

## X. The Apostle's Creed

January 18/20/21, 2020

1 Peter 3:18-22

**Aim:** To rejoice in the triumph of Jesus Christ, who endured the humiliation of suffering and death at the hands of unjust men, was vindicated through His resurrection by the Spirit, and has ascended in Heaven where all things are in submission to Him.

*The Apostles' Creed*

I believe in God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth:

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,  
Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
Born of the Virgin Mary,  
*Suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
Was crucified, dead, and buried:  
He descended into hell;  
The third day he rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty;*  
From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost;  
The holy Catholic Church;  
The Communion of Saints;  
The Forgiveness of sins;  
The Resurrection of the body,  
And the Life everlasting.

Amen.

DSB Note: The phrase, 'He descended into hell,' is the most controversial part of the confession of faith commonly known as the Apostles' Creed (note plural possessive). Some point to this passage in 1 Peter 3, in particular in verses 18b-20a, as justification for this phrase in the Creed, although Peter's wording is different. I have chosen to call this lesson *The Apostle's Creed* (note singular possessive), because in it the Apostle Peter uses credal language to describe Christ's work from humility to majesty, including His suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and subsequent dominion.

### A. Peter's Complex Teaching (1 Peter 3:18-22)

*<sup>18</sup>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, <sup>19</sup>in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>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, <sup>22</sup>who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

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*McKnight:* Few passages have so many themes and different ideas intertwined. It is no wonder that commentators have shaken their heads in despair! But the main idea is not complex. Just as Jesus suffered as a righteous man and was vindicated, so too if the churches of Peter live righteously (as he has exhorted them to do), they will be vindicated and sit with Jesus in the presence of God. Such an understanding of this passage is a typical way of putting this section into focus with the previous verses (3:13-17).

*Dorani:* First Peter 3:18-22 is by all accounts the most difficult passage to interpret in 1 Peter—some say the entire New Testament.... However difficult 3:19-22 may be, if we read the passage in context and hold to the essentials of the faith, we will at least avoid major error. Taking 1 Peter 3:13-22 as a whole, we see that the *end* of the passage gives reasons for the commands stated at the *beginning*. The passage is a cousin of 1 Peter 2:18-25. Both present Jesus as the supreme example of the innocent man who endures mistreatment. In 1 Peter 2, Jesus suffers injustice and entrusts Himself to God. In 1 Peter 3, Jesus suffers for doing good and experiences God's vindication. In each passage, Jesus both *illustrates and empowers* righteous action. Yet whereas 1 Peter 2 accents Jesus' sacrifice, 1 Peter call attention to His resurrection, exaltation, and power of all (3:21-22).

*Helm:* Another structural element in 1 Peter that helps us make sense of the passage before us comes by way of relationship. Our passage marks the third time Peter has specifically and intentionally mentioned Jesus to his readers in a major way. Jesus is imbedded in the structure of the letter. The first time he did so with special focus, he appealed to Jesus' costly death in order to motivate his readers to holiness (1:18-19).... In that part of the letter, Peter was trying to impress upon his readers the importance of being holy. If Christ sacrificed everything for them, then surely, when they consider the cost of their salvation, they will be spurred on to holiness. The second time we saw a relationship established between the readers and Jesus came in 2:21-25.... Again, note the aspect of Christ's work that Peter is emphasizing. He appeals to His death. In fact, the entire language comes right out of Isaiah's classic Suffering Servant passage.

*Helm:* However, when Peter introduces Jesus for the third time (3:18-22), he appeals in large part to His resurrection and ascension. Jesus was 'made alive in the spirit' (3:18, and this same Jesus has now 'gone into heaven' (3:22). How different this present emphasis is from the previous occurrences—and how important for us to make note of it. What do these insights on relationships teach us? They inform us that 3:18-22 are not concerned with the arduous task of submission, suffering, and death. Rather, this passage is about the final victory that is gained through them. Therefore, we can say that Peter wants to encourage us by lifting our hearts and minds to Heaven where Christ is already seated. In other words, 'Take heart, you too shall one day win!'

### B. Peter's Credal Teaching (1 Peter 3:18, 21d-22)

*McKnight:* These verses are attached here to emphasize the *victory* that Jesus achieved in order that the readers can perceive that, if they live the way that Jesus did (doing good), they also will find ultimate victory in site of the persecutions that loom on the horizon.

*Dorani:* Scholars generally agree that 1 Peter 3:18-22 draws on an early creed or hymn, since the structure and vocabulary seem to differ from the rest of Peter, but to say more is to speculate. The texture of 3:18-19 is almost poetic:

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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 [being] made alive in the spirit  
In which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison.

*Doriani:* Whatever the uncertainties in 1 Peter 3:18-19, the main theme is manifest: when Jesus suffered unjustly, God vindicated Him, and He will vindicate us, too. Further there is a tight connection between verses 18 and 22, where identical aorist passive participles (all ending with the letters *-theis*) connect what humans did *to* Jesus and what the Father did *for* Jesus.... This threefold declaration is the framework for the passage. Jesus was put to death and then rose to life and ascended into heaven. Peter wants us to know that if we suffer and even die for the faith, God will raise and vindicate us, too.

He was put to death, by men in the flesh (*thanatōtheis*)  
He was made alive in the Spirit [or in His spirit] (*zōopoiētheis*)  
He has gone to heaven (*poreutheis*).

*Helm:* Jesus was put to death in the flesh but was made alive in the Spirit and has now gone up into Heaven. In the original Greek these three phrases possess a lyrical symmetry and beauty that the English hides. In fact, some writers go so far as to see a connection between them and the ancient hymn Paul made use of in his first letter to Timothy: ‘He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit...taken up in glory’ (3:16). This much has been established: Peter’s main idea is about the victorious Christ, and it is captured in three ascending phrases.

*Helm:* Our text has a definite movement and flow of thought! It starts with Christ’s sufferings but ends with His ascension. It opens with His willful submission to unrighteous rulers, but by the time it closes, a complete reversal has taken place. The submissive Son is, by the end, the ruling King seated at the right hand of God. And everything—all angels, authorities, and powers—are now subject to Him. Our difficult text, which at first had enough complexities to make us think it was unintelligible, does seem to have a central theme after all. In fact, the main idea is easily observable and readily seen—Jesus Christ was vindicated, and now He sits in Heaven victorious. With confidence we can now say that if this text is about anything, it must be about Christ’s victory and ascendant glory. It is about His climbing supremacy and complete vindication.

*MacArthur:* Peter culminates his section on the unjust suffering of believers with the example of how Christ’s unjust suffering achieved God’s triumphant purpose. At the heart of the gospel is the fact that Jesus Christ, who was perfectly righteous, died for the utterly unrighteous. He triumphed through that undeserved suffering by, as God had predetermined, providing redemption for the world.

### 1. Christ’s Death (3:18abcd)

<sup>18</sup>*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...*

a) *Connection (3:18a)*

<sup>18</sup>*For Christ also suffered once for sins...*

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*Gardner:* Peter's next comments both look back to the preceding verses but also forward to an exposition of Christ's conquering and saving power. The *for* shows the link with what has just been written. First, in looking back to what has just been said, Peter presents Jesus as an example of suffering according to 'God's will.'

*MacArthur:* The conjunctions *also* and *for* point Peter's readers back to the previous passage (3:13-17) and remind them that they ought not be surprised or discouraged by suffering, since Christ triumphed in His suffering even though He died an excruciating death, and that of the most horrible kind—crucifixion.

### b) Content (3:18ab)

<sup>18</sup>*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous...*

*Gardner:* Secondly, Peter uses these comments to develop his argument that Jesus is Lord and has defeated death through His death, resurrection, and ascension. He therefore differentiates Christ's sufferings from other Christian suffering in three ways: *Christ died for sins*. He did so *once for all*, and He was *the righteous* one dying *for the unrighteous*.

#### (1) Sacrificial

*Gardner:* Christ's death, while being an example for all, is also utterly unique, for it brings about the forgiveness of sins and opens the gate for people to come into the presence of God. Christ's passion and death, unlike the suffering and possible death of a believer, was *sacrificial*.

*MacArthur:* Some translations (e.g., KJV, NKJV) of this verse rendered *died* as *suffered*, a reading based on variant Greek manuscripts. But the different translations do not change the meaning: Christ suffered in that he *died for sins*. Sin caused the sinless Christ's death. This is the supreme example of suffering for righteousness' sake (v. 18), and He willingly endured it on behalf of sinners.

#### (2) Sufficient

*Gardner:* His death was an offering for sins and it was an offering that never has to be repeated (*once [and] for all*). The sinless (*righteous*) Jesus died on the cross subject to God's judgment for sin.

*MacArthur:* The phrase *once for all* translates the word *hapax*, which means 'of perpetual validity, not requiring repetition.' For the Jews so familiar with their sacrificial system, that was a new concept. To atone for sin, they had slaughtered millions of animals over the centuries.... But Jesus Christ's one sacrificial death ended that insufficient parade of animals to the altar and was sufficient for all *and* for all time (Heb. 1:3; 7:26-27; 9:24-28; 10:10-12), as He took the punishment due the elect and bore it for them, thus fully satisfying God's righteous judgment.

#### (3) Substitutionary

*Gardner:* The penalty deserved by the unrighteous (plural) was taken by Jesus upon Himself, so that God's justice prevailed. If God was to remain a just judge, then sin had to be accounted for, and the penalty exacted. In Christ's sacrificial death sin was judged and so it was this death that had brought these Christians to God as they placed their faith in Christ and repented of their sins.

*MacArthur:* Thus, in Christ's substitutionary death, He suffered *the just for the unjust* (cp. 2 Cor. 5:21).... Peter directs his statements at the practical, referring to the substitutionary suffering of

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Jesus as an illustration of how the most extreme affliction and injustice resulted in the singularly supreme triumph of salvation. This should be eminently encouraging to believers who suffer unjustly.

*Sproul:* The only ground for our justification, now and forever, is the imputation of the righteousness of Christ to all who believe. The righteousness by which we are justified is what Luther called an *iusticia aliena* an alien righteousness, a righteousness that, properly speaking, is now our own. It comes *extra nos*, from outside of us. It, properly speaking, belongs only to the One who is just, but it is precisely that foreign righteousness that God accounts to us when we put our trust in Jesus.

### c) Consequence (3:18c)

*...that he might bring us to God...*

*Gardner:* His suffering and death has led to these Christians being brought *to God*. This is paralleled in the life of the believer. Just as a wife through her Christ-like life might win her unbelieving husband to the Lord (3:1), so the suffering of Christians at the hands of their persecutors may lead others to place their faith in Christ. ‘If it is God’s will,’ then we may assume that a Christian’s suffering can have the same end, namely, that some are brought to God.

*MacArthur:* The triumph in Christ’s death is expressed in the phrase *that He might bring [believers] to God*. The divine tearing of the temple veil from top to bottom (Mt. 27:51) symbolically demonstrated the reality that He opened the way to God. The heavenly Holy of Holies, the ‘throne of grace’ (Heb. 4:16), was made available for immediate access by all true believers. The verb translated *He might bring (prostagō)* expresses the specific purpose of Jesus’ actions. It often describes someone’s being introduced or given access to another. In classical Greek the noun form refers to the one making the introduction. In ancient courts certain officials controlled access to the king. They verified someone’s right to see him and the introduced that person to the monarch. Christ now performs that function for believers.

### d) Corpse (3:18d)

*...being put to death in the flesh...*

*Gardner:* *He was put to death in the body* in the place of the many who have faith in Him. The tearing of the temple curtain as Jesus died on the cross (Mk. 15:38) vividly demonstrated that His death had gained access into the Father’s presence for all who would believe in Him.

*MacArthur:* Some critics have dispute Christ’s resurrection from the dead by claiming He never died in the first place. According to such skeptical reasoning, He merely fainted into a semi-coma on the cross, was revived in the coolness of the tomb, unwrapped Himself, and walked out. [DSB Note: this is the essential position in the Quran.] But the phrase *having been put to death in the flesh* leaves no doubt that on the cross Jesus’ physical life ceased.

## 2. Christ’s Resurrection (3:18e, 21d)

*...but made alive in the spirit, ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...*

### a) Made Alive (3:18e)

*Gardner:* The gospel of forgiveness not only required the death of Jesus, but also His resurrection. He was put to death in the body, that is, in this physical realm of human flesh with

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the pain and suffering involved in this existence. But He was *made alive by* [or ‘in’] *the Spirit*. Some suggest that this refers to His coming alive in a spiritual realm of existence in which He will live forever. In this case the translation might be ‘made alive in the spirit (see NASB and RSV). Our view is that the NIV is right in assuming that Peter has in mind the activity of the Holy Spirit in raising Jesus from the dead (cp. 1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:4)... The Spirit’s raising of Jesus from the dead reveals the acceptance by the Father of Christ’s sacrifice for sin. In His resurrection lies Christ’s vindication but also our vindication as believers. As Paul says in Romans 4:25: ‘He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.’

*MacArthur*: The phrase *made alive in the spirit* is a reference to Jesus’ eternal inner person. The Greek text omits the definite article, which suggests Peter was not referring to the Holy Spirit, but that the Lord was spiritually alive, contrasting the condition of Christ’s *flesh* (‘body’) with that of His *spirit*. His eternal spirit has always been alive, although His earthly body was then dead; but three days later His body was resurrected into a transformed and eternal state. ... Some interpreters think the aforementioned phrase describes Jesus’ resurrection. But if the apostle had intended to make such a reference, he would have used an expression such as, ‘He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the *flesh*.’ The resurrection was not merely a spiritual reality—it was physical. Thus Peter’s point here must be that though Jesus’ body was dead, He remained alive in His spirit (cp. Lk. 23:46). Although Christ is the One who is eternal life itself (1 Jn. 5:20), He did experience a kind of spiritual death—defined not as cessation of existence but an experience of separation from God.

*Sproul*: Peter’s word’s *made alive by the Spirit* can also be translated ‘made alive *in* the Spirit,’ so we might wonder whether it is a reference to Jesus’ human spirit or to the Holy Spirit... He was ‘made alive *by* the Spirit,’ which, as already noted, can also be interpreted as ‘made alive *in* the spirit,’ thereby distinguishing between Jesus’ body and His soul or, in this case, His spirit, so that He suffered death in the body but not in His spirit. I have a problem with that, because the spirit of Jesus did not have to be made alive; it already was alive. If this is a reference to Jesus’ human spirit, it would indicate an incorrect understanding of what happened to Jesus at His death, some kind of spirit death along with a bodily death. I do not think that is what Peter means here. I think it is referencing the Holy Spirit, so that the power by which Jesus was raised from the dead was the power of the Holy Spirit Himself. That is consistent with what the Scriptures teach elsewhere, that He was raised by the Spirit of God.

### *b) Resurrection (3:21d)*

*Gardner*: Finally, Peter finishes this section on the glorious note of Christ’s resurrection, ascension, and glorification. The resurrection is the evidence that the sacrifice of Christ has been received and accepted by the Father... The resurrection of Jesus also serves as a guarantee of the resurrection of all people who acknowledge Christ as their Savior and covenant Lord.

### **3. Christ’s Ascension (3:22)**

<sup>22</sup>...*who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.*

*MacArthur*: *Having gone into heaven* is a reference to Christ’s ascension, which Luke describes in the opening chapter of Acts (1:9-11).

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*Gardner:* The resurrection led on to Jesus' ascension *into heaven*, from where He now rules.... *At God's right hand* is an expression found in a number of places in the New Testament such as Romans 8:24 and Hebrews 1:3. It means that Jesus rules as God and for God. He is the one to whom power and authority have been given and He carries this out in the will of the Father. Peter may have had in mind Psalm 110.... The authority that belongs to Jesus and is exercised even *now* by Him is an authority over all things, including angels and all spiritual powers whether for evil or good.

*MacArthur:* Peter concludes this passage with a glorious final note concerning Jesus Christ's triumphal suffering. Both the Old and New Testaments affirm *the right hand* as a place of prestige and power (Gen. 48:18; 1 Chr. 6:39; Ps. 16:8; 45:9; 80:17; 110:1; Mk. 16:19; Acts 2:33; 5:31; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 12:2). *The right hand of God* is the preeminent place of honor and authority for all eternity.... That is where Christ went after He finished His work of redemption, and that is where He rules from today (cp. Phil. 2:9-11)

*MacArthur:* Christ assumed His position of supremacy over *angels and authorities and powers* (angelic beings, including Satan and his demons) after they *had been subjected to Him* by the Cross, which fact He proclaimed to the demons in prison. It shows again that He was not preaching to demons a message of salvation, since demons cannot be saved, but are damned forever (Heb. 2:16).... The word rendered *had been subjected* (from *hupotassō*, 'to line up in rank under') describes the present status of all spiritual beings in relation to Christ. He is supreme over all (Phil. 2:9-11).

*Helm:* There is a repeated word in this section of 1 Peter.... The word is *subject*, and we find it here in the final verse of chapter 3.... Clearly, this word has played a strong structural role for Peter up to this point in the letter. It appeared first in 2:13, 'Be *subject* for the Lord's sake to every human institution.' We saw it again in 2:18, 'Servants, be *subject* to your masters.' And it emerged a third time in 3:1, 'Likewise, wives, be *submissive* to your own husbands.' The ironic use of it in our own text can hardly be missed. For nearly two chapters now Peter has been calling the church to the difficult work of submitting to ungodly authorities. But here the tables have been turned. All angels and authorities and powers have been *subjected* to Jesus. Christ has been victorious. It would appear that Peter intends in this text to refresh and encourage weary followers of Christ by showing them the final outcome.

*MacArthur:* Peter's concluding statement to this passage and chapter emphasizes again that the Cross and the Resurrection are what subjected the fallen and rebellious angelic hosts to Jesus Christ, and saved souls from eternal judgment—the greatest triumph ever of the suffering of a righteous person.

### C. Peter's Controversial Teaching (1 Peter 3:18e-21)

#### 1. Christ's Mission (3:18e-20ab)

...but made alive in the spirit, <sup>19</sup>in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, <sup>20</sup>because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah...

##### a) Questions

*Gardner:* Virtually everyone finds this next section really complex and hard to understand. A number of questions confront us: firstly, 'who are the spirits?'; secondly, 'where is this prison?';

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thirdly, ‘when did this preaching happen?; and fourthly, ‘what was preached?’ Then follow any number of questions about how the flood of Noah’s day resembles baptism!

*Doriani:* Four questions seem prominent: 1) Where did Jesus go? 2) Who were the spirits in prison? 3) What is their prison? 4) What did Jesus say to them?

*Sproul:* The passage generates a number of questions: Which spirit is in view here, the human spirit or the Holy Spirit? Who are the spirits in prison? Where does the prison indicate, or where is that prison? When did this preaching mission take place? Finally, why did this preaching mission take place. Each of those questions has various answers supplied by biblical scholars. My view of the meaning of this text is in the minority.

*Helm:* A...commentator framed the problematic text this way: ‘The exegetical questions basically come down to these: Where did Christ go? When did He go? To whom did He speak? What did He say? Different answers to each of these questions can be found, resulting in a labyrinth of exegetical opinions, each of which has no clearly overwhelming claim to certainty, [with one] calculating 180 different exegetical combinations, in theory.’

### (1) Spirit of Christ’s Mission

*Doriani:* It seems impossible to be sure whether the Greek means that Jesus was made alive in His human spirit or made alive by God’s Spirit. Further, did He preach in His spirit or did He preach in the power of God’s Spirit? Interpreters and translators are divided and uncertain. First, Greek doesn’t use capital letters except for personal names, so we don’t know whether *spirit* should be capitalized, to refer to the Holy Spirit, or not, to refer to Jesus’ spirit. Either reading makes sense in context. Second, the word *spirit* is in the dative case, without a clarifying preposition. As a result, the sense could be that Jesus is alive *in* or *with regard to* His spirit or that He is alive *by means of* God’s Spirit. If we step back from the exegetical uncertainties, however, we see that each reading is possible grammatically and theologically because other sections of the New Testament show that both are true: Jesus is alive in His human spirit and by the Holy Spirit. Moreover, Jesus both preached in His spirit and by the Holy Spirit; since the Spirit empowered all of Jesus’ life and ministry.

### (2) Site of Christ’s Mission

*Doriani:* If we hope to interpret this passage correctly, we cannot import 1 Peter 4:6 or Ephesians 4:9 or the Apostles’ Creed (‘He descended into hell’) into it. The passage does *not* say that Jesus ‘descended,’ nor does it mention hell. It states that He *went*, not that He *went down*. Further, we cannot assume that *prison* (*phulakē*) means ‘hell.’ New Testament Greek had an ample vocabulary to refer to the idea of hell or the realm of the dead—*Hades*, *Gehenna*, *the abyss*, *the lake of fire*, *the outer darkness*, *Tartarus*—but *prison* is no part of that vocabulary.

### (3) Substance of Christ’s Mission

*Doriani:* Peter states that Jesus ‘preached’ (NIV) or ‘proclaimed’ (ESV, NASB) something. The Greek word is not *euaggelizomai* (‘to preach the gospel or good news’) but *kērussō*, ‘to make a proclamation.’ Like other words, *kērussō* has a range of meanings, and it can be used for evangelistic proclamations (e.g., Rom. 10:8-15; Gal. 2:2), but it typically means ‘to make an official announcement or public declaration,’ not ‘to evangelize’ (e.g., Mk. 1:45; Gal. 5:11; Rev. 5:2). So we need not think that Jesus *evangelized* the spirits in prison.

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*MacArthur:* The verb rendered *made proclamation* (*kērussō*) means that Christ ‘preached’ or ‘heralded’ His triumph. In the ancient world, heralds would come to town as representatives of the rulers to make public announcements or precede generals and kings in the processions celebrating military triumphs, announcing victories won in battle. This verb is not saying that Jesus went to preach the gospel, otherwise Peter would have likely used a form of the verb *euangelizō* (‘to evangelize’). Christ went to proclaim His victory to the enemy by announcing His triumph over sin.

### (4) Subjects of Christ’s Mission

*Sproul:* Concerning the *spirits in prison*, people argue as to whether they are angelic spirits, the departed souls of righteous believers, or the departed souls of evil, ungodly people. Those are the three basic options, but I am going to suggest a fourth.

*Dorani:* Next, who are these *spirits in prison*? Theories abound. They could be the demons that Jesus cast out during His ministry in Israel, as they await a final reckoning hinted at in Luke 8:26-33. But there is barely a scrap of evidence for this interpretation. They could be all the saints of old, waiting for Jesus to liberate them from Sheol or the bonds of death. But the efficacy of Jesus’ sacrifice is not bound by time. There is no need to believe that Old Testament saints were separated from God from the day of their death to the day of Jesus’ resurrection. The spirits could be the antediluvian generation of humans who lived in the darkness of Noah’s day. But why would they be singled out to hear Jesus’ words? Or they could be fallen angels, perhaps those mentioned in Genesis 6 and imprisoned by God (2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6).

### (5) Sequence of Christ’s Mission

*Gardner:* The further question of *when* this preaching took place must be addressed. Since in verse 18 Peter writes of Christ’s death and resurrection as past events, some has suggested that this preaching took place between the death and resurrection of Jesus. Others, however, have suggested that the preaching is something that happened as Jesus ascended to the Father. That is, at the very time He was being given power and authority over all things, He went to the place where the fallen spiritual beings are imprisoned and proclaimed the Lordship that is now His. Either view is possible.

*Sproul:* Much of the speculation about this text is based on the fact that the reference to Jesus’ going on this preaching mission occurs after the reference to His death. Because it is mentioned later, the automatic assumption is that it must refer to something that took place after His death; but the text does not say this.... Many people agree that this took place after the resurrection and maybe between the resurrection and the ascension. Others argue that it happened at the ascension. We are still left with the mystery of when this preaching actually took place. I suggest that the text does not tell us. It simply mentions that Jesus preached to the spirits in prison by the same Spirit that raised Him from the dead.

#### b) Views

*McKnight:* At this point, however, the discussion becomes highly complex and controversial. It has led to three main views: 1) the descent-into-hell view; 2) the pre-existent Christ view; and 3) the triumphal proclamation over the spirit-world view.

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### (1) ‘Pre-Existent Christ’ View

#### (a) *Description of View*

*Gardner:* Some believe that this is a description of the pre-existent Christ preaching *through* Noah to those who were disobedient and imprisoned in sin in Noah’s generation. Noah is called a preacher of righteousness in 2 Peter 2:7 and his message to his generation was one of the need for repentance. Since they rejected the message of Jesus delivered through Noah, they died in the flood and their spirits are now in prison (in hell or in Hades, the place of departed spirits).

*McKnight:* The view that Peter is describing the pre-existent Christ understands the same elements as follows: 1) *through whom* describes the pre-existent Christ in the person of Noah; 2) the *spirits* are the contemporaries of Noah who needed to hear the word of God; 3) the *prison* is a metaphor for sin and ignorance or a literal description of their location now; 4) *He went* refers to neither a descent nor an ascent, but rather describes simply that Jesus spoke to that generation; and 5) the verb *preached* describes a genuine presentation of the gospel of salvation to the contemporaries of Noah. Once again, the overall compatibility of this view with the theme of 3:13-17 is not hard to understand. Just as Jesus endured suffering in different ways and experienced opposition to His preaching, though He remained faithful, so also the Christians Peter is addressing must remain faithful in spite of suffering.

#### (b) *Issues with View*

*Gardner:* The main problem for us with the first view mentioned above is the way Peter actually describes the rebellious people of Noah’s day. Why does he speak of their *present* circumstances and their being *in prison*, and why refer to them as *spirits* rather than as *people* who perished in the judgment of the Flood but who had heard the gospel through the Spirit of Jesus? Dead human beings are not referred to as *spirits* anywhere else in Scripture. {The closest would be Hebrews 12:23, but there the whole phrase makes it clear that it is people who are in mind: ‘the spirits of righteous men made perfect.’} Also, while no one would doubt that the pre-incarnate Christ was actively at work, Peter is not speaking here of the pre-incarnate Christ. He is specifically speaking (in v. 18) of the Christ who died and was raised from the dead. Furthermore, it is difficult to see why Peter should speak of the spirits of human beings being *imprisoned*. The rest of Scripture has no reference to the imprisonment of those who die in rebellion against God.

### (2) ‘Descent Into Hell’ View

#### (a) *Description of View*

*Gardner:* Others believe that this section refers to the time *between* Christ’s death and resurrection, and that Christ went to the place of the dead (or to hell) where he preached to the disobedient of Noah’s generation imprisoned there. There, say some, his preaching was simply an announcement of His victory over death and, therefore, the justice of God’s judgment on them for their unbelief. Others say that this was a preaching of the gospel, thus giving that generation, having now seen Jesus, a second chance to turn in repentance and faith to God.

*McKnight:* For those who believe Peter is here describing the descent of Jesus into hell after His death, the prominent features are as follows: 1) *through whom* refers to Christ in His disembodied spirit and prior to His resurrection; 2) the *spirits* refers either to the fallen angels of

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Genesis 6:1-4 or to the spirits of those who died prior to the Flood; 3) the *prison* refers to the underworld; 4) the expression *He went* describes a descent into the underworld; and 5) *preached* refers to a genuine offer of salvation to those who had never had an opportunity to hear the gospel. In general, then, while the text does bring in some extraneous factors, it deals with the vindication of Jesus and His continued ministry in spite of death. As the text goes on, the theme of vindication becomes more prominent.

### (b) *Issues with View*

*Gardner*: The main problem for us with the second view also relates to the comments on the first view. It is at least very strange to imagine the word *spirits* is used in this way. Usually dead people would be referred to as *souls* in the way they are in this passage in 3:20! Also, while Noah's generation may have been regarded as the most dreadful example of rebellious and fallen human beings, why should they be singled out for a gospel proclamation? While it is certainly possible that this was a straightforward proclamation of Christ's conquest of death and sin and a vindication of their judgment, we cannot accept the idea of some commentators that a 'second chance' was being given for that generation. This is never hinted at in Scripture. Again, we would also be left asking, 'Why did that generation, rather than any other, receive such an opportunity?'

### (c) *Descent into Hell*

*Sproul*: Much discussion of the text is provoked by a clause within the Apostles' Creed: 'He [Jesus] descended into hell.' This clause, the *Descensus ad Infernos*, was not in the earliest manuscripts of the creed.... Somewhere about 300 AD Clement of Alexandria postulated the thesis that Jesus went to hell to preach the gospel to sinners held captive there so that they might repent and be saved. Augustine objected to that later because the New Testament teaches that we have only one opportunity: 'It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment' (Heb. 9:27). Historic Protestantism does not believe in a second chance after death.

*Sproul*: At the end of the sixteenth century, one of the leading theologians of the Roman Catholic Church, Cardinal Robert Bellarmine, said he believed that Jesus went to the limbo of the fathers in order to release the saints who were caught in this preserved state. Supposedly, limbo is no a rigorous portion of hell but a place on the edge of hell, where the flames of pain do not reach. The thinking was that Jesus went there to preach the gospel to Old Testament believers, who had to wait until the time of Christ before they could enter into heaven. That view, of course, is also rejected by classical Protestantism, which believes, as Paul labors in his letter to the Romans, that the moment a person puts his trust in Christ, he is in a state of justifying grace. To make his case, Paul reached back to Abraham, who was counted righteous the moment he believed in the promise of God (Rom. 4:3). We believe that the saints of the Old Testament went to heaven, not to a holding place. The principle is that the work of Jesus is applied by God both backward and forward. They trusted in the future promise; we trust in the fulfilled promise.

*Sproul*: Calvin believed that it was suitable to say in our confession of faith that Jesus descended into hell; however, he suggested that the order of the sequence of the phrases be changed this way: '[Jesus] suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified, descended into hell, dead, and buried.' Calvin argued that there was a real descent into hell but that it did not take place after Jesus' death or between His death and resurrection, but on the cross. Calvin and others would not speak of a later descent or a descent between death and resurrection because at the end of His

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time on the cross, our Lord said, ‘It is finished.’ He used the word *tetelestai*, a word drawn from the commercial language of the day indicating that the final judgment had been made. Since there was no more satisfaction to render than that which was rendered on the cross, there was no need for Jesus to experience any further punishment. The second reason that classical Protestantism does not believe that Jesus went to hell between His death and His resurrection is that the Bible makes clear where He was. His human body was in the tomb, and His human soul was with the Father. In His dying breath Jesus said, ‘Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit’ (Lk. 23:46).

*Dorani*: Indeed, if we want to guard against uncertainty by asserting what is certain, let us affirm this: if the essence of hell is separation from God, then Jesus ‘descended into hell’ on the cross. He experienced separation from the Father while on the cross. The Apostle’s Creed declares that Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried and that He descended into hell. What the creed says is true, but the order of two phrases should be reverse to read, ‘He was crucified, descended into hell, was dead and buried, and rose again on the third day.’ Jesus’ main descent into hell occurred on the cross. After His death, Scripture notes, He did not join the devil in hell; He joined the Father in paradise (Lk. 24:34, 46).

### (3) ‘Triumphal Proclamation’ View

#### (a) *Description of View*

*Gardner*: Still others believe the statement concerns a proclamation to the fallen angels, the disobedient spirits. The content of the preaching, which may have been during the time before the resurrection or during the ascension, would have been one of proclamation of judgment and that Jesus is Lord. The fallen angels are closely linked with Noah’s generation in Genesis 6:1-3 (where ‘sons of God’ can be understood as angels) and in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6.... The majority of commentators today believe that fallen spiritual beings such as angels are in mind in this passage, and this is the view we take here.

*McKnight*: The view that Peter is here describing a triumphal proclamation of Jesus Christ after His resurrection and prior to His exaltation assumes a Jewish context and takes the following views: 1) *through whom* refers to some kind of spiritual existence of Christ after His resurrection (as the chronology of the text suggests); 2) the *spirits* refer to the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1-4; 3) the *prison* describes the upper regions of binding, or in the words of 2 Peter 2:4, the ‘pits of darkness’; 4) *He went* refers to an *ascent* of Jesus; and 5) *He preached* describes the proclamation of victory that Jesus announced over the spirit world as He ascended to the right hand of God. Once again, the compatibility of this view with the theme of 3:13-17 is obvious: just as Jesus was vindicated before His opponents, so also will the Christians be, if they, like Jesus, remain faithful and righteous to the tasks God has called them to do.

*Sproul*: My friend John MacArthur and I rarely disagree on matters of biblical interpretation, but we do disagree on this text. MacArthur believes that this text refers to a mission Jesus made to the evil angels incarcerated since their evil activities in the days of Noah. We read in the early chapters of Genesis how the sons of God intermarried with the daughters of men and produced a race of corrupt people (6:2). Dr. MacArthur interprets the Genesis text as indicating an actual intermarriage between heavenly beings and earthly beings. I disagree with his thinking there. I think the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis refers to the descendants of the line of Seth who maintained their integrity and the descendants of the line of Cain who were filled with corruption.

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### (b) *Explanation of View*

#### (i) Spirits

*Doriani*: The last option, that Jesus made a proclamation to fallen angels, is most widely adopted, for several reasons. First, in the New Testament, the word *spirits* (plural) always refers to non-human spiritual beings unless qualified. It calls deceased humans *souls* (*psuchē*). So unless this passage is the lone exception (and it would be special pleading to claim that it is), *spirits* does not mean ‘humans’ here either. Typically, *spirits* refers to evil spirits or fallen angels.

*MacArthur*: Christ directed His proclamation *to the spirits*, not human beings, otherwise Peter would have used *psuchai* (‘souls’) instead of *pneumasin*, a word the New Testament never uses to refer to people except when qualified by a genitive (e.g., Heb. 12:23, ‘the spirits of the righteous’).

*Gardner*: While the third view is not without some problems, we agree with the majority of commentators that Peter’s reference to *the spirits in prison* refers to fallen supernatural beings, which include angels. There is a clear link between the fallen angels and the judgment under Noah, assuming that we understand the ‘sons of God’ in Genesis 6:1-3 to be angels. Beyond this, the word *spirits* (in the plural and standing on its own without qualification) is always used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to supernatural beings. Thus we read of the evil and unclean *spirits* that Jesus confronted on many occasions (e.g., Mk. 5:13; 6:7). Then in Hebrews 1:14, angels themselves are called *spirits*. While nowhere does Scripture suggest that the *spirits* of dead sinful human beings are being kept in prison, we do read in Rev. 20:1-3, 7 that Satan is held in prison until the final judgment. 2 Peter 2:4 also refers to angels who have sinned and who have been put in dark dungeons to await judgment. We thus take the *spirits* to be all manner of evil supernatural beings, including the demonic spirits which Jesus encountered during His ministry.

#### (ii) Days of Noah

*Doriani*: Second, we can identify the spirits who *disobeyed...in the days of Noah*. In Peter’s time, the most common Jewish understanding of Genesis 6 held that fallen angels played a great role in corrupting humans in Noah’s generation. These fallen angels are prominent in 1 Enoch 12-21. Of course, Enoch is not authoritative, but it was a widely known and revered book at the time, so we can expect readers to pick up an allusion to it. (We may say that an allusion to Enoch in that day might be picked up much as an allusion to C. S. Lewis’s Aslan might be picked up today.). First Enoch 21:6-10 says that fallen angels ‘transgressed the commandment of the Lord’ and so were bound in prison.

*MacArthur*: Peter further identifies the demons to whom Christ preached His triumphant sermon as those who *once were disobedient*. As the reason that God bound them permanently in the place of imprisonment, that *disobedience* is specifically related to something that happened in the time of Noah. What was that disobedience that had such severe and permanent results? Peter’s readers must have been familiar with the specific sin committed by the imprisoned demons because the apostle did not elaborate on it. Genesis 6:1-4 gives the account of this demonic disobedience.... Satan and his angels had already rebelled and been thrown out of heaven and eternally fixed in a state of unmixed wickedness. Satan had been successful in the Garden and his demonic forces had been at work motivating corruption in the world. The Genesis 6 account

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was perhaps the most heinous effort they made related to the God-ordained provision of marriage (v. 1). The demons mounted an attack on marriage and procreation that wickedly influenced subsequent generations.... The oldest interpretation, the traditional Jewish view of ancient rabbis and modern Jewish commentators as well as of the church fathers, is that ‘the sons of God’ were demons, or fallen angels.... The phrase ‘sons of God’ (Heb., *bene haelohim*) always refers to angels in its other Old Testament uses (cp. Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Ps. 29:1; 89:6).... In his second letter, Peter also briefly refers to the bound demons’ sin (2 Pe 2:4-6; cp. Jude 6-7).

### (iii) Prison

*Dorani:* Third, as we saw earlier, *prison* probably does not refer to hell, since the New Testament uses many other terms for the location of dead, unredeemed humans. We notice that no location for Peter’s prison is given. It seems wise (if uncertain) to take *prison* as a metaphor for God’s control over evil spirits. Jesus’ domination of evil spirits is certainly a pervasive theme in the Gospels and Act, as both He and his apostles break their power and force them to submit to His will. Indeed, the Synoptics’ principal explanation of Jesus’ power over demons uses a similar metaphor for His control of Satan (cp. Mt. 12:28-29).

*MacArthur:* The angelic spirits Christ was to address were *now in prison* (*phulakē*; an actual place of imprisonment, not merely a condition). At the present time believers must struggle against the powers of the unbound demon forces as those forces influence them through the corrupt world system over which Satan has rule (cp. Eph. 6:12).... It was not to such unbound spirits, but to the bound demons that Christ went to announce His triumph. The book of Revelation calls this *prison* the ‘bottomless pit,’ literally the ‘pit of the abyss.’

*MacArthur:* Those wicked spirits were sent to the abyss because they overstepped the boundaries of God’s tolerance. They filled the earth with their wretchedness to such an extent that not even 120 ears of Noah’s preaching convinced anyone beyond his family to repent, believe in God, and escape His judgment. Since that time, the demons who committed such heinous sin had been bound and imprisoned when Jesus died at Calvary. Perhaps by then they thought He had lost the upper hand over them, but such was not the case. Instead, He appeared in their midst and proclaimed His triumph. Colossians 2:15 declares, ‘When [God] had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through [Christ].’

### (iv) Preaching

*Gardner:* Peter concludes in verse 22 with an emphasis on Christ’s ascension and powers which are all in submission to Him. It therefore is perhaps likely that the preaching or declaration of His status took place at the time of His ascension. The *content* of this preaching is therefore best understood as a proclamation of Christ’s Lordship in view of His resurrection rather than an offer of salvation. Nowhere in Scripture are we given to believe that evil spirits or angels are given the opportunity for repentance. This is a special privilege available only to human beings, for they are created in the image of God.

*MacArthur:* The Lord proclaimed His triumph over Satan, sin, death, and hell to the very worst of demons, who disobeyed God in the worst manner in the days of Noah before the Flood. The fallen angels’ long effort to demonize people, hinder the redemptive purpose of God, and prevent the ‘seed’ of the woman (Gen. 3:15) from crushing Satan’s head and sending the demons into the lake of fire (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14-15) was ultimately foiled at the Cross.

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*Doriani:* We cannot know what Jesus told the spirits in prison, but several New Testament themes would be appropriate: their realm is now under His dominion. Every knee will bow to Him. Their doom is sealed, since Jesus' death and resurrection concludes and demonstrates His control over evil in all places and forever.... Perhaps Jesus proclaimed that His death, resurrection, and exaltation sealed their defeat and doom. We cannot now know. But we do know that nothing in 1 Peter 3 promotes the idea that Jesus evangelized humans after their deaths.

### (4) 'Preaching the Gospel' (Sproul) View

*Sproul:* The fourth option as to whom Jesus preached is not without difficulties. When I think of Jesus preaching by the power of the Spirit, the first thing that comes to mind is His inaugural sermon in the synagogue, when He read from the prophet Isaiah (Lk. 4:18-21)... At Jesus' baptism He was anointed by the Holy Spirit and empowered for His earthly ministry, and the majority of His attention while He was on earth was given to His own people, Israel.... If we look at Isaiah 61, we see that the heart of the Messiah's task was to preach release for the captives, the lost of Israel. So it is possible that what Peter has in view here, as he is writing to Jewish people, are living people. The spirits in prison are not dead people but living people, not people in hell, but people who are held captive by sin.

*Sproul:* The Bible does use the term 'spirit' to refer to living people. We do it ourselves when we refer to people as 'souls.' We say such things as, 'Not a soul was at the event last evening.' In fact, when God breathed into Adam His breath, man became a living *nephesh* or *pneuma*—spirit. Because the Bible refers to people as spirits, living people who are in bondage to sin can certainly be referred to as *spirits in prison*.

*Sproul:* There is a difficulty, however, with the reference to those who formerly disobedient in the days of Noah. This might mean that the condition of being captive to sin can be traced all the way back to the days of Noah, when men became wicked and the thoughts in their hearts were only evil continuously so that God judged the world in the flood. Then, through the proclamation of Noah, eight were saved, but through the preaching of Christ to this people, who have been held captive for millennia, they have been redeemed. The context in which Peter writes these things is to encourage us that our suffering is used by God as a testimony for righteousness and is accompanied by the Holy Spirit to bring about the Spirit's purposes of redemption, in the same manner by which our Lord, who was raised by the Spirit, went and preached and saw so much fruit.

*McKnight:* I prefer the third view, but regardless of the view one takes, I would emphasize at this point the need to see this passage in light of its context: the overall theme of vindication. Jesus was righteous and suffered for the unrighteous; God vindicated Him by exalting Him to His right Hand. The churches of Peter need to know that if they remain faithful, like Jesus they too will be vindicated. That is the hope that ought to sustain them as they endure suffering, the hope of which they are to be ready to speak, and the hope that Peter urges them to embrace.

## 2. Noah's Salvation (3:20bcd)

*...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.*

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[DSB Note: this reference to Noah seems primarily to serve as a bridge between the two ‘controversial’ points Peter raises in what precedes and follows it (the ministry of Jesus, the comparison of baptism.)]

### a) *God’s Patience (3:20bc)*

*...when God’s patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared...*

*Gardner:* The other emphasis here that must not be missed is the reference to God’s *patience*. Genesis 6 recounts the way God was prepared for judgment even as the call for repentance was preached by Noah and the ark was built. Throughout its building, the ark itself became a proclamation of the coming judgment for sin. The lengthy delay between God’s announcement of judgment and the flood itself reflects His patience and, in the end, His desire that all should be saved (1 Tim. 2:4). In 2 Peter 3:9 Peter returns to the subject of God’s patience, saying ‘the Lord is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.’ In fact, Peter attributes the apparent delay in Christ’s return to God’s grace. Until He comes in glory there remains time for repentance. However, in spite of God’s patience, it seems that the men and women of Noah’s age particularly succumbed to the influences of the evil spirits and served their will rather than God’s. In the end, *only a few people, eight in all, were saved*.

*MacArthur:* The biblical account of *when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah*, before sending the Flood, Peter saw as an analogy for the triumphant salvation provided through Jesus Christ. God was patient with the corrupt world, as Genesis 6:3 states.... During that 120-year grace period Noah was ‘a preacher of righteousness’ (2 Pe. 2:5) who announced judgment but also offered the way of deliverance.

*Sproul:* The Apostle makes a strong link between what God did in His redemptive purposes in the Old Testament through the salvation of Noah and his family on the ark and what came later in the sacrament of baptism. The experience on the ark is seen as a type or symbol of what would come later. God was patient *in the days of Noah*. During that time, Noah was, as the Apostle Peter wrote, ‘a preacher of righteousness’ (2 Pe. 2:5). After the ark was finished, the rains came, and the flood inundated the whole world, and Peter says that eight people were saved through the instrumentation of the water. If we read between the lines, we can see that, in all likelihood, there were many people who knew Noah and heard his preaching but failed to heed his warning of God’s coming judgment.

### b) *Noah’s Salvation (3:20cd)*

*...while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.*

*Gardner:* In the faithful and obedient life in the midst of much mocking from an evil society, Noah serves as an encouragement to Christians of Peter’s day. He was a righteous man living in evil days, and this is how Peter’s readers must see themselves. God delivered Noah and his family from evil people and did so by the ark. Therefore, while we often see the Flood only in terms of the judgment of evil people, Peter points out that it is *also* the means by which Noah was saved from such terrible evil. The Flood can therefore also be seen as pointing to salvation for God’s faithful people. The *eight* people saved in the ark were Noah and his wife and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives. The deliverance of Noah and his family *in it* (the ark) meant they *were saved through water*. This is how, in the Flood waters, Peter sees a parallel with baptism: *this water symbolizes* (or corresponds to) *baptism* (v. 21).

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*MacArthur:* The members of Noah’s family were the only *eight persons* on earth to heed the divine warning and escape the coming catastrophe of a worldwide flood. Hence only Noah, his three sons, and their wives *were brought safely through the water* while the rest of mankind was drowned in God’s act of judgment (Gen. 6:9-8:22).

*Sproul:* The eight people spared at the time of the flood were Noah and his wife and their three sons and their wives.... If you look at the story of Noah, you see that the water for those who perished was the cause of their destruction. It was the instrument of divine wrath against a world that had gone over completely into godlessness. At the same time, those very waters that destroyed the world carried the vessel in which the family of Noah was housed and carried them to safety.

### 3. Baptism’s Antitype (3:21)

<sup>21</sup>*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...*

#### a) *Baptism in Church History*

*Doriani:* If we streamline 1 Peter 3:21a, we hear the words ‘baptism now saves you’ (the NASB uses the exact sequence). The church has long debated these words. In the early church, many thought baptism to be essential for salvation and embodied that conviction in the emergency baptism of dying infants. Later, Augustine stated that infants were incorporated into the faith and life of the church by their baptism. Others focused on the long preparation of adult converts for baptism. They linked baptism and the confession of faith, by which one shares in the death and resurrection of Christ. In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas and others stressed that God dispensed His grace through the seven sacraments. In that system, baptism had the essential role of removing the guilt of original sin.

*Sproul:* The Roman Catholic Church taught then and continues to teach that the sacrament of baptism works *ex opere operato*, that is, to the very ‘working of the work’; it works regeneration in the souls of those who receive the sacrament, which is known as ‘baptismal regeneration.’ This doctrine has been held to other degrees by Protestant bodies, but in the main, historic Protestantism, particularly Reformed Protestantism, has categorically rejected the idea that baptism automatically regenerates or places a person in a state of salvation, arguing that people who are baptized may indeed not be saved, and it is a mistake to assume that baptism indicates salvation. This was the mistake Israel made with their sign of circumcision.

#### b) *Baptism in Reformed Tradition*

*Doriani:* Protestants, as we know, debate whether baptism is rightly applied to children, and, if so, what it signifies and accomplishes. Risking over-simplification, we can say that most Protestants aim to avoid two errors. First, mindful of the passages that declare what baptism *does*, they do not want to reduce baptism to a mere sign of graces already received. For Scripture says that baptism unites us to Christ (Rom. 6:1ff.), clothes us with Christ (Gal. 3:27), and joins us to the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). But second, we also know that the action of baptism does not, in itself, save. (We deny the Roman concept of *ex opere operato*—‘by the work, worked.’) Scripture says that *the Lord Jesus saves*, by grace through faith, in climactic texts, such as Acts 2:21; 15:11; 16:31; and Romans 10:9-10. Further, it is all too obvious that many of the baptized eventually reject the Lord and His covenant. Therefore, Protestants affirm that God gives grace in baptism and yet deny that it guarantees salvation or necessarily

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regenerates unto eternal life. We want to stand between two errors. We deny that baptism is a *mere* sign and we deny that baptism is an *intrinsically efficacious* sign.

*Sproul:* We believe in our communion that baptism is a sign of God's promise for all who believe, and that the promise is not realized unless we embrace Christ by faith. When we do, all the things that baptism symbolizes become ours. Baptism symbolizes our participation in Christ's burial and in His resurrection. It symbolizes the cleansing of our sin. It symbolizes our regeneration but does not automatically convey it. It symbolizes our sanctification, our being anointed by the Holy Spirit. It signifies our adoption into the family of God, all of which occurs the second we have faith.

*Dorani:* For adults, baptism is a confirmation of their faith and an instrument of their union with the triune God. For children, the Spirit may or may not impart new life at the time of baptism, but baptism can surely be a means for discipleship. For instance, when a child witnesses an infant baptism during worship, parents (or others) can remind the child of his or her own baptism.

### c) *Baptism as a Covenant Sign*

*Gardner:* The Flood of Noah's day is a demonstration of God's *covenant* dealings with men and women.... Those who do come to Him, as He graciously calls them, will receive the blessings of God's covenant promises, but those who turn from God, rejecting Him fully, find that they are judged by Him. This is what happened in Noah's day.... Noah and the small family group, who trusted the Lord enough to respond in faith to His offer of salvation in the ark, were saved. The waters of the Flood thus become *both* the instrument of God's judgment *and* the instrument of God's salvation: they *were saved through water* (v. 20).

*Gardner:* Covenant signs always point in these two directions: to the blessing, salvation, and protection of the sovereign Lord or, for those who reject His Lordship, to their judgment. The covenant sign of circumcision served precisely to remind the Israelites that they stood before the judgment throne of God. The 'cutting off' of the foreskin reminded people both of God's blessings, that His faithful people would inherit the promises of God, but also that, should they rebel and reject the covenant Lord, they would be 'cut off' from His people and from Him (judged). This is how the Flood also functioned, says Peter, as he looks back to the way Noah was saved.

### d) *Baptism in Peter's Epistle*

<sup>21</sup>*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...*

#### (1) Spiritual Type

*MacArthur:* Peter used *corresponding to that*, a phrase containing the word *antitypon*, which means 'copy,' 'counterpart,' or 'figure pointing to' to make the transition to the salvation in Christ. That word yielded the theological term *antitype*, which in the New Testament describes an earthly expression of a heavenly reality—a symbol or analogy of a spiritual truth (cp. John 3:14-16; Heb. 4:1-10; 8:2, 5). The preservation in the ark of those who believed God is analogous to the salvation believers have in Christ.... It is better to view the antitype in the broader sense of Noah and his family's total experience with the ark. God preserved them from the flood waters while the rest of mankind perished. Noah and his children are a genuine type of

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the salvation in Jesus Christ, which preserves believers safely through God’s judgment on sinners.

*MacArthur:* Certain theological traditions misinterpret Peter’s statement *baptism now saves you* to refer to spiritual salvation by water baptism (i.e., baptismal regeneration). But *baptism* (from *baptize*) simply means ‘to immerse,’ and not just in water. Peter here uses baptism to refer to a figurative immersion into Christ as the ark of safety that will sail over the holocaust of judgment on the wicked. Noah and his family were immersed not just in water, but in the world under divine judgment. All the while they were protected by being in the ark. God preserved them in the midst of His judgment, which is what He also does for all those who trust in Christ. God’s final judgment will bring fire and fury on the world, destroying the entire universe (cp. 2 Pe. 3:10-12); but the people of God will be protected and taken into the eternal new heavens and new earth (v. 13).

### (2) Spiritual Reality

#### (a) *Not Removal of Dirt*

*Gardner:* The parallel with baptism builds on these covenantal ideas. The passage has stressed Christ’s Lordship (v. 15) and ends with His ascension (v. 22). Peter has been and will continue to be concerned with Christians living before the Lord in obedience, and he is concerned with how God will judge His people (4:17). Thus, he is keen to say that baptism is *not the removal of dirt from the body*. It is interesting that so many still treat baptism today as more a symbol of being cleansed or washed clean of sin, when Peter says here that this is *not* what it is about.

*MacArthur:* Peter made clear that he did not want readers to think he was referring to water baptism when he specifically said *not the removal of dirt from the flesh...* That he was actually referring to a spiritual reality when he wrote *baptism now saves* is also clear from the phrase *an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*. The only baptism that saves people is dry—the spiritual one into *death* as well as the resurrection of Christ—of those who appeal to God to place them into the spiritual ark of salvation safety (cp. Rom. 10:9-10).

#### (b) *Appeal to God for a Good Conscience*

*Gardner:* Rather, he says, it is *the pledge of a good conscience toward God*. In other words, in the sign of baptism, the believer is saying with *a good conscience*, that is, with a pure heart, with integrity and with deepest honest before God, that he or she is indeed prepared to submit to the just judgment of the covenant Lord. This is what Noah submitted to as he built the ark and launched out into the waters, trusting for God to save him.

*MacArthur:* *Appeal (eperōtēma)* is a technical term that was used in making contracts. Here it refers to agreeing to meet certain divinely-required conditions before God places one into the ark of safety (Christ). Anyone who would be saved must first come to God with a desire to obtain a *good* (cleansed) *conscience* and a willingness to meet the conditions (repentance and faith) necessary to obtain it.... Water baptism does not save; it is the Holy Spirit’s baptizing the sinner safely into Jesus Christ—the elect’s only ark of salvation—that forever rescues the sinner from hell and brings him securely to heaven. This is the ultimate triumph of Christ’s suffering for them, and the pledge of triumph in their own unjust suffering.

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*Doriani:* We still hear the words *baptism...now saves you*. Yet Peter is clear that neither water nor baptism, per se, can save. The act does itself does not save. What saves is the *appeal to God for a good conscience*. What saves, to paraphrase, is the proper awareness of God that leads someone to seek and find peace with Him. This occurs, however, not on the basis of the interest or effort of the person in question but *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...* The risen and reigning Christ saves and is the basis of our *appeal to God*. Water baptism represents all this.

*Gardner:* When Peter talks of *baptism that now saves you and it saves you by the resurrection* (v. 21), it may seem that Peter endues baptism itself with the powers of salvation. But he no more does that than he suggests that it was the Flood waters themselves that saved Noah! Of course, such an idea is far from the teaching either of this epistle or of the rest of Scripture. God alone saves and Peter has already made this point in a great variety of ways in this epistle... If the removal of dirt refers to getting rid of sin, then, Peter says, this does not happen in baptism. It has already happened as he makes clear in 1:2, through ‘the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ.’ The pledge of baptism to God is a response to His call, and is a sign of commitment to Him as the covenant Lord who is both a gracious Savior and a just judge. In baptism, the already forgiven sinner symbolically demonstrates that he has entrusted himself to the just judgment of God, in much the same way that Noah literally did this as he stepped into the ark.

*Sproul:* Without Christ, His death, His resurrection, the imputation of His righteousness to us, and the imputation of our guilt to Him on the cross—without those things, baptism would be utterly worthless. If I thought for one second that baptism put people in a state of justification, I would stand on a corner with a fire hose and baptize as many people as I could. I do not think that is the point being made here. The water that saved Noah and his family saved them because they put their trust in the promises of God, and for those who did not, that same water was the occasion of their utter destruction.

*Gardner: Summary:* Peter is encouraging his readers who are likely to suffer for their faith. It is vital they understand the extent of Christ’s Lordship even over those who may persecute them. Jesus died and was raised from the dead (v. 18) by the Spirit. In His resurrected state, a state capable of inhabiting the spiritual realms of heaven, Jesus proclaimed His conquest over death and sin to the evil spirits and fallen angels who had spent long generations causing men and women to rebel against God. In Noah’s generation these forces of evil had led a generation into terrible rebellion against God. However, God’s judgment was delayed while He waited patiently for the ark to be built. Noah and his family, the faithful were saved. This provides comfort to the people to whom Peter writes. Evil has been conquered in the death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord. In God’s time the judgment and vindication of His people will come just as it did for Noah. Meanwhile, Christ’s Lordship is total.

For next time: Read 1 Peter 4:1-11.

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### Lesson Summary

#### X. The Apostle's Creed (1 Peter 3:18-22)

**Aim:** To rejoice in the triumph of Jesus Christ, who endured the humiliation of suffering and death at the hands of unjust men, was vindicated through His resurrection by the Spirit, and has ascended in Heaven where all things are in submission to Him.

#### A. Peter's Complex Teaching (3:18-22)

This passage is the most difficult in 1 Peter and one of the more difficult passages in all the New Testament. Because that is so, we will look at the beginning and end (vv. 18, 22) first, which are the clearest teaching to understand the overall message of Peter. Then we will dive into the more controversial section in the middle (vv. 19-21).

- This is Peter's third passage focusing on Christ, primarily His triumph (see v. 22)
- The other two (1:19-21, 2:21-25) focus primarily on His example of suffering

#### B. Peter's Credal Teaching (3:18, 21d-22)

The three main, clear points of Peter's teaching take on a credal form, describing Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension into glory (cp. 1 Tim. 3:16).

##### 1. Christ's Death (3:18abcd)

- Christ's suffering is an example of suffering for God's will, connecting to 3:13-17
- Christ's death was sacrificial (*suffered...for sins*), sufficient (*once for sins*), and substitutionary (*the righteous for the unrighteous*)
- In consequence, He has brought us to God (*prosagō*); He has introduced us and brought us into God's presence
- This was accomplished by His physical death (*being put to death in the flesh*)

##### 2. Christ's Resurrection (3:18e, 21d)

- He was *made alive in the Spirit* (cp. 1 Tim. 3:16; Rom. 1:4)
- This most likely refers to the Holy Spirit's power in the resurrection, thus vindicating His sacrifice
- The minority view see this referring to Christ's spirit remaining alive even in death
- Verse 21 explicitly mentions *the resurrection of Jesus Christ*

##### 3. Christ's Ascension (3:22)

- He *has gone into heaven*; a reference to the ascension (Acts 1:9-11)
- He is now sitting *at the right hand of God*, the place of power & authority (Ps 110:1)
- All things, including angels and other spiritual powers are now *subjected to him* (Phil. 2:9-11)
- This submission (from *hupotassō*) is a complete reversal of the situation suffering believers currently find themselves in (cp. 2:13, 18; 3:1)
- Thus, the example of the suffering Savior's triumph brings us great hope

#### C. Peter's Controversial Teaching (3:18e-21)

Peter's teaching on Christ's mission (3:19-20) has led to a variety of interpretations, with three main views being promulgated (Sproul advocates a fourth). His teaching on baptism (3:21) is also controversial. Linking them both are references to Noah (3:20).

##### 1. Christ's Mission (3:18e-20ab)

- The 'Pre-Existent Christ' view sees Christ preaching through Noah to that wicked generation
- The 'Descent into Hell' view sees Christ entering hell between His death and resurrection to preach the gospel to dead souls (spirits) there

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- Christ's 'descent into hell,' understanding hell to be separation from God, occurred on the cross before death, not after death and before resurrection
  - Sproul's 'Preaching the Gospel' minority view has Jesus preaching the gospel to the Jews during His earthly ministry
  - The primary view is the 'Triumphal Proclamation' view, where during Jesus' ascension, He proclaimed His triumph and victory over sin, death, and the devil to the demons who intermarried with humans (Gen. 6:1-4; cp. 2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6), who have since been held by God in darkness awaiting final judgment
2. Noah's Salvation (3:20bcd)
- God demonstrated his patience in the days of Noah, waiting 120 years (cp. 2 Pe. 2:5)
  - But only the 8 souls of Noah's family were saved
  - The flood waters of judgment were also the means of Noah's salvation (in the ark)
3. Baptism's Antitype (3:21)
- Many have misunderstood Peter to be teaching baptismal regeneration (*baptism...now saves you*)
  - But Peter says that baptism does not wash away sin (*not as a removal of dirt from the body*)
  - Rather, Peter links the waters of the flood as a type of baptism, in which those who put their faith and trust in the promises of God (*an appeal to God for a good conscience*) are saved
  - It is only in the power of Christ's death and resurrection and our faith in that sacrifice that we are saved
  - Baptism is a sign and seal of that salvation that must be appropriated by the believer

1 Peter 3:18-22 is a complex passage with several highly controversial elements, and yet the overall structure and teaching is clear. This section ends the long passage begun in 2:11-12 on how to live the Christian life (the 'beautiful life,' the 'good life') in front of a hostile world, which may unjustly subject Christians to suffering. Christ is the example of unjust suffering, but in His death, resurrection, and ascension He has been vindicated and now triumphantly rules over all creation, with every in submission to Him. This overall message of reversal, vindication, and triumph in the face of unjust suffering is of great encouragement to believers who now share in Christ's suffering, knowing that they will also share in His triumph.

The biggest controversy surrounding the passage is the interpretation of Christ's mission of proclamation to the spirits in prison. Many questions (and even more suggested answers abound) in attempting to understand Peter's meaning. The best explanation (although by no means certain), is that Jesus, during His ascension, proclaimed His triumph over sin, death, and the devil to evil spirits (demons, fallen angels) who had been held in prison by God, awaiting judgment for their sin of intermarriage with humans in Genesis 6:1-4 (cp. 2 Pe. 2:4; Jude 6). Peter is not teaching that Jesus literally 'descended into hell' after death or that He offered the gospel to the dead souls of unrepentant sinners. Instead, He triumphed over the evil *spirits* who had attempted to thwart the gospel from coming to fruition (cp. Col. 2:15).

Noah is mentioned (the evil spirits were active in his day) as an example of a righteous man saved by faith. His salvation through the ark is a type of the salvation that we enjoy today, symbolized by baptism. Baptism does not save us; rather it is the faith (*appeal to God for a good conscience*) in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.