them

# References

- Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, in *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), pp. 203-239.
- For more detailed discussion and notes, visit the Resources section of the CGYG website:

*[www.cgygfellowship.com](http://www.cgygfellowship.com)*