

# **FIRST PETER THREE EIGHTEEN THROUGH TWENTY TWO**

## **1Pet.3:18-22, An Exegesis**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. This text, like so many others, has been a problem to many; a problem of exegesis and plain frustration to some.
2. Some contend that the preaching of Vv.18,19 was done to people after death – that it was done by Christ in person during the three days his flesh was in the grave, or some variation of that idea. This I emphatically deny!
3. Some simply refuse to accept the plain truth about baptism taught in V.21.
4. Let us study this passage based upon sound exegesis.

### **II. DISCUSSION**

#### **A. WHAT VV.18-20 TEACH.**

1. According to V.18 what Christ, the just One, did and why.
  - a. Being put to death in the flesh, he suffered once for the sins of the unjust.
  - b. He did this that he might bring the unjust, i.e., sinners, to God.
  - c. Though Christ was put to death in the flesh, death could not hold him (Ac.2:23-27), he was quickened (make alive, raised from the dead) by the Spirit; that is, God raised him from the dead by the Spirit (Ac.2:24; Eph.1:20,21).
  - d. I say it was the Spirit because of what is affirmed in V.19
2. According to Vv.19,20 what did Christ do, how did he do it, to whom did he do it, and when did he do it?
  - a. “He went and preached,” V.19.
  - b. How did he do this preaching? “By which,” that is, by the Spirit mentioned in V.18, the Spirit by which he was quickened, or made alive, or raised from the dead.
  - c. To whom did he do this preaching? To the disobedient “spirits in prison,” Vv.19b,20a.
  - d. When did he do this preaching to these disobedient spirits in prison? When the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was in preparation; that is,

while Noah was building the ark, in which eight souls were saved by water – Noah and his family, V.20b.

- e. This text recognizes the Bible principle that anything done by the Lord's authority is done by the Lord, though not by the Lord in person.
    - (1) In this case "by Christ," by means of the Spirit.
    - (2) Christ existed from before the world, Gen.1:26,27 ("Let us"); Jno.1:1-3; 17:3-5. See 1Cor.10:4.
  - f. The text means to identify the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, and does so by showing that it is the same Spirit by which his preaching was done to disobedient spirits in prison, in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared.
    - (1) Remember this: The prophets spake by "the Spirit of Christ which was in them," 1Pet.1:10,11.
    - (2) Also, "The Spirit of Christ which was in them" (that is, the prophets), and the Spirit by which Christ preached during the days of Noah, is the same as the Holy Spirit. For 2Pet.1:21 says, "...the prophesy came not by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."
3. The spirits of Vv.19,20.
- a. Were preached to.
  - b. Were disobedient spirits – thus sinful spirits.
  - c. Were disobedient during the days of Noah when or while Noah was preparing the ark.
  - d. Were therefore spirits, or persons, or souls living in the flesh during the days of Noah and during the time he was building the ark. (See Gen.6:5ff). Cf. 1Jno.4:1 for further information on the identify of spirits.
  - e. Where "in prison," meaning in the "bondage of sin." For sinners are the "bond slaves" of sin; that is, in captivity to sin. Cf. Lk.4:18; Jno.8:34.
  - f. Were in need of deliverance from the prison of sin, which could be accomplished only by the preaching mentioned in our text, which no doubt was done by means of Noah whom Peter in 2Pet.2:5 says was "a preacher of righteousness."
    - (1) Noah not only built the ark as God commanded.

- (2) Noah also preached to the sinful souls (spirits in prison) of his day.
4. Consider also Gen.6:3: “My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.”
    - a. He would not always “contend, to be at strife or plead” with.
    - b. “I will not suffer my spirit, admonishing them and pleading with them by the prophets, to be perpetually neglected; I will punish them”; “will not keep up his pleading with them indefinitely,” he will, however, continue this for a period of 120 years.
    - c. And this period of grace was the time when God was still endeavoring to bring the people, the spirits in prison, the sinful people of Noah’s day, to repentance through the preaching of Noah. Cf. 1Pet.3:18-20; 2Pet.2:5.
    - d. Thus Christ by means of the Holy Spirit preached and strove through Noah, a preacher of righteousness, for a period of time – until God brought “the flood upon the world of he ungodly.”
  5. 1Pet.3:18-20 has no reference to a chance of salvation being offered to sinners who have died in their sins.
    - a. One’s eternal destiny is fixed at the time of one’s physical death. How he has lived while in the flesh determines that.
    - b. Consider Eccl.12:13,14; Mt.16:27; Lk.16:19-31; 2Cor.5:10; Heb.9:27.
    - c. It is true that 1Pet.4:6 says: “For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead...”
      - (1) But it is a perversion of 1Pet.4:6 to claim it teaches those who died in sin were, or are, offered a chance of salvation after dying in sin.
      - (2) Note this: “**Was** (past tense) preached to them that **are dead** (present tense).”
      - (3) The gospel was preached to them while they were living (note the context), but they were dead at the time Peter wrote this. No 2<sup>nd</sup> chance after death here!
  6. “Wherein few, that is eight souls were saved by water,” V.20.

- a. “Wherein” is literally, “into which,” i.e., into the ark, in order to be saved, the eight souls went, being saved in it through (dia, by) means of the water.
- b. They were saved in the ark, and by the water; the ark protected them from the flood, and the water bore up the ark, the means of their salvation or deliverance from the destruction of the flood brought upon the world of the ungodly.
- c. Those saved in the ark were “saved through water.”

**B. THE APPLICATION MADE AND THE TRUTH TAUGHT IN Vv.21,22.**

- 1. V.21a: “The ‘like figure’ whereunto even baptism doth also now save us...,”
  - a. Or, “Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism,” (ASV).
  - b. The antecedent of the word “which” is the “water” alluded to in V.20, not, however, the water of the flood, but water generally, and in this clause identified as the water of baptism.
  - c. Thus Peter affirms that water, utilized in baptism – that is, water baptism – “after a true likeness,” of that characteristic of the deliverance of the 8 souls, now saves you.
  - d. “After a true likeness (“the like figure”) doth now save you, even baptism”
    - (1) Strong says: “the like figure” means the “counterpart,” the part resembling or corresponding to another.
    - (2) Vine, I, 96: “A corresponding type, said of baptism; the circumstances of the flood, the ark and its occupants, formed a type, and baptism forms a corresponding type.”
    - (3) Thayer,51: “A thing resembling another; its counterpart; something in the Messianic times which answers to the type, prefiguring it in the O.T., as baptism corresponds to the deluge.”
  - e. The deliverance or salvation of the 8 souls is thus made “the like figure” or pattern of the deliverance or salvation

which the sinner receives in passing through the waters of baptism.

- f. The “likeness” obtains as follows:
    - (1) The waters of the flood bore up the ark and delivered the 8 souls from the destruction of the ungodly antediluvian world.
    - (2) These waters separated the 8 souls who were saved from those who were drowned in them.
    - (3) The flood destroyed the evils of the old world and enabled the 8 souls to emerge into a new existence.
  - g. In like fashion:
    - (1) Baptism is the final condition in God’s plan of salvation through man’s obedience to which one is enabled to escape the condemnation of the lost. Cf. Mk.16:15,16; Rom.1:16,17; Ac.22:16; 2:36-38.
    - (2) Baptism designates the line of demarcation or separation between the saved and the lost. Cf. Rom.6:1-8,16-18.
    - (3) In baptism the “old man of sin” is buried, and from its watery grave one comes forth to “walk in newness of life.”
  - h. “Which also,” that is, the water of the text is a reference to the water of baptism that “doth also now save,” ordinary water, the same kind of water in the flood – therefore water baptism. Cf. Ac.10:47,48; 22:16.
2. V.21c: “By (through) the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”
- a. Baptism “doth not save us” only because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.
  - b. Had he not been raised from the dead it would not have availed anything for anyone to be baptized in water for any purpose. See Rom.4:25; 1Pet.1:3-5.
3. Guarding against any possibility of misunderstanding the verse as a result of a misinterpretation of what he affirms baptism does, Peter offers both a negative and a positive explanation.
- a. Negatively: The baptism that saves is “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh.”
    - (1) “Filth” here denotes or refers to that which is dirty, physically defined. See Rev.22:11.
    - (2) The water of baptism that saved does not wash sin from the skin, and is not to be confused with a bath

for the body or a ceremonial cleansing of the flesh of man

b. Positively: “but the answer of a good conscience toward God,” or “the interrogation of a good conscience toward God.”

(1) “Answer” is from the Greek meaning: “A demand; earnest seeking, i.e., a craving, an intense desire, to long for something.” Thayer.

(2) That which is desired is a good conscience toward God.

(3) When a sinner is taught through gospel preaching that he must be baptized for the remission of sin, or in order to be saved from past sins, and he has the desire to do right; the desire to obey God for the right reason, he will not have a good conscience toward God until he obeys God’s command to be baptized for the remission of his sins.

(4) This has to do with the soul of man, not his fleshly body!

4. Having been raised from the dead to sit on David’s throne at God’s right hand in heaven (Ac.2:27-36), Jesus Christ now reigns with all authority and power, V.22. Cf. Eph.1:19-23, etc.

### III. CONCLUSION

1. By means of the Spirit; that is, through Spirit-filled and Spirit-guided Apostles Jesus Christ still preaches to spirits in prison – to sinners in captivity to sin – in order to free them from their bondage.

2. And as Peter affirms in V.21 baptism doth also now save or deliver sinners from the bondage of sin. Not baptism alone, but as the final step in God’s plan of salvation to save man from past sins.

3. This is made possible “by (through) the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

4. There is no other way and no chance after death for one to hear, believe and obey the gospel, or to be saved, after having died in sin.

5. Now is the time to do it! Have you done this? Heb.3:7,8.