

# The "Spirits in Prison" An Analysis of 1 Peter 3:18-20

by  
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**Note:** In discussing the issues and arguments here, there is considerable analysis of the Greek in which Peter wrote. However, the paper is written in such a way that a reader who has not studied Koine Greek can follow the arguments and conclusions without trouble.

## Introduction

There is some degree of presumption in any attempt to analyze 1 Peter 3:18-20, a passage A. T. Robertson called "the most disputed passage in the Epistle and almost in the New Testament."<sup>1</sup> Problems exist in almost every phrase, and the opinions of the scholars have varied greatly. Nevertheless, another examination is deemed necessary by this writer. The reason is not that this paper has a new interpretation to proffer but that the interpretation herein espoused as best has not been represented in any of the most recent literature.<sup>2</sup> It is proper, therefore, to reexamine the passage with a view to ascertaining whether there is sufficient evidence for this older interpretation.<sup>3</sup>

## A Question of Hermeneutics

There are at least two ways a passage such as 1 Peter 3:18-20 may be studied: (1) one may simply list, organize, or categorize all the views which have been set forth throughout the history of interpretation,<sup>4</sup> or (2) he may seek simply to interpret the passage, organize the

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- 1 A. T. Robertson, *Epochs in the Life of Simon Peter* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 283.
  - 2 For example: Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974); J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper and Row, 1969); Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan and Company, Ltd., 1947); Francis Wright Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961); Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964); Martin H. Scharlemann, "'He Descended into Hell': An Interpretation of I Peter 3:18-20," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 27 (February, 1956):81-94; C. E. B. Cranfield, "The Interpretation of I Peter iii. 19 and iv. 6," *The Expository Times* 69 (September, 1958):369-372.
  - 3 A statement of this interpretation and a partial list of its exponents are given in section two of this paper, "The Interpretation Set Forth in this Paper."
  - 4 A very brief summary is given by Charles Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), pp. 273-274. A more thorough historical study is given by Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968), IV:366-368. The most complete treatment of this type is William Kelly, *The Preaching to the Spirits in Prison* (London: F. C. Rice, n.d.), pp. 1-139. It

evidence, as he sees it, for the interpretation taken, and deal with objections to that interpretation. The latter approach is followed in this paper.

The question of singular significance, therefore, which must be addressed at the outset is that of methodology. What are the sound principles of hermeneutics by which one seeks to interpret a passage like this one? The following are suggested:

### Step 1

One must determine what *type* of passage it is with which he is dealing. Is it a systematic passage wherein some doctrine is being developed? Is it a hortatory passage? A descriptive passage? Concerning 1 Peter 3:18-20, the following facts seem clear: (1) It occurs within a general context in which Peter is encouraging his readers during a time of persecution (cf. 3:13-17; 4:1-5). (2) In so encouraging them, he offers an example of suffering: Jesus Christ himself (v. 18). (3) What, though, does a preaching activity of Christ--regardless of the questions of when and to whom he preached--have to do with the merits of his life as an example of suffering? The answer to this question is hardly obvious no matter which interpretation of the passage one prefers. But this very dilemma, existing as it does for all interpretations, points to one conclusion: verses 19ff are a side remark. Peter is certainly not systematically developing some point, some doctrine, major or minor, of theology. The passage is thrice removed from such a possibility: first, it is found within a practical and not a theological section; second, it is found within an example or illustration and is not part of the address *per se* that Peter gives to the practical problem; and third, it is a side remark even to that illustration. These facts absolutely demand the application of the following hermeneutical principle:

### Step 2

The principle of the analogy of faith must be applied. Bernard Ramm cites the following definition for this principle: "The constant and perpetual harmony of Scripture in the fundamental points of faith and practice deduced from those passages in which they were discussed by the inspired penmen either directly or expressly, and in clear, plain, and intelligible language."<sup>5</sup> Ramm goes on to state that "in actual practice the analogy of faith expresses itself in several corollary maxims: e.g., the obscure passage must always give way to the clear one; no doctrine may be founded on one verse or a few miscellaneous verses; . . ."<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 3:18-20 is certainly an obscure, incidental passage. It cannot teach a doctrine found nowhere else in Scripture. In particular: (1) it cannot teach that salvation is offered to evil angels or to people who have died, and (2) it is most unlikely that it would

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is considered of no little significance to me that after the most exhaustive discussion of all interpretations, Kelly defends the one presented in this paper.

5 Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Boston: W. A. Wilde Co., 1956), p. 126, citing T. Horne, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, I:342.

6 Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, p. 127.

mention as an aspect of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ--in short, his whole redemptive work--a ministry to evil angels or dead people never developed elsewhere in a systematic passage.<sup>7</sup>

The consideration of the analogy of faith with regard to the interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20 is of the utmost importance. Many mutually exclusive interpretations are grammatically and lexicologically possible, and apart from the analogy of faith, what criteria can guide one in making interpretive decisions? The hermeneutical principle of the analogy of faith must be the primary guide and final court of appeal in determining the meaning of a passage such as this one. The modern commentators (footnote 2) have abandoned this proper methodology almost to a man and seem to have been guided solely by imagination or an untenable interpretation of Genesis 6. But deficient hermeneutics is by no means limited to modern times. On the basis of this passage and a few other isolated, incidental, nonsystematic passages the Catholics and Lutherans have for centuries erected the doctrine of a *descensus ad inferos*.

The crucial question, however, is simply this: Is the evidence--grammatical and lexicological--which can be adduced from this passage so clear and compelling, permitting no possible alternative interpretation, that one must conclude Peter is here teaching a doctrine (some preaching ministry of Christ) found nowhere else in Scripture? This paper asserts a negative answer.

## The Interpretation Set Forth in this Paper

The position defended in this paper is the common Reformed interpretation:

Augustine, Bede, Aquinas, Erasmus, Beza, Gerhard, Hottinger, Clericus, Leighton, Pearson, Secker, Hammond, Hofmann, and most Reformed theologians, explain 1 Pet. 3:18-20 to mean, that Christ preached by Noah to men who were "disobedient" in the days of Noah, and who for this cause were "spirits in prison" at the time of Peter's writing.<sup>8</sup>

This interpretation, however, is not limited to the theologians. No less a New Testament scholar than A. T. Robertson defended it. Buswell relates the following in this regard:

In the interpretation of these verses I follow the teaching of Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, A. T. Robertson and others in understanding that the time when Christ preached to the persons who were, in Peter's day, called 'spirits in prison,' was 'in the

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7 Of course, other passages are adduced in support of some such doctrine, e.g., Acts 2:27-31; Eph. 4:9; etc. But these passages are also incidental, and they easily admit of alternate interpretations consistent with the analogy of faith. See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), II:615-618.

8 William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), II:609, note 1.

days of Noah,' and that Christ preached in the Spirit through Noah who was called a 'preacher of righteousness' (II Peter 2:5). The following translation of I Peter 3:18-20 is my own, but it is based upon lectures of A. T. Robertson's which I heard in New York more than twenty years ago.

". . . Christ once for all died for us, the Just One for the unjust ones, in order that He might bring us to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but was made alive by the Spirit; in which [Spirit] He went and preached, in the days of Noah, while the longsuffering of God was waiting, while the ark was being built, to [the persons who are now] spirits in prison, to those who at [that] time were disobedient."

In the lectures to which I have referred, A. T. Robertson discussed the syntax of Peter's sentences at some length, and argued as a grammarian (and he was the greatest authority on New Testament Greek grammar) that such a translation as I have given is thoroughly justified.<sup>9</sup>

It is the thesis of this paper that the evidence discussed in the following section, "The Analysis of 1 Peter 3:18-20," when viewed from the standpoint of the analogy of faith as developed in the previous section, "A Question of Hermeneutics," is sufficient to establish the above interpretation of 1 Peter 3:18-20 as the most probable explanation of the Apostle's thought.

## The Analysis of 1 Peter 3:18-20

### Syntactical Analysis

I argue that verses 18 through 22 in their entirety should be subordinated under *ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς . . .*, and that the next line to be brought out to a margin equal with this line is *Χριστοῦ οὖν παθόντος . . .* in 4:1.<sup>10</sup> The main sentence of the passage is therefore *Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν* ("Christ died"; 3rd person singular, 2nd aorist active indicative of *ἀποθνήσκω*). The *καὶ* in the sentence, here taken in the sense of *also*, indicates that Peter is offering an example of suffering for his readers (cf. vv. 14 and 17), in this case suffering in the extreme. "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20).

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9 James Oliver Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), II:319; bracketed phrases original.

10 J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, pp. 151-152, argues that verses 19-21 form an "intrusion" and that the thought of verse 18 is picked up at verse 22. All his reasons are based on the premise that he is dealing with liturgical literary structure here and that he knows essentially the contents of the liturgy. Therefore, since his guiding assumptions are somewhat subjective and conjectural, his argumentation is necessarily weak. Moreover, the *ὅς* of verse 22 fits too naturally with the *Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ* of verse 21 to carry it back to verse 18. It seems much better to interpret the structure as outlined in the main body of this paper.

The details of the syntactical analysis presented in this paper for verses 18-20 are shown on page 5. The following particulars regarding the line subordination are to be noted.

*First*, the two phrases subordinated under ἀπέθανεν. Peter is using Christ as an example of suffering. As his suffering had both a characterizing motif and an ultimate purpose, so should the suffering of the Christians in Asia Minor. Christ's death--suffering in the extreme--was (1) the death of a just one for unjust ones and (2) a death for the purpose of bringing those unjust ones to God. In like manner, these Christians were to suffer (1) as "followers of that which is good" (v. 13) and (2) for the purpose of growing in a victorious Christian life (4:1, 2).

*Second*, the next two phrases are to be subordinated under the subject Χριστός: he was on the one hand put to death σαρκί but on the other hand quickened πνεύματι.

With regard to the *third* decision, however, differences begin to surface. Under what should ἐν ᾧ . . . be subordinated? Placing it under πνεύμα is an interpretive judgment anticipating somewhat the next section, "Interpretive Analysis." It is not, however, without support even among those differing from the interpretation herein given.<sup>11</sup> Πνεύμα in the arrangement here is the antecedent of ᾧ.

*Fourth*, ἐν ᾧ ἐκήρυξεν forms the second, though subordinate, subject-verb clause: *he preached*.

*Fifth*, the ellipsis contains the recipients of the preaching, the πνεύματα .

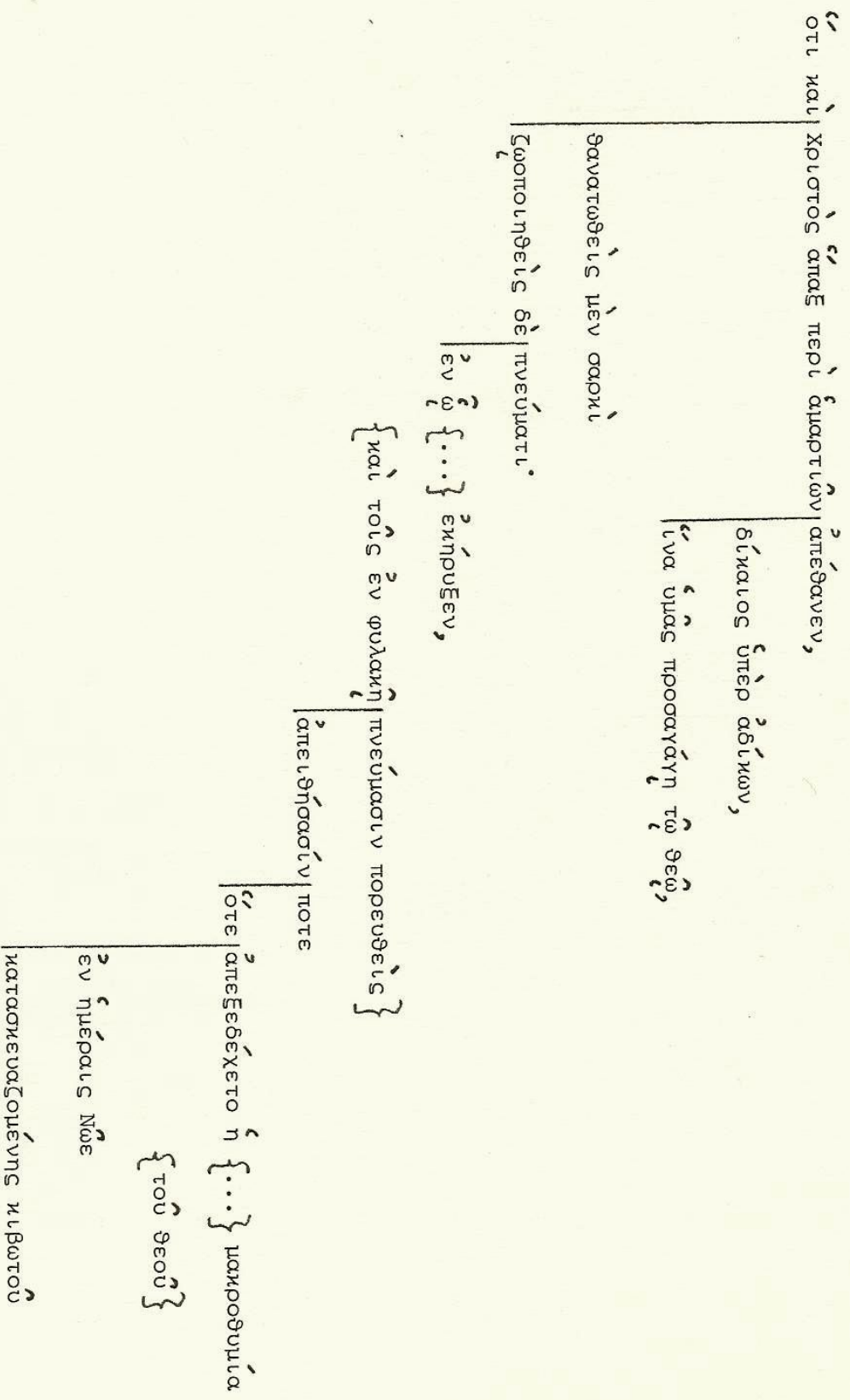
*Sixth*, under πνεύμασιν is subordinated the temporal description of those ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε.

*Finally*, three phrases are further subordinated specifying the *when* (ὅτε) of the disobedience: (1) while the longsuffering of God waited, (2) in the days of Noah, and (3) while the ark was being prepared.

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11 See J. N. D. Kelly (*ibid.*, p. 152) and his answer to Selwyn's argument (*The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 197) that ᾧ has the whole preceding context as its antecedent.

Syntactical Analysis - I Peter 3:18-20



## Interpretive Analysis

Several arguments, taken together, form the basis for the view outlined in the section two, "The Interpretation Set Forth in This Paper."

### Argument 1

The first critical part of the passage concerns the two parallel participial phrases:

θανατωθεῖς μὲν σαρκί  
ζωοποιηθεῖς δὲ πνεύματι

The exegesis of these phrases must be performed in two successive stages.

*First*, a certain amount of information may be gleaned from the meaning of the two appositional participles. They are aorist passive participles of the verbs θανατόω and ζωοποιέω respectively. The former simply means *kill someone, hand someone over to be killed*,<sup>12</sup> and the latter means *make alive, give life to*.<sup>13</sup> In the N.T. ζωοποιέω never means *to preserve alive*.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, unless this passage is the only exception, σὰρξ and πνεύμα cannot refer to the human body and human spirit of Jesus Christ. The spirit does not die at death and cannot, therefore, be said to be made alive.<sup>15</sup>

*Second*, concerning σαρκί and πνεύματι, the question must be raised as to whether the case must carry the same force in both words. Many so take them,<sup>16</sup> but there is no necessity involved.<sup>17</sup> The best procedure seems therefore to be to examine each word independently in

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12 William R. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 352.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 342.

14 *Ibid.*; see also Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:619.

15 J. N. D. Kelly, (*The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p. 151) agrees that σὰρξ and πνεύμα do not refer to Jesus' body and spirit, but his argument is entirely fallacious. He claims that to so take them would be to grant body-soul dichotomy. However, that man is a dichotomous being, consisting of a body and a soul--the soul carrying the personality and surviving the body at death--is precisely the teaching of Scripture. See Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:42-64, and L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 191-201. What distinguishes the Scriptural from the Platonic doctrine is the latter's idea that the body is evil. Instead, the soul without the body is said to be unclothed, and it looks for the resurrection of the body. God originally created man to be an embodied being.

16 J. N. D. Kelly, *ibid*, p. 151, Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 196, and Scharlemann, " 'He Descended into Hell,' " p. 88, all take both of them as datives of reference.

17 A careful study of Romans 5:12-19 shows that Paul used parallelism both with complete correspondence (e.g., at v. 19) and with some variation (e.g., at v. 15).

their respective relationships with each participle.

Σαρχί. The case here seems almost certainly the locative of sphere:<sup>18</sup> he was put to death within the sphere of his incarnate existence. Thus, σάρξ, as in the all-important John 1:14 passage, refers to the whole of his human nature--body and soul--assumed in the incarnation.<sup>19</sup> The eternal Λόγος could not have been put to death; but with respect to his human nature and within the sphere of his human existence, the Θεάνθρωπος could and was put to death.

Πνεύματι. The crucial question is this: Is πνεύματι also locative? This paper will argue for the instrumental case of agency and take πνεύμα as a reference to the Holy Spirit. The chief reason for this decision involves the analogy of faith as it bears on the alternatives to this interpretation. Suppose πνεύματι were locative: *made alive in the sphere of the spirit*. That "spirit" here could refer to Christ's human spirit has already been ruled out. If it refers then, as a locative, to the Holy Spirit, it would teach that Christ at some point was "made alive" in the sphere of the Holy Spirit. But such an idea borders on the heretical, for Christ always had the fullness of the Spirit without measure (John 3:34). The only other possible meaning πνεύμα might have here is the abstract sense spiritual existence. But being made alive in the sphere of spiritual existence implies an erroneous concept of the incarnation and two natures of the Θεάνθρωπος. Christ never ceased to be fully consubstantial with the Father; he retained throughout the humiliation his complete deity and therefore necessarily his spiritual existence and cosmic activity as the eternal Λόγος. The significance of the resurrection is that his perfect humanity was glorified and that his humiliation was over. Therefore, no locative use of πνεύμα is acceptable theologically. To quote Walvoord,

From an orthodox theological point of view, the passage is best explained as referring to a work of the Holy Spirit. The thought implied by the revisors that Christ was "made alive in spirit," meaning alive in his essential spiritual being, is not the orthodox doctrine. Christ needed no restoration to spiritual life, but he did need a physical resurrection which is in contrast to "being put to death in the flesh." The expression

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18 This case is discussed by Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1959), pp. 86-88. The view that σαρχί is "clearly locative" was taken from John F. Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing house, 1971), p. 102. It is to be noted that though Kelly, Selwyn, and Scharlemann (footnote 16 above) call σαρχί a dative of reference, in the translation of the phrase θανατωθείς μὲν σαρχί they imply the locative sense given in this paper. Perhaps there is a difference in terminology.

19 See the discussion of σάρξ given by B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1908), I:21.



"by the Spirit" enhances and makes more pointed the fact of bodily resurrection.<sup>20</sup>

Hodge has argued very similarly:

The difference between the force of the two datives [local dative = locative case; instrumental dative = instrumental case] is justified and determined by the meaning of the participles with which *σαρκί* and *πνεύματι* are connected. "He was put to death as to the flesh; he was made alive by the Spirit." The one word demands one force of the dative, and the other a different, but equally legitimate sense.<sup>21</sup>

It is further to be noted that there is clear N.T. precedence for taking *πνεύματι* as an instrumental of agency. Under this designation, Dana and Mantey write, "Agency is expressed occasionally in the New Testament by the instrumental case without the use of any preposition. At such times the verb is always in the passive or middle voice."<sup>22</sup> The example they give, Romans 8:14, in fact involves the very word *πνεύματι*. With *ζωοποιηθείς* being a passive participle, 1 Peter 3:18 can be viewed as completely fitting the category.

## **Argument 2**

The next phrase in need of careful attention is *ἐν ᾧ*. The issues here revolve around two questions: Is *ἐν* locative or instrumental, and what is the antecedent of *ᾧ*? These questions cannot be answered apart from a consideration of the time of the preaching. So at this juncture the focus of attention must move further into the passage.

## **Argument 3**

By the application of the "ellipsis technique,"<sup>23</sup> a judgment has been made that *καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν ππρευθείς* is subordinate to the main clause *ἐν ᾧ ἐκήρυξεν*. The question of the identification of the *πνεύματα* will be addressed below. Here the issue is the time of the preaching. The full clause which must supply the answer is this: *ἐν ᾧ ἐκήρυξεν ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε . . .* The following argument is given by Shedd:

The participle *πότε*, qualifying *ἀπειθήσασί*, shows that the disobedience (or disbelief) occurred 'when the ark was a-preparing.' But the preaching must have been

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20 Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, p.102.

21 Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, II:619-620; brackets original.

22 Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar*, p. 91.

23 Developed by Dr. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Dept. of Old Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

contemporaneous with the disobedience, or disbelief. What else was there to disobey, or disbelieve?<sup>24</sup>

#### **Argument 4**

If the reasoning presented thus far in the analysis is valid, the following salient facts have emerged: (a) Christ was raised from the dead "by the Holy Spirit"; (b) Christ preached; (c) this preaching occurred during the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared and while the longsuffering of God waited. Now how did he preach during the days of Noah? The answer must be found in ἐν ᾧ. This phrase must explain the mechanism, the means by which the preaching was accomplished. No other phrase in the passage has any possibility of supplying the answer. The significance of this phrase in explaining the process can be readily seen when it is remembered that Peter himself has already commented on the preaching of the prophets: ". . . the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify when he [the Spirit] testified beforehand . . ." (1 Pet. 1:11). Christ preached through the prophets by the Holy Spirit as the latter indwelt and inspired these men.

Therefore, a clear explanation is available, not merely somewhere in Scripture, but in the very book under investigation as to how Christ could preach during the days of Noah: he could do so "by the Holy Spirit." Through whom did Christ preach in the days of Noah? Clearly Noah himself, for Peter later calls him "a preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5). And notice the connection with verse 18: as Christ was raised "by the Holy Spirit," so he preached in the days of Noah "by the Holy Spirit." Since this mechanism is to be found in ἐν ᾧ, the force of this phrase can easily be seen: ἐν is instrumental and ᾧ has πνεύματι as its antecedent.

Though ᾧ is neuter to agree with πνεύμα, theologically it should come into English as *whom*, not *which*. Thus, the thrust of the entire statement is the following: "For also Christ once concerning sins died, on the one hand having died in the flesh but on the other hand having been made alive by the Holy Spirit, by whom, having gone to the spirits in prison, he preached in the days of Noah . . ." Peter is giving his readers an example of suffering, and it is somewhat tangential to digress and discuss this preincarnate activity of Christ.<sup>25</sup> However, it does serve to further the example by making clear to the Christians in Asia Minor that they should have no illusions of mass conversion as a result of their "answer" (v. 15) and "good manner of life" (v. 16), for indeed not even Christ through Noah in a similarly hostile environment saw any such phenomenon.

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24 Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, II:609, note 1.

25 As A. T. Robertson has noted (*Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville, Broadman Press, 1933), VI:118), Peter easily digresses at a word: "It is interesting to observe that, just as the relative *en hoi* here tells something suggested by the word *pneumati* (in spirit) just before, so in verse 21 the relative *ho* (which) tells another illustration of the words *di' hudatos* (by water) just before. Peter jumps from the flood in Noah's time to baptism in Peter's time, just as he jumped backwards from Christ's time to Noah's time. He easily goes off at a word." Robertson makes the same observation in *Epochs in the Life of Peter*, pp. 283, 284.

## Argument 5

The "spirits in prison" may now be identified. If the preaching was, in fact, Noah's while the ark was being built, it is no great jump to consider the πνεύματα to be the people to whom he preached. As to the question of biblical precedence for such a usage of πνεύματα, comment will be given presently. For now, another issue must be addressed: What is the implication of ἐν φυλακῇ? Augustine interpreted the phrase in the highly metaphorical sense of "imprisoned in sin," in which prison they were held while still alive.<sup>26</sup> However, while the N.T. does picture one living in sin as a slave in bondage to sin, it does not use the figure of a prison to picture this slavery.<sup>27</sup> The other view consistent with the overall interpretation of the passage thus far set forth is that those to whom Noah preached are now, at the time of the writing of 1 Peter, ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν. And for such use of πνεύματα--as a reference to disembodied people in the intermediate state--there is clear N.T. precedence, namely Hebrews 12:23: "the spirits of just men made perfect". The alternate word for the immaterial part of man, ψυχή, is also used for those in the intermediate state in Revelation 6:9-11. Moreover, this interpretation takes φυλακῇ in its literal sense as applied to Hell, the place of confinement and torment for the wicked both in the intermediate and eternal states.<sup>28</sup> It should be pointed out in passing that the inability to adequately cope with φυλακῇ is the fatal flaw in interpretations such as J. N. D. Kelly's<sup>29</sup> which view the preaching of Christ as having taken place during the ascension. The δαιμόνια to whom such proclamation could be made at such time are not yet in prison.<sup>30</sup> At least those who see in 1 Peter 3:19, 20 a descensus ad infernos, whether to preach to imprisoned humans or evil angels, have a reasonable way in which to assimilate φυλακῇ into their interpretation.

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26 *Ep. clxiv.* 14-17, as pointed out by J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p. 153.

27 See the discussion of φυλακῇ in Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, p. 875.

28 There is no place in the N.T. where φυλακῇ is directly applied to the words ἄδης, γέεννα, or ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός. However, it is so applied to (cp. Rev. 20:7 with 20:1-3). If, then, as this writer believes, and in agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith, (chap. 32 Section I) there are only two places in the supernatural realm, Heaven and Hell, and that each of these phrases describes the same place, Hell, the issue is settled. But even if one will not grant that ἄβυσσος = Hell, the φυλακῇ is clearly an appropriate description, in its literal sense, of the place of confinement (Hell) for the condemned.

29 J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, pp. 155-156.

30 See Merrill F. Unger, *Biblical Demonology*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Van Kampen Press, Inc., 1953), pp. 52-76.

## Argument 6

A final argument may be advanced for the interpretation herein defended. The question is asked whether there is any significance to the use of *κηρύσσω* instead of *εὐαγγελίζω*? Some would argue in the affirmative. For example:

The verb *kerussein*, 'to herald' or 'proclaim' (see Rev. v. 2), here translated *preached*, is to be distinguished from *euangelizein*, to proclaim good tidings (see especially iv. 6). Peter is not saying that Christ preached the gospel. Rather He announced His triumph over evil, which was for the evil spirits bad news.<sup>31</sup>

The preaching of the gospel either between Christ's death and resurrection or during his ascension, whether to evil angels or condemned people having already died, is obviously a problem.<sup>32</sup> But it is to be urged that when *κηρύσσω* is predicated of Jesus Christ, it always refers to preaching the gospel and offering salvation,<sup>33</sup> and when not so predicated, it still almost always refers to the gospel.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, at the very least, those views seeing the preaching of Christ occurring between his death and resurrection or at his ascension are involved in an unusual usage of *κηρύσσω*; at worst it involves them in an offer of salvation to either people who have died or evil angels which, in view of the analogy of faith, is completely out of the question.

On the contrary, the view espoused in this paper has no problem with *κηρύσσω* involving an offer of salvation. That was precisely what Noah did. However, it is to be noted that this view of 1 Peter 3:19 can allow either possibility for *κηρύσσω*, for Noah, no doubt, also proclaimed coming judgment in the form of the flood.

## Objections to the Interpretation Presented in this Paper

### Objection 1

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31 Stibbs, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 142. See also Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, pp. 200-201, and Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 146.

32 Unless, of course, one does not fear to follow Alford in his view of an offer of salvation here (*The Greek Testament*, 4:365-368).

33 Matt. 4:17, 23; 9:35; 11:1; Mark 1:14, 38, 39; Luke 4:17, 19, 44; 8:1.

34 Matt. 3:1; 10:7; 24:14; 26:13; Mark 1:4; 3:14; 6:12; 13:10; 14:9; 16:15, 20; Luke 3:3; 9:2; 24:47; Acts 8:5; 9:20; 10:37, 42; 15:21; 19:13; 20:25; 28:31; Rom. 10:8, 14, 15; 1 Cor. 1:23; 9:27; 15:11, 12; 2 Cor. 1:19; 4:5; 11:4(2); Gal. 2:2; Phil. 1:15; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 2:9; 2 Tim. 4:2. This list leave, then, only the following references: Matt. 10:27; Mark 1:7, 45; 5:20; 7:36; 8:39; Luke 12:3; Rom. 2:21; Gal. 5:11; Rev. 5:2. Therefore out of 60 uses, not counting 1 Peter 3:19, *κηρύσσω* refers to preaching the gospel for salvation 50 times. These figures are based on *The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament*, 9th ed. (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, Ltd., 1903), pp. 422-423.

Selwyn<sup>35</sup> argues that the word *πορευθεῖς* (aorist participle of *πορεύομαι*, /go) precludes the possibility of Christ preaching by the Spirit through Noah. However, exactly the same phenomenon exists in Ephesians 2:17: Christ did not go and preach to those who were afar off in a personal sense but through the apostles.

## Objection 2

Both Selwyn<sup>36</sup> and J. N. D. Kelly<sup>37</sup> argue that *πνεύματα* cannot in 1 Peter 3:19 refer to the spirits of the departed wicked. The argument is that in the N.T. *πνεύματα*, without qualification, thus distinguishing this verse from Hebrews 12:23, always refers to angels, good or fallen. It is admitted that one might wish for other examples in the N.T. of *πνεύματα* without qualification designating people who have died and are therefore disembodied. However, the problem is minor. In one case, Hebrews 12:23, qualification is there ("of men"); in another case, 1 Peter 3:19, it is not. The fact is that with or without qualification, *πνεύματα* is only rarely used of the dead in the intermediate state. Therefore, that it only occurs once without qualification should not appear so significant. The lack of qualification in 1 Peter 3:19 is insufficient to dissociate it from Hebrews 12:23.

## Objection 3

Shedd, it was pointed out above, argued that the disobedience mentioned occurred in response to the preaching which took place. This argument was used in the defense of the interpretation accepted in this paper. However, Scharlemann makes the following observation:

In this connection it is necessary to point out that *ἀπειθήσασιν* is an aorist participle. Combined with the little word *ποτέ*, it gets the force of a pluperfect. That is to say, the action described by this participle precedes the time of *ἐκήρυξεν*.<sup>38</sup>

I am not sufficiently competent in Greek to comment on this argument. However, Shedd, who is, did not see the situation this way. But even if the point is valid, the interpretation herein set forth is not adversely affected, though perhaps one argument in its favor is weakened. The point would still remain that the disobedience occurred during the days of Noah. If, indeed, the disobedience was not in response to the preaching, though that it seems to be most likely, then the implication would be simply that the preaching--the exhortation to repent and escape judgment, as argued in this paper--was in response to the disobedience. The

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35 Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 200.

36 Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, pp. 198-199.

37 J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, p. 154.

38 Scharlemann, " 'He Descended into Hell,' ", p. 92.

preaching would still be in the days of Noah, for, after all, the flood itself was a response to the disobedience.

#### Objection 4

It is sometimes argued that 1 Peter 3:18, as regards *σαρκί* and *πνεύματι*, must be interpreted in the light of Romans 1:3-4 and 1 Timothy 3:16. All three passages involve the use of early credal or hymnic material.<sup>39</sup> Two questions must, therefore, be answered: First, do the interpretations of these passages stand or fall together? Second, if so, what is the correct interpretation of Romans 1:3-4 and 1 Timothy 3:16? Can they bear the interpretation placed on *σαρκί* and *πνεύματι* at 1 Peter 3:18 in this paper? Of course, if a negative answer is given to the first question, the interpretation of the former two passages need not be discussed here at all, and I see no compelling argument to interpret them in the same way. True, 1 Timothy 3:16 looks like an early creed, but at Romans 1:3-4 and 1 Peter 3:18 the credal characteristics are not nearly as pronounced. In any case, the theory that all three draw from a common source is quite conjectural. Another fact is significant: concerning Romans 1:3-4 at least, there is again considerable disagreement about the word *πνεύμα*.<sup>40</sup> One cannot abandon a plausible interpretation of one disputed passage in favor of one interpretation of another disputed passage, especially when it is also disputed whether the passages are even parallel.<sup>41</sup>

#### Objection 5

Probably the most serious objection to the interpretation in this paper is the reference to the Genesis 6 account in 1 Enoch (e.g., 6:1-7; 7:1-3; 10:1-15; 15:1-2; 64:1-2). However tempting it is to interpret a canonical book in terms of the speculations of noncanonical, apocalyptic literature, great caution should be exercised in this matter. The following comments are offered.

*First*, it is by no means certain that "sons of God" in Genesis 6 refers to angels, the imagination of the pseudepigraphal writer of Enoch notwithstanding. Indeed, the common Reformed position has been that the reference is to the Godly line of Seth.

*Second*, recent research has very strongly indicated that the term refers, not to some fanciful

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39 J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, pp. 150-151; Selwyn, *The First Epistle of Peter*, p. 196.

40 Calvin sees a reference to the Holy Spirit in this passage; Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 103, and Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 19th ed. (Philadelphia: Alfred Martien, 1873), pp. 19-20, both see a reference to the divine nature. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., 1959 and 1965, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, reprint 2 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1968), I:5-12, sees a reference to the post-resurrection nature of Christ.

41 Walvoord, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 103, for one, denies that they are parallel.

theory of fallen angels who copulate with human women, but to sacral kings of the ancient Near East.<sup>42</sup>

*Third*, Jewish interpretation of Genesis 6 has certainly not always agreed with 1 Enoch. For example, the Targum of Onkelos, the Greek translation of Symmachus, and many Jewish authorities to the present day interpret the passage as a reference to men of the aristocracy, i.e., princes and nobles, in contrast to those socially inferior.<sup>43</sup> There is, therefore, no necessity for taking Peter's passage as a further elaboration of the apocalyptic theory of Genesis 6. In general matters of this nature, it is wise to heed the words of John Murray:

However helpful extra-canonical literature may be in arriving at the sense of Scripture, extra-canonical considerations may never be pitted against the evidence which the Scripture itself determinatively provides.<sup>44</sup>

## Objection 6

The last objection which will be met in this paper concerns 1 Peter 4:6; 2 Peter 2:4; and Jude 6. Are they parallel passages?

*With regard to 1 Peter 4:6:* Although Cranfield<sup>45</sup> argues that this verse should be connected with 1 Peter 3:18-20, there is no good reason for doing so. It has already been argued that the latter passage is an excursus and that in 4:1 Peter is back to his original idea. The best view of 4:6 is that the gospel was preached to those now dead at the time they were still living. This preaching was, no doubt, in apostolic times, and it brought a favorable response--they now "live according to God in the spirit."<sup>46</sup>

*Concerning 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6:* Admittedly, these verses are not easy to interpret. They definitely refer to angels, angels already incarcerated in Hell. When and why they were so incarcerated "before the time" (cf. Matt. 8:29) is not a matter of revelation. But in the absence of clear exegetical necessity, there is no point in reading these passages into 1 Peter 3:18-20. It is to be noted in this regard that neither passage makes any reference to a preaching ministry of Christ.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the following facts: (1) From a consideration of the analogy of faith, it would be most unlikely to find in this passage so strange a ministry of

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42 Meredith G. Kline, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1-4," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24 (1961-1962):187-204.

43 See the documentation by Kline, *ibid.*, p. 194.

44 John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), p. 244.

45 Cranfield, "The Interpretation of I Pet. iii. 19," P. 371.

46 See Stibbs, *The First Epistle of Peter*, pp. 151-152, for further details on this view of 1 Peter 4:6.

Jesus Christ as preaching to evil angels or disembodied spirits either between his death and resurrection or during his ascension--an aspect of his redemptive work found nowhere else in Scripture. (2) From the general context of 1 Peter, i.e., verse 1:11, a perfectly natural interpretation exists: Christ preached to living people in Noah's day by the Holy Spirit through the person of Noah himself. (3) From the standpoint of grammar and lexicology, this natural interpretation is a clear possibility. There are no compelling reasons in this case for preferring the bizarre to the natural and expected meaning from the analogy of faith.



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