

Addendum 1 Peter 3:18-22--

18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

(1 Peter 3:18-22 ESV)

Part One--What did Jesus proclaim, when did he do it, and to whom?

There are things difficult to understand in this passage, but let's not miss the important truths that the Apostle Peter emphasizes.

But before we follow Christ's ultimate descent in verses 19-20, look closely at how His own suffering is described (3:18). Here we have a clear and concise statement of the gospel.

- Christ died for sins
- Christ died once for all
- Christ died in place of sinners, "the just for the unjust"
- Christ died to bring us to God
- Christ is at the Father's right hand, victoriously ruling over all, and interceding for the saints (I John 2:1-2)

Here we have the need (our sins), the complete payment (Christ's death in our place), the all-sufficiency of that payment (once for all), and the outcome (our access to God). It doesn't get any clearer than this.

Adapted from: Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 13) (p. 227). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition, with additional material added by me.

There are at least five interpretations of this difficult passage, and trusted evangelical commentators differ from one another. The preponderance of evidence however, favors one of these two:

(1) The first interpretation understands "spirits" (Gk. pneumasin, plural) as referring to the unsaved (human spirits) of Noah's day. Christ, "in the spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18), proclaimed the gospel "in the days of Noah" (v. 20) through Noah. The unbelievers who heard

Christ's preaching "did not obey . . . in the days of Noah" (v. 20) and are now suffering judgment (they are "spirits in prison," v. 19). Several reasons support this view: (a) Peter calls Noah a "herald of righteousness" (2 Pet. 2:5), where "herald" represents Greek *kēryx*, "preacher," which corresponds to the noun *kēryssō*, "proclaim," in 1 Pet. 3:19. (b) Peter says the "Spirit of Christ" was speaking through the OT prophets (1:11); thus Christ could have been speaking through Noah as an OT prophet. (c) The context indicates that Christ was preaching through Noah, who was in a persecuted minority, and God saved Noah, which is similar to the situation in Peter's time: Christ is now preaching the gospel through Peter and his readers (v. 15) to a persecuted minority, and God will save them.

(2) In the second interpretation, the spirits are the fallen angels who were cast into hell to await the final judgment. Reasons supporting this view include: (a) Some interpreters say that the "sons of God" in Gen. 6:2–4 are angels (see note on Gen. 6:1–2) who sinned by cohabiting with human women "when God's patience waited in the days of Noah" (1 Pet. 3:20). (b) Almost without exception in the NT, "spirits" (plural) refers to supernatural beings rather than people (e.g., Matt. 8:16; 10:1; Mark 1:27; 5:13; 6:7; Luke 4:36; 6:18; 7:21; 8:2; 10:20; 11:26; Acts 5:16; 8:7; 19:12, 13; 1 Tim. 4:1; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 16:13–14; cf. Heb. 1:7). (c) The word "prison" is not used elsewhere in Scripture as a place of punishment after death for human beings, while it is used for Satan (Rev. 20:7) and other fallen angels (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). In this case the message that Christ proclaimed is almost certainly one of triumph, after having been "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (1 Pet. 3:18). (ESV Study Bible)

Two closing thoughts:

Warren Weirsbe:

As Christians, we do not fight for victory, but from victory—the mighty victory that our Lord Jesus Christ won for us.

Wiersbe, Warren W.. *Be Hopeful (1 Peter): How to Make the Best of Times Out of Your Worst of Times (The BE Series Commentary)* (pp. 106-107). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

Wayne Grudem:

'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.'

In its context, this passage thus functions (i) to encourage the readers to bear witness boldly in the midst of hostile unbelievers, just as Noah did; (2) to assure them that though they are few, God will surely save them; (3) to remind them of the certainty of final judgment and Christ's ultimate triumph over all the forces of evil which oppose them. This passage, similarly understood, can provide similar encouragement to Peter's readers today.'

Wayne A. Grudem. 1 Peter (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (Kindle Locations 2740-2744). Kindle Edition.

Part Two--Does Baptism save?

21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. (1Peter 3:21-22)

The Westminster Confession shares this important rule for interpreting Scripture: "The infallible rule of interpretation of scripture is the scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture, it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."

In this case, we need to interpret this Scripture on baptism and salvation in light of other Scripture. If baptism were necessary for salvation, Scripture would affirm that in every case. The following examples suffice to show baptism does not save:

John 5:24

Jesus: *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.*

John 6:47

Jesus: *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.*

Acts 16:30-31

The Philippian jailer inquiring of the Apostle Paul and Silas: *Then he brought them out and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household."*

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

If baptism saved, it certainly would be mentioned by Jesus and his apostles.

So to what is Peter referring?

Wayne Grudem--

The water of baptism is like waters of judgment - similar to the waters of the flood, and showing clearly what we deserve for our sins. Coming up out of the waters of baptism corresponds to being kept safe through the waters of the flood, the waters of God's judgment on sin, and emerging to live in 'newness of life' (cf. Rom. 6:4). Baptism thus shows us clearly that in one sense we have 'died' and 'been raised' again, but in another sense we emerge from the waters knowing that we are still alive and have passed through the waters of God's judgment unharmed. As Noah fled into the ark, so we flee to Christ, and in him we escape judgment.

Wayne A. Grudem. 1 Peter (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (Kindle Locations 1798-1802). Kindle Edition.

Final thought:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God...(1 Peter 3:18)

Have you received, by faith, the gift of eternal life which Christ purchased for you?

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
(Romans 6:23)