

PREACHING TO IMPRISONED SPIRITS

Time, Recipients, content of the Message

By Arlen L. Chitwood

“Because Christ also suffered for sins once, 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;

In which also he went and preached [delivered a proclamation] unto the spirits in prison,

That aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water” (I Peter 3:18-20, ASV).

The “spirits” in this passage are said to have been “disobedient” during days preceding the Flood. For this reason not only are they imprisoned but Christ also appeared in their presence at a time following their imprisonment and delivered a proclamation.

The time and purpose of this proclamation evidently center around *the reason* for their previous actions, and the passage must be interpreted with this in mind.

These imprisoned spirits cannot be identified as descendants of Adam. The dead from

the lineage of Adam are never referred to as being in prison; nor are individuals from the human race, living or dead, ever called “spirits.” Man has a *spirit*, but he himself is never called “a spirit.”

Scripture speaks of “the spirits of just men” (Heb. 12:23) and refers to Christ, *following His resurrection*, as “a quickening spirit” (referring to His position as Life-Giver in His resurrection body [*a spiritual body* — I Cor. 15:44, 45 — *a body of flesh and bones*, the same body which had been placed in the tomb, but now possessing the Spirit rather than the blood as the life-giving, animating principle of the body]).

But the descendants of Adam cannot be referred to by the use of the word “spirit” in this sense, for they have not received such bodies, with the possible exception of Enoch, Moses, and Elijah.

Among God’s created beings, only *angels* are called “spirits” in the Word of God:

“Who maketh his angels *spirits*, and his ministers a flame of fire.

Are they [angels] not all ministering *spirits*, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb. 1:7b, 14).

The “spirits” in I Peter 3:19 can only be identified as *the angels* who had left their positions of power in the heavens, had taken upon themselves the form of man, and had cohabited with women in the human race during days preceding the Flood. The prison in this passage is *Tartarus*; and according to both II Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, these angels are not only confined in this prison but they are chained, awaiting judgment.

The word for “preach” in I Peter 3:19 is *kerusso* in the Greek text, which means, “to

make an announcement.” The word itself gives no indication concerning either the type announcement or the content of the message. These things must be determined from the context or other related Scripture.

Kerusso appears numerous times throughout the New Testament and is almost always used in connection with proclaiming some facet of the gospel message. In these passages though, either the Greek word *euaggelion* (“gospel,” “good news”) or other related qualifying words appear with *kerusso* to make this connection (e.g., Matt. 4:23; I Cor. 1:23).

But there is nothing in I Peter 3:18-20 which would even remotely connect *kerusso* with the gospel message. In fact, the word *could not* refer to the proclamation of the gospel. The message in this passage is directed to “spirits [angels],” and the gospel is for the descendants of Adam, not angels. *Kerusso* is used in I Peter 3:19 in the same sense that it is used in Rev. 5:2 — a proclamation concerning *something other than the gospel*.

The *time* of this proclamation did not occur, as many infer, between Christ’s death and resurrection while He was in *Hades*; nor, as others infer, did this proclamation have anything to do with the strange interpretation which is termed “the preaching of Christ [by the Holy Spirit] through Noah” during days preceding the Flood. I Peter 3:18, 19 clearly reveals that Christ delivered this proclamation *Himself, following His resurrection*.

In verse eighteen, Christ was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the Spirit.” At the time of His death, Christ possessed a “soulical [*psuchikos*]” body of flesh, blood, and bones. The life-giving, animating principle of this body was the blood (Lev.

17:11). But at the time of His resurrection Christ possessed a “spiritual [*pneumatikos*]” body of flesh and bones, without blood. The life-giving, animating principle of this body was the Spirit of God.

The body which Jesus possessed following His resurrection was the same body He had possessed before His death. The words “soulical” and “spiritual,” in the preceding respect, have to do with the life-giving, animating principle of the body, not the body itself (*cf.* I Cor. 15:44-50).

The thought in verse eighteen is continued in verse nineteen by the statement:

“In which also he went and preached [delivered a proclamation] unto the spirits in prison.”

In verse eighteen, Christ was put to death in a soulical body and then raised in a spiritual body. Then, in verse nineteen, Christ went to *Tartarus* and delivered a proclamation to the angels who had been directly responsible for the judgment of the Flood.

The word “which” (v. 19) is a translation of the Greek relative pronoun “*ho*.” A rule of Greek grammar states that the relative pronoun must agree with its antecedent in both gender and number. “*Ho*” is a singular case form of the word which can be either masculine or neuter (both case forms in this instance are the same in the Greek text, but the feminine is different).

The wording in verse eighteen, in the English text, would seemingly allow for two possible antecedents to be considered: “flesh,” and “Spirit.” However, in the Greek text, “flesh” is a feminine word and thus cannot be the antecedent. “Spirit,” on the other hand, is a neuter word. Consequently, the

antecedent of “which” can only be “Spirit” (a neuter relative pronoun agreeing with its neuter antecedent).

With this in mind, note what is in view insofar as the time and manner of the proclamation are concerned. In verse eighteen, Christ was “made alive in the Spirit.” Jesus possessed a resurrection body animated by the Spirit, capable of actions which cannot be accomplished in the natural body (*cf.* Luke 24:36-51; Acts 1:9-11).

Then verse nineteen states, “In which also he went and preached [delivered a proclamation] unto the spirits in prison.” The relative pronoun “which,” with its antecedent, “Spirit,” can only refer to His resurrection body. Jesus, *in His resurrection body*, went to *Tartarus* for the specific purpose of making an announcement to *a particular group of imprisoned angels*.

These angels imprisoned in *Tartarus* had sought, under Satan, to completely corrupt the lineages of all the families of the earth, evidently attempting to prevent the appearance of *the Seed of the woman* in Gen. 3:15. But now, the second Man, the last Adam, *stood in their presence*. Not only this, but *He stood there in His resurrection body with His work of redemption completed*.

He had met Satan face to face in the wilderness, showing that He was fully qualified to redeem that which the first man, the first Adam, had forfeited in the fall. He then paid redemption’s price at Golgotha, His Own shed blood. Man’s redemption was now not only an accomplished fact, but redeemed man (having descended from Adam through Noah and his three sons [an uncorrupted lineage]) could ultimately realize the purpose for his creation in the beginning.

(To see the full extent of Christ’s finished work at Calvary and how it affected the complete demonic world, whether those presently chained in *Tartarus* or those ruling over the nations with Satan, refer to the author’s article, “The Preaching of the Cross.”)

This finished work of Christ at Calvary had to do with not only the unsaved but also the saved. And, as well, this finished work forms an announcement for the complete demonic world, which would be part and parcel to the announcement which Christ delivered to the spirits in prison following His resurrection.)

The only proclamation which Christ could have delivered to the imprisoned angels in *Tartarus* would have had to center around the fact that what they had attempted to do preceding the Flood was for naught. An uncorrupted human race existed — a race uncorrupted by what these angels attempted — and the resurrected Christ stood in their presence. And not only would the resurrected Christ, as the second Man, the last Adam, one day take the kingdom, but a great host of individuals redeemed from the lineage of the First Adam would reign as co-heirs with Him.

The angels in *Tartarus* could now look forward to only one thing: *remaining chained, awaiting consignment to the lake of fire*.

Satan and the angels continuing to reign with him could, likewise, now look forward to only one thing: *biding their time, awaiting the day Christ takes the kingdom, followed ultimately by their consignment to the lake of fire, “prepared for the devil and his angels.”*