

Preaching To The Spirits In Prison

Intro: Many times, we are asked to explain Peter's meaning that Jesus preached to the spirits in prison. This question finds its basis in 1 Peter 3:19: "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;" What is the meaning of this passage?

I. WHAT IT DOES NOT MEAN

A. We might not understand exactly what a verse means, but we can still understand what it does not mean.

1. A good example: 1 Cor. 15:29 "Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? why are they then baptized for the dead?"
2. We might not know what Paul meant, but we know the Mormon's baptizing for the dead is not what it means.
3. We can know these things from a general teaching of the Scriptures.

B. Some ideas as to what Peter did not mean:

1. The spirits are supernatural beings:
 - a. Fallen angels
 - b. The fallen angels who married human women in Gen. 6:1-2, 4 "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, ²That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they *were* fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. ³And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. ⁴There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare *children* to them, the same *became* mighty men which *were* of old, men of renown."
 - c. The children of these fallen angels who married human women.
2. Regarding the nature of the preaching.
 - a. It was a proclamation of His victory over the spiritual forces of darkness.
 - b. Christ was evangelizing the fallen angels.
 - c. Christ was evangelizing people who had died.
 - d. It was offering a second chance to people who were lost.
3. There are probably a lot more ideas than what I know.

II. LOOK AT THE TEXT.

A. 1 Pet. 3:18 "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:"

1. Christ is given for an example of suffering—here referring specifically to His death.
2. Christ suffered for sins:
 - a. Even though He was just; Acts 7:52 "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:"
 - b. He did not deserve suffering; 1 Pet. 2:22 "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:"
 - c. He suffered for the unjust; 1 Pet. 2:24 "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed."
3. The reason Christ suffered is so He could bring us to God (to reconcile us); 2 Cor. 5:18 "And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation;"

4. So, Christ was put to death in the flesh:
 - a. His spirit did not die.
 - b. This refutes the doctrine of soul-sleeping.
- B. 1 Pet. 3:19** ¹⁹“By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;”
1. “By which” is literally “in which.”
 2. “Also” refers back to “by [in] the spirit” of verse 18.
 3. “Preached”
 - a. It is from the Greek word κηρύσσω (*kerusso*).
 - b. This word means to herald abroad without any reference to what is proclaimed.
 - c. We must determine what is proclaimed by context and other references.
 4. “Unto the spirits in prison.”
 - a. These spirits were in prison when Peter wrote this epistle.
 - b. The “prison” refers to that place of punishment in the hades realm (unseen world) called Tartarus.
 - (1) 2 Pet. 2:4 ⁴“For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;”
 - (2) Luke 16:23-24 ²³“And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. ²⁴And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”
- C. 1 Pet. 3:20** ²⁰“Which sometime were disobedient, 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.”
1. “Which sometime were disobedient while the ark was a preparing”
 - a. This leaves out the parenthetical phrase.
 - b. It retains the meaning of the passage.
 - c. Gen. 6:5-7 ⁵“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually. ⁶And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. ⁷And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.”
 2. God was longsuffering (patient) in the days of Noah; Gen. 6:3 ³“And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”
- D. Meaning of the passage:**
1. Christ in spirit went to those in Noah’s day (through Noah) and preached to those people; 2 Pet. 2:5 ⁵“And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;”
 2. God was longsuffering giving them time to repent; Gen. 6:3 ³“And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”
 3. They did not repent.
 4. Those spirits are now in prison (when Peter writes this book).

Conclusion: We need to learn the need to preach the Gospel to a lost and dying world lest they end up in that prison the people of Noah’s day were and are residing in.