

**CHRIST PREACHING THROUGH NOAH:
1 PETER 3:19-20 IN THE LIGHT OF DOMINANT THEMES
IN JEWISH LITERATURE**

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Near the end of chapter 3 in his first epistle, Peter writes:

18. For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit;

19. in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison,

20. who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

The difficulty of this passage has resulted in a variety of views, especially about the meaning of verse 19, *in which he went and preached to the spirits in prison*.

The issues where commentators differ are at least these:

1. Who are the spirits in prison?
unbelievers who have died?
OT believers who have died?
fallen angels?
2. What did Christ preach?
second chance for repentance?
completion of redemptive work?
final condemnation?
3. When did he preach?
in the days of Noah?
between death and resurrection?
after resurrection?

Among all the possible answers to those questions, the following five views have been the most commonly held (the italicized words indicate the identity of "the spirits in prison" in each view):

View 1: When Noah was building the ark, Christ "in spirit" was in Noah preaching repentance and righteousness through him to *unbelievers who were on the earth then* but are now "spirits in prison" (people in hell).¹

¹Augustine, *Letter 164*, chaps 15-17; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part 3, question

View 2: After Christ died, he went and preached to *people in hell*, offering them a second chance of salvation.²

View 3: After Christ died, he went and preached to *people in hell*, proclaiming to them that he had triumphed over them and their condemnation was final.³

View 4: After Christ died, he proclaimed release to *people who had repented just before they died in the flood*, and led them out of their imprisonment (in Purgatory) into heaven.⁴

View 5: After Christ died (or: after he rose but before he ascended into heaven), he travelled to hell and proclaimed triumph over the *fallen angels* who had sinned by marrying human women before the flood.⁵

There are other views than these but they are usually different combinations of the details listed above (offering salvation to unbelieving people and angels, or proclaiming triumph over sinners and complete redemption to believers, etc.).⁶ For our purposes this list is sufficient.

52, art 2, reply to obj 3; Robert Leighton (died 1684), *Commentary on First Peter* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1972) 354-66; T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (3 vols; ET Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1909), 2:289; W. Kelly, *Christ Preaching to the Spirits in Prison* (London: Morrish, 1872) 3-89; D. G. Wohlenberg, *Der erste und zweite Petrusbriefe und der Judasbrief* (Leipzig: Deichert, 1923) 106-115; D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1981) 842.

²B. Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1946) esp 90-91, 118, 120-122, 130-131 (includes preaching also to disobedient angels); C. E. B. Cranfield, *I & II Peter and Jude* (Torch Bible Commentary; London: SCM, 1960) 84-6 (but hesitantly); A. M. Hunter, *IB* 12; 132-3 (preaching to the rebellious generation of the flood); J. H. A. Hart, "The First Epistle-General of Peter," *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol 5, 68-9 (preaching to disobedient angels, who repented) (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1903); Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St Peter and St Jude* 170-3; Ernest Best, *I Peter* (NCB; London: Oliphants, 1971) 140-7; others listed in Reicke, *Spirits* 47-9 and in W. J. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965) 21, note 34; A. T. Hanson, "Salvation Proclaimed. I. 1 Peter 3:18-22," *ExpT* 93 (1981-82) 100-15.

³Reicke (*Spirits* 44-5) lists several 17th century supporters of this view, which he calls the "orthodox Lutheran theory"; it is strongly supported by R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St Peter, St John and St Jude* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1938) 160-9.

⁴This position began with Robert Bellarmine in 1586, and has been common among Roman Catholic interpreters; so H. Willmering in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (ed. B. Orchard; London: Nelson, 1953) 1179; others listed in Reicke, *Spirits* 42-4, and Dalton, *Proclamation* 30-1.

⁵This is probably the dominant view today, primarily because of the influence of E. G. Selwyn's commentary (*The First Epistle of Peter* [2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1946] 197-203, 314-362), and then of the detailed work by Dalton, *Proclamation* 135-201 (Dalton sees the preaching as having occurred during an "invisible ascension" of Christ on Easter Sunday morning, just after his appearance [John 20:17] to Mary in the Garden; see 185). Others who favor this view (but who place the preaching at various times, either before Christ's resurrection, immediately after it, or at his ascension) include: J. N. D. Kelly, *The Letters of Peter and Jude* (CBC; Cambridge: University Press, 1967) 151-8; J. Fitzmyer, *JBC*, 2:366-7; Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle of Peter* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959) 142-3; Edwin Blum, "I Peter," *Expositor's Bible Commentary* vol 12 (gen. ed. F. Gaebelin; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 241-3; A. R. C. Leaney *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1969) 50-2; R. T. France, "Exegesis in Practice: Two Samples," *New Testament Interpretation* (ed. I. H. Marshall; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 264-281 (a good recent statement of this position).

⁶For the view of R. Harris (1902), E. Goodspeed (1945), and others that the text should be emended to read, "Enoch went and preached . . ." see notes in Reicke, *Spirits* 41-2.

The following discussion will argue for View 1 (Christ preaching through Noah when the ark was being built), a view which has not received the support of any recent commentary, and which is frequently dismissed in discussions of this passage because Augustine, who first proposed it, took *in prison* to refer to "the darkness of ignorance" in which unbelievers lived—obviously a metaphorical (or "allegorical," to use Dalton's term) sense of "prison" not intended by Peter. But this sense of "in prison" is by no means essential to the view that Christ was preaching at the time of Noah, and a more common understanding ("spirits in hell") is certainly consistent with it (see below). The other standard objection to this view is that it has no clear relationship to the context, but it will be argued that on closer inspection the context lends more support to this view than perhaps to any of the others.

Although most of the views mentioned above depend on backgrounds familiar to readers of the Bible generally, a word of explanation should perhaps be given regarding View 5. This view argues that certain extra-biblical Jewish traditions, especially the tradition of 1 Enoch about Enoch going and proclaiming a message of condemnation to disobedient angels, were well known to Peter's readers. Therefore, when Peter said that Christ went and preached to the "spirits in prison," his readers would immediately have recognized the allusion to 1 Enoch and known that Peter was portraying Christ as a "second Enoch" who in a far greater way "went and proclaimed" his victory over fallen angels, and announced to them, as had Enoch long before, that they were eternally condemned for their sin. The fact that they "formerly disobeyed" is then understood to refer to the sin of angels who married human wives in Gen 6:2, 4, a story well-attested in extra-biblical Jewish literature.⁷

Dalton has performed a valuable service for biblical studies in his careful tracing of the history of different views, and in his most gracious evaluation of even those views which he rejects. Moreover, his extensive arguments in support of his own position have persuaded many readers from a very wide spectrum of theological positions. Even if his position is not accepted by all readers, it must certainly be reckoned with in any subsequent discussion. Because of this, and because I am in substantial agreement with the weighty objections he brings to bear against Views 2, 3, and 4, much of my interaction in the subsequent discussion will be with Dalton's argument.

I shall consider the three questions mentioned above in the order given:

- I. Who are the spirits in prison?
- II. What did Christ preach?
- III. When did he preach?

⁷The fullest statement of this position is in Dalton, *Proclamation* 135-201, but a briefer yet very clear statement of this view is found in France, "Exegesis," 264-81, or in Kelly, *Commentary* 151-8.

I. WHO ARE THE "SPIRITS IN PRISON"?

A. The meaning of "spirit" (πνεῦμα) alone

1. General meaning: angels or human spirits

If the phrase "the spirits in prison" appeared in the text without any further specification, it could refer either to human or to angelic spirits, depending on the larger context. This is because the word *spirits* (πνεύματα) both in the Bible and in extra-biblical literature can be used to refer to human spirits or to angels (or demons).

Examples of the word used to refer to a human spirit, that part of a person which continues to live and remain conscious after a person's physical body dies, are found, for example, in Eccl 12:7 ("and the spirit returns to God who gave it" is a description of death; the LXX has πνεῦμα here); Matt 27:50 (Jesus "yielded up his spirit"); Luke 23:46 ("Father, into your hands I commit my spirit");⁸ John 19:30 (Jesus "bowed his head and gave up his spirit"); Acts 7:59 (as Stephen was dying he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"); 1 Cor 5:5 ("that his spirit may be saved"); 7:34 ("how to be holy in body and spirit"); 14:14 ("my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful"); Heb 12:23 ("the spirits of just men made perfect" are said to be now in heaven, in God's presence), Jas 2:26 ("the body apart from the spirit is dead"); cf. Num 16:22 ("the God of the spirits of all flesh"); Josephus, *War* 7.185, etc.

Examples of the meaning "angel" (or "evil angel, demon") are found in Matt 8:16 ("he cast out the spirits with a word"); 10:1 ("he gave them authority over unclean spirits"); 12:43, 45; Mark 1:23; 6:49 ("they thought it was a spirit" [πνεῦμα]); Luke 10:20 ("a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have"), etc.

2. Does πνεῦμα, "spirit," have a special meaning when used "absolutely"?

Those who understand the spirits in prison to be fallen angels (view 5 above) have claimed that the word "spirit" is never used "absolutely" (or without a "defining genitive phrase") to refer to human spirits.⁹ Those who make this objection claim that πνεῦμα is used 'absolutely' to refer to good or evil angelic spirits.

However, this objection is simply one example of an error in exegetical method which occurs frequently in Selwyn's commentary, the error of drawing conclusions about the meaning of words or phrases from an inadequate amount of data or from artificially created distinctions in style which really have no significant influence on the meanings of the words used. In this case, the objection is invalid for three reasons:

⁸Some have suggested that this verse means simply, "Into your hands I commit myself" (so Dalton, *Proclamation* 146). However, in light of the very similar expressions in Matt 27:50, John 19:30, and Acts 7:59, where such a meaning is not possible, this suggestion is not persuasive.

⁹The objection apparently originated with Selwyn, *Peter* 199, and was repeated by Dalton, *Proclamation* 147, and France, "Exegesis," 269.

(a) In fact the word πνεῦμα is used "without a defining genitive" to refer to a "departed" human spirit (the spirit which had left Abel after Cain killed him) in *1 Enoch* 22:6 and again in 22:7; another example is found in *1 Enoch* 20:6 (Greek text).¹⁰ These examples are significant because Selwyn, Dalton, and France all emphasize *1 Enoch* as the supposed background for this passage in *1 Peter*. Other examples of πνεῦμα used "absolutely" of a human spirit are *Eccl* 12:7; *Matt* 27:50; *John* 19:30.

(b) But the larger issue is not whether we can find examples of πνεῦμα used without a "defining genitive" to refer to human spirits, for that is simply an artificial distinction. The real issue is whether the context specifies more clearly what type of spirit is meant. If by πνεῦμα used "absolutely" Selwyn and Dalton mean πνεῦμα used with no further specification or definition from context, then it must be said in reply that no examples of πνεῦμα meaning "angelic spirits" can be found without further definition from context, either.

In fact, the three examples of an "absolute" use cited by Dalton,¹¹ *Matt* 8:16; 12:45; *Luke* 10:20, are all three further defined by the immediate context: *Matt* 8:16 mentions people who were "demon possessed" in the previous phrase; *Matt* 12:45 is in a paragraph where the subject had been defined as "unclean spirits" in v 23; *Luke* 10:20 is in response to v 17, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." These three are not instances showing that πνεῦμα generally, without other indications from context, means "evil spirits" — for all these instances have prior contextual specification. (*Acts* 23:9 is a general reference to "heavenly beings," probably any non-angelic ones which the Pharisees may have thought to exist.)

But this is simply because of an obvious linguistic fact: πνεῦμα has a range of meanings, and can refer to human spirits, to angelic spirits, to God's Holy Spirit, etc. Because of this, there will always be a further specification of the type of spirit intended in context if the author wishes to communicate to the reader the sense in which he is using the term.

(c) Third, *1 Pet* 3:19 is not itself an example of πνεῦμα used with no further definition from context, for the sentence itself defines further what kind of "spirits" are intended. They are spirits "in prison" who "disobeyed in the days of Noah" and who did so "while the patience of God was waiting during the building of the ark." We, of course, must understand what those phrases mean, but it is clear that the context gives much further specification concerning the type of spirits intended.

3. "Spirits" in *1 Enoch*

It has been argued that for Peter's readers the phrase "spirits in prison" would automatically call to mind the use of πνεῦμα in *1 Enoch* to refer to "angels who sinned and were consigned to a place of punishment awaiting

¹⁰Greek text in M. Black, *Apocalypsis Henochi Graeca* and A.-M. Denis, *Fragmenta Pseudepigraphorum Quae Supersunt Graeca* (two volumes in one; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 32. A recent English translation by E. Isaac is found in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; 2 vols.; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983, 1986) 1:13-89.

¹¹*Proclamation* 147.

final judgment."¹² But even if one grants for the sake of argument that all of Peter's readers had just finished reading *1 Enoch* the night before Peter's letter arrived, it does not follow that "spirits in prison" would mean "fallen angels" to Peter or to his readers.

The extant Greek sections of *1 Enoch* use πνεῦμα 37 times.¹³ Of these 37 times, the word is used 20 times to refer to angelic or demonic spirits. But it is used 17 times to refer to human spirits (*1 Enoch* 9:10; 20:3, 6[2]; 22:3, 6, 7, 9[2], 11[2], 12, 13[2]; 98:3, 10; 103:4) — and 20 versus 17 is no overwhelming preponderance of use. We are unjustified in drawing from this data any conclusions about what Peter's readers would have thought the phrase "spirits in prison" meant.

Moreover, in some of these instances the human spirits of those who have died are seen to be bound or confined in a place of waiting until they face the final judgment (*1 Enoch* 22:3-13 [which uses πνεῦμα 10 times in this sense]; cf 98:3), and could readily be said to be "in prison." Here *1 Enoch* does not use the same word Peter uses for "prison" (φυλακή) when he talks about these imprisoned human spirits, but it does not use the word when it talks about imprisoned angelic spirits either (φυλακή does not occur in *1 Enoch*).

4. Are the spirits "in prison" now, or when Christ preached to them?

Although it might be assumed on an initial reading of *1 Pet* 3:19 that "he preached to the spirits in prison" must refer to those who were "spirits" and were "in prison" at the time the preaching was done, that is not necessarily the case. The verse could equally well be understood to mean, "he preached to the spirits who are now in prison," that is, those who are spirits in hell at the time Peter is writing but who were formerly human beings on earth at the time of the flood. (NASB translates, "He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark.") It is quite natural to speak in terms of a person's present status even when describing a past action which occurred when the person did not have that status. For example, it would be perfectly correct to say, "Queen Elizabeth was born in 1926," even though she did not become Queen until long after 1926. Someone might even say, "I spoke with Queen Elizabeth in 1946," even though she was not Queen until 1952.

Peter himself speaks this way just a few verses later in *1 Pet* 4:6, "For this is why the Gospel was preached even to the dead, in order that though they have been judged in the flesh like men, they might live in the spirit like God." The great majority of commentators, no matter what their view on 3:19-20, hold — correctly, I think — that "the Gospel was preached to the dead" in 4:6 means that the Gospel was preached to "those who are now dead" (at the time Peter is writing) even though they were alive on the earth at the time the Gospel was preached to them. Peter explains that it was

¹²Dalton, *Proclamation* 166-8.

¹³This count is taken from the concordance in C. Wahl, *Clavis Librorum Veteris Testamenti Apocryphorum Philologica* [Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1972] 548), and excludes the variant readings.

preached to them for "this" reason: to save them from final judgment (which is mentioned in the immediately preceding verse, v 5). Thus, before they died the Gospel was preached to those who are now dead in order that though they still had to die in the flesh like men, they could nevertheless live eternally like God: it was not preached to save them from physical death but from final judgment.

Therefore, in understanding 1 Pet 3:19-20, the possibility must be left open that "he preached to the spirits in prison" means, "he preached to those who are now spirits in hell but who at the time of the preaching were human beings living on the earth." He of course calls them "spirits" rather than "persons" or "men" because it is as "spirits" that they now exist.

B. Evidence from four other defining phrases

When we read the rest of Peter's sentence in 1 Pet 3:19-20, we find that he has not left us with the ambiguous phrase "the spirits in prison" standing by itself. It is followed in the same sentence by four additional defining phrases:

- "who formerly disobeyed"¹⁴
- "in the days of Noah"
- "when the patience of God was waiting"
- "during the building of the ark"

These four phrases, upon examination, all indicate that the "spirits in prison" must be understood to be human spirits, not angelic spirits. This can be seen by an investigation of the biblical and extra-biblical evidence pertaining to these phrases.

1. Evidence for angelic disobedience

a. The sons of God in Gen 6:2, 4

Those who favor view 5 above (the spirits in prison are fallen angels) emphasize the many places in extra-biblical Jewish literature where the "sons of God" who married "the daughters of men" in Gen 6:2, 4 and begot children by them, are understood to be sinful angels who married human women. It is true that this interpretation of Gen 6 is frequent in extra-biblical literature: it is attested in at least the following nine texts: *J. Ant.* 1.73; Philo, *On the Giants* 6; *Questions on Genesis* 1.92; *CD* 2:18; *1 Enoch* 6:2, 6; 106:13-14; *Jub* 5:1; 10:1-6; *2 Bar.* 56:12-15.

But it is often not realized that such an interpretation of Gen 6 is far from unanimous in Jewish tradition. The following list shows nine other texts where non-angelic interpretations are held:

¹⁴At this stage in the discussion I shall assume the validity of the common English translation, "who formerly disobeyed," even though at a later point I shall argue on grammatical and contextual grounds that it would be better to translate this phrase, "when they formerly disobeyed."

First, while Philo himself calls these "sons of God" angels in one place, he later calls them "good and excellent men."¹⁵ Moreover, the Targums and Rabbinic literature are unanimous in adopting non-angelic views of the "sons of God." *Tg. Onq.* on Gen 6:2 and 4 reads "sons of princes" (or great men), and *Tg. Ps-J.* has the same. *Tg. Neof.* has "sons of the Judges" in both verses.¹⁶

T. Sota 3.9a interprets "sons of God" as men of the generation of the flood. In *Gen. Rab.*, they are understood as "sons of judges" and as "leaders,"¹⁷ while *Num. Rab.* understands them as the generation of men at the time of the flood.¹⁸ *B. Sanh.* 108a understands them as men at the time of the flood. Symmachus translates Gen 6:2 as "the sons of the rulers" (τῶν δυναστευόντων).

Although this material is admittedly somewhat later than *1 Enoch* and *Jub.* (both 2nd cent. BC), the citations from Philo and the Targums are certainly not irrelevant for NT exegesis — indeed, the Rabbinic material generally represents a stream of Jewish tradition which is certainly relevant as a background for NT studies. And the citations in this second group are diverse and frequent enough to give strong indication of the existence of a "non-angelic" view of the "sons of God" in Judaism, especially more orthodox Judaism before or during the time of the NT.

Our understanding of this point is not crucial, for one could be convinced that Peter's readers all thought that Gen 6:2 and 4 referred to fallen angels who took human wives and still hold that 1 Pet 3:19-20 spoke of human beings who disobeyed during the building of the ark. (Peter does not, of course, say "he preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed by marrying human women" but rather "spirits . . . who disobeyed when the ark was being built.") But this evidence is nonetheless helpful in showing that one cannot simply assume that the readers of 1 Pet had an "angelic" interpretation of Gen 6:2, 4 in their minds. Indeed, Peter would not have assumed an "angelic" interpretation in his readers' minds either, for no uniform interpretation of this passage can be demonstrated for the first century AD.

b. Other references to angelic disobedience

But even if there is no uniform interpretation of the "sons of God" passage in Gen 6:2, 4 to refer to angelic sin, is there nonetheless other

¹⁵*Questions on Genesis* 1.92. Although the meaning of the passage is still widely disputed, something near to this statement of Philo seems to be the most satisfactory interpretation: note the emphasis on sonship as including likeness to one's father in Gen 5:3, and the tracing of descendants from God through Adam to many "sons" in all of chapter 5. The structure of the narrative is tracing the parallel development of the godly (ultimately Messianic) line of Seth and the ungodly descendants of the rest of mankind. Thus "sons of God" are (as in Deut 14:1) people belonging to God and like him, walking in righteousness (note Gen 4:26 as an introduction to Gen 5), and "daughters of men" are the ungodly wives whom they marry. Cf the argument of H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (2 vols; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) 1:249-54; also J. Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 243-49. But M. G. Kline, *WTJ* 24 (1962) 187-204, argues for human kings.

¹⁶However, a marginal gloss of unknown date in *Tg. Neof.* on Gen 6:4 reads "sons of the angels."

¹⁷*Gen. Rab.* 26.5 on Gen 6:2, quoting Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai (ca AD 140).

¹⁸*Num. Rab.* 9.24, on 5:27.

evidence in Jewish literature showing a common tradition of interpretation in which angels are said to have sinned "in the days of Noah" or "while the patience of God was waiting" or "during the building of the ark"?

Something near to this idea is found in *Jub.* 10:4-5, where Noah, speaking of evil spirits (who are called "Watchers"), says to God, "You know what your Watchers . . . did in my days, and also these spirits who are alive. Shut them up and take them to the place of judgment."

Then with reference to the reason for the flood, *T. Naph.* 3:5 says that "the Watchers departed from nature's order; the Lord pronounced a curse on them at the flood. On their account he ordered that the earth be without dweller or produce." Here the flood is specifically said to have been caused by the sin of angels. In addition, *1 Enoch* 67:8-13 says that the waters of the flood will first become hot — to punish sinful angels — and then become cold — to punish sinful man.

But it must be mentioned that even the tradition in these texts is mixed. The sin of angels is more frequently placed not at the time of the flood, but in the days of Enoch and Methuselah, two and three generations before Noah (*Jub.* 4:22, cf 4:20, 20:8), or in the days of Jared, four generations before Noah (*1 Enoch* 6:6 [Greek text]; 106:13). Such a difference of two to four generations may seem insignificant to the modern reader with simply a vague memory of the genealogy leading to the birth of Noah, but such a difference was certainly not insignificant to the authors or readers of these extra-biblical works, for these writings go into great detail narrating the events of the lives of people like Enoch, his son Methuselah, his grandson Lamech, and his great-grandson Noah.¹⁹

More significantly, even in these three texts which place angelic sin in some relationship to the flood, there is still no mention of two elements which Peter specifically mentions in 1 Pet 3:20: God patiently waiting (for repentance), and disobedience which occurred "during the preparation of the ark."

One final strand of evidence for the idea of angelic sin as a background to 1 Pet 3:19 might be found within the NT itself: It might be argued that 2 Pet 2:4-5 (and perhaps Jude 6) connect the sin of angels and consequent judgment with Noah and the flood, or perhaps with the sin concerning "the daughters of men" in Gen 6:2, 4.

However, this conclusion cannot be sustained after a closer look at 2 Pet 2:4-7, for there in the same sentence Peter mentions not only angelic sin and the flood, but also "the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah" and the rescue of Lot (vv 6-7). But Peter hardly thinks the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah happened at the same time as the flood! This means that, far from seeing events such as angelic sin and the flood as contemporaneous, he is simply picking out three separate examples of sin and judgment from the OT to emphasize that judgment on sin will come and that God will save the righteous from it (vv 9-10).

Jude 6 is even less persuasive. It mentions angelic sin and judgment on angels, but does not specify the sin except for a general statement that

¹⁹See the detailed chronologies in other Jewish literature, such as *J Ant* 1.81-88 (with extended note in LCL edition, 4:38-39); also *b. Abod. Zar* 9a (with note in Soncino English translation [ed. I. Epstein; London: Soncino, 1961] 4:44).

angels "did not keep their own position" (a probable reference to rebellion against God's authority). And there is no connection with the time of the flood but rather the following sequence:

- v 5 Exodus from Egypt; judgment on unbelievers (Exodus 14; Numbers 14)
- v 6 Sin of angels; judgment
- v 7 Sodom and Gomorrah; judgment (Genesis 19)

No chronological connection is implied; Jude, like Peter, simply selects three noteworthy examples of judgment from the OT. In neither text is there an implication of angelic sin at the time of the flood, or of angelic sin with human women.

Nevertheless, if there were no other references indicating a tradition of *human* disobedience just before the flood, the three pseudepigraphal texts which briefly mention angelic disobedience in a general way, though not precisely parallel to Peter's statement about the spirits in prison, might still be thought to provide a helpful background against which Peter's readers would have understood 1 Pet 3:18-20. But before such a conclusion is drawn, it is appropriate to examine the evidence showing a tradition of human, not angelic, disobedience "during the building of the ark."

2. Evidence for human disobedience

a. Who disobeyed "during the building of the ark"?

(1) OT evidence

The OT narrative indicates that there were human beings who disobeyed God "when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark," but there is no indication of angelic disobedience during that time.

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth . . . and the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth . . . so the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground." (Gen 6:5-7)

Moreover, God saw that

all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. And God said to Noah, "I have determined to make an end of all flesh: for the earth is filled with violence through them." (Gen 6:12-13)

Though there are different views on whether Gen 6:1-4 refers to the sin of angels when it talks about the "sons of God" (see above), what is not in dispute is the fact that the entire section immediately preceding the command to build the ark (Gen 6:5-13) clearly emphasizes human sin and only human sin as the reason God brings the flood upon the earth. The text does not say that God was sorry that he had made angels, but that he was sorry that he had made man (v 6); it does not say that God decided to blot out fallen angels, but man (vv 6, 13). It is not the violence and corruption

practiced by angels which arouses God's anger, but the violence and corruption practiced by man (vv 5, 11, 12, 13).

At this point one might object that the human disobedience is sometimes seen as having been caused by prior angelic disobedience, and that therefore the two are closely connected anyway. While this connection is made in some extra-biblical literature, it is certainly not a uniform interpretation, and it is clearly not a connection made in the biblical text itself. In addition, 1 Pet 3 speaks not of those who disobeyed long before the flood, but of those who disobeyed precisely "when the ark was being built."

(2) NT evidence

In the New Testament, 2 Pet 2:5 mentions Noah as a "herald of righteousness" in the midst of "the world of the ungodly." Similarly, in Matt 24:37-39 and Luke 17:26-27 Jesus clearly emphasizes human disregard of impending judgment in the days of Noah. Furthermore, he says that a similar situation will occur again: "As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man . . ." (Matt 24:37). In this context, the warning about the need for human watchfulness, and the parallels with activity in the days of Noah, mean that human disobedience in the days of Noah is clearly in view. Once again, angelic disobedience is never specifically connected with the judgment of the flood itself.

(3) Extra-biblical evidence

The clear biblical emphasis on human disobedience which led to the flood (see above) not surprisingly gave rise to a very common and diverse set of Jewish traditions concerning this human sin.

Sib. Or. 1.171-172 says that people who heard Noah's exhortations to repentance from their wicked life mocked him: "When they heard him they sneered at him, each one, calling him demented, a man gone mad."²⁰

Similarly, *b. Sanh.* 108b says that those watching Noah "derided him," saying, "Old man, what is this ark for?"

Gen. Rab. 30.7 (on 6:9) says that Noah was mocked by those who watched him build the ark. They despised him and called him "contemptible old man." Moreover, when Noah cut down trees to build the ark and told them a flood was coming they responded, "It will come only on your father's house."

In *Eccl. Rab.* on 9:14 (sec. 1), when Noah warns the people, "Tomorrow a flood will come, so repent," they refuse to listen and mock him, "If punishments begin they will begin with your house."

These specific citations quite clearly speak of *human* disobedience "while the ark was being built," and should be seen in contrast to the total absence of references to angelic sin during the building of the ark.

²⁰This mocking occurs in the middle of Noah's sermon about their sins, after the ark has been built: note lines 190-191, 205. This section of the *Sib Or* is dated in the late first century BC or very early first century AD by J. J. Collins, in agreement with A. Kurfess: see J. J. Collins, "Sibylline Oracles" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:331.

Furthermore, Jewish literature frequently mentions human, not angelic sin as the reason why God brought the flood on the earth.²¹ And the phrase "the generation of the flood" is used frequently in Rabbinic writings as a paradigm of extreme human wickedness.²²

All of these texts (45 listed in notes 21-22, from every strand of Jewish tradition) must be seen in contrast to the small evidence of a tradition of angelic sin at this time: one text (*Jub.* 10:4-5) which mentions angelic sin in Noah's day and two (*T. Naph.* 3:5; *1 Enoch* 67:8-13) which say angels were punished at the flood (one of which, *T. Naph.* 3:5, also says the earth was made "without dweller or produce" because of angels' sin). Not one text from any strand of Jewish tradition mentions angels disobeying "during the building of the ark." The overwhelming weight of extra-biblical tradition—as well as the biblical evidence itself—clearly emphasizes human sin as the most likely referent for Peter's phrase, "who formerly disobeyed . . . in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark."

b. For whom was the patience of God waiting?

When Peter further defines the "spirits in prison" as those "who disobeyed when the patience of God was waiting," it strongly suggests that God was waiting for repentance on the part of those who were disobeying. Otherwise there would be no point in Peter's mentioning God's patience. Furthermore, the word ἀπεκδέχομαι, "waiting," has the nuance of hopeful or expectant waiting for something to happen ("await eagerly," BAGD, 83).

The "angelic" interpretation of this passage does not seem able to do justice to this phrase, because there is no statement in the OT or NT that fallen angels ever have a chance to repent (cf 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Heb 2:16). But if Peter is referring to human beings who disobeyed, the statement is entirely consistent with a repeated history throughout the Bible of God's patient waiting for human repentance before bringing judgment.

This emphasis on God's waiting for sinful people to repent is again unanimous in extra-biblical Jewish literature, and it is specifically connected with the years leading up to the flood. *Tg. Neof.* on Gen 6:3 reports God saying to Noah, "Behold, I have given you 120 years, hoping that they might do repentance." The same idea is repeated in *Tg. Onq.*, *Tg. Ps-J.*, and the *Frg. Tg.* on Gen 6:3.

Mek. Shirata 5:38-39 (on Exodus 15:5-6; Lauterbach, 2:39-40) says that God gave an extension of time "to the generation of the flood that they might repent." The Mishnah (*Aboth* 5:2) says that all the generations from Adam to Noah continued to provoke God, thus making known how "long-suffering" God is, until he finally brought upon them the water of the flood.

²¹The texts are too numerous to cite here but it is sufficient to give the references: *Tg. Onq.*, *Tg. Ps-J.*, *Tg. Neof.*, and the *Frg. Tg.* on Gen 6:5 and 6:11-13; *Gen. Rab.* 26.5 (on 6:2); 26.7 (on 6:4); 28.8 (on 6:7); 31.1-5 (on 6:13); 31.6 (on 6:13); *Eccl. Rab.* on 2:23, sec 1; *Num. Rab.* 5.3 (on 4:18); 9.18 (on 5:21); 9.24 (on 5:27); *b. Ros. Has.* 12a; *b. Sanh.* 108a; *Philo, Q. Gen.* 1.99, 100; 2.13; *Abr.* 40-41; *J. Ant.* 1.74, 75, 98; CD 2:20-21; *1 Enoch* 65:6, 10-11; 67:8-10; *2 Enoch* 70:4-8; *3 Enoch* 4:3; *Jub.* 5:2-4, 7-9; *Apoc. off. Adam* 3:3; *Bib. Ant.* 3:2, 6; *Sib. Or.* 1:130-131, 150-179; 3 Macc 2:4.

²²*M. Sanh.* 10:3; *Eccl. Rab.* on 2:23, sec 1; *Song Rab.* on 1:4, sec 3; *Num. Rab.* 9.18 (on 5:21); 14.6 (on 7:54); 20.2 (on 22.2), etc.

Similar statements about God's waiting for men to repent are found in *Gen. Rab.* 32:7 (on 7:10); *Num. Rab.* 14.6 (on 7:54). And Philo (*Q. Gen.* 2:13 on *Gen.* 7:4, 10), in discussing the delay of the flood, says that God "grants repentance of sins . . . in order that when they see the ark . . . they may believe the announcing (τῷ κηρύγματι) of the flood . . . and that they may turn back from impiety."²³

Thus, with respect to the background for Peter's phrase, "when the patience of God was waiting," the extra-biblical literature gives frequent and diverse witness to God's waiting for human repentance, but it is entirely silent regarding any waiting for angelic repentance — something the NT even seems to deny as a possibility.

c. Noah as a preacher to his generation

There remains one further strand of extra-biblical Jewish tradition relevant to the background of biblical interpretation against which Peter was writing his epistle. This concerns a widespread testimony to Noah's efforts as a "preacher of righteousness." Of course, this evidence is of primary value merely to confirm the results of the two previous sections, indicating: (a) that it was humans who were thought to be sinning at that time, for they are the ones Noah tells to repent, and (b) that God's patience is waiting for the repentance of the human beings to whom Noah preaches. But the fact that Noah is frequently said to be a "preacher" of repentance and righteousness to those around him during the building of the ark should at least prompt us to consider the possibility that when Peter speaks of preaching "to the spirits in prison, who formerly disobeyed . . . during the building of the ark," he is in some way alluding to the preaching activity of Noah, familiar in Jewish tradition.

What is interesting is the frequency with which Noah is called a "preacher" or "herald" using the word κηρύξ and related words, all of which are cognate to κηρύσσω in 1 Pet 3:19 (Christ "preached" to the spirits in prison).

For example, in the early material from *Sib. Or.* Book 1,²⁴ we find that lines 150-198 contain two long speeches by Noah calling for repentance from those around him and warning that the flood was coming. In fact, *Sib. Or.* 1:128-129 records God as commanding Noah, "Proclaim repentance to all the peoples . . . so that all might be saved." The verb used for "proclaim" is κηρύσσω, the same verb used in 1 Pet 3:19.

Philo's use of the cognate noun κήρυγμα to refer to warnings about the flood has just been cited (see above). Josephus does not use this term of Noah, but he says that Noah "urged them to come to a better frame of mind and amend their ways" (*Ant.* 1.74, referring to human sinners).

In connection with Noah's preaching, *Gen. Rab.* 30.7 (on 6:9) quotes Rabbi Abba (3rd cent. AD?) as saying, "The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'One herald arose for me in the generation of the flood, and this was Noah.'"

²³Here Philo uses the noun κήρυγμα, "announcement, proclamation" which is cognate to Peter's verb κηρύσσω, "preach, proclaim," in 1 Pet 3:19.

²⁴This section was written perhaps 50 years before the time of the New Testament: see above, note 20.

(The word for 'herald' used here is *kerōz*, an Aramaic loanword from Greek κήρυξ, cognate to κηρύσσω in 1 Pet 3:19; cf BDB, 1097.) Other examples of Noah's preaching are found in *Eccl. Rab.* on 9:14, sec. 1; *b. Sanh.* 108a, 108b.

Moreover, in early Christian literature we read, "Noah preached repentance and those who obeyed were saved" (*1 Clem.* 7.6), and that Noah proclaimed a "new beginning to the world" (*1 Clem.* 9.4). In both cases Clement (writing in AD 95) uses κηρύσσω to speak of Noah's preaching activity.

It is also relevant here to notice that Noah is called a "preacher (κηρύξ) of righteousness" in 2 Pet 2:5.

Thus, there is a widespread Jewish and early Christian tradition about Noah's activity as a preacher to those around him before the flood. And Peter's verb κηρύσσω and its cognates are used with surprising frequency in these traditions, even by Peter himself.

3. Conclusion from survey of background material

The conclusion from this survey of extra-biblical literature is significant. When Peter defined the "spirits in prison" as those "who disobeyed in the days of Noah when the patience of God was waiting during the building of the ark," he could not possibly have expected that his readers would have identified those specific characteristics with disobedient angels. There is simply no evidence in biblical or extra-biblical literature which mentions angels who fit all those characteristics.

But there is an abundance of evidence in biblical and extra-biblical literature identifying sinful human beings who fit each part of that description exactly. Our conclusion must be that Peter's phrase "spirits in prison" refers in some way to the human beings who disobeyed at the time Noah was building the ark, human beings who were destroyed in the flood. This conclusion can only be avoided by disregarding the crucial defining phrases in 1 Pet 3:20, and carrying on one's exegesis as if Peter had never said "in the days of Noah, while the patience of God was waiting during the building of the ark."

C. Additional note: Can we assume that Peter's readers knew 1 Enoch?

There is one further consideration which may appropriately be mentioned here. Those who take the "spirits in prison" to be fallen angels must argue that *1 Enoch*, the primary location of a detailed story about angelic sin and subsequent imprisonment, was widely known in the ancient world, so widely known that Peter could allude to a section of *1 Enoch* without mentioning the work by name and still assume (if he wished to communicate effectively) that all his readers scattered throughout four provinces in Asia Minor would understand the allusion and interpret his sentence correctly in light of that allusion. (I have argued above that even if *1 Enoch* were that widely known, readers would not automatically think of angels when they read the phrase "spirits in prison." As we saw, even in *1 Enoch* there are human as well as angelic spirits imprisoned and waiting judgment, and there is human as well as angelic disobedience, with the human sin coming nearer the time when God's patience was waiting during the building of the

ark. Nevertheless, this question is still relevant, since it speaks to a major part of Dalton's argument.)

It seems that we must entertain serious doubts about whether *1 Enoch* was that widely known, and whether Peter would have been justified in making such an allusion. It is one thing to agree that Jude 14-15 quotes *1 Enoch* by name and does so in a way in which even readers who have never heard of *1 Enoch* can still understand the force of what Jude is saying. It is quite another thing to say that Peter would allude to *1 Enoch* without mentioning it by name, and would do so in such a way that readers who were not familiar with *1 Enoch* would be completely unable to understand Peter's meaning. Yet this is what advocates of the "preaching to fallen angels" view must claim.

Against this claim must be put the fact that even though *1 Enoch* is quoted in Jude 14-15, no one has ever demonstrated that *1 Enoch* was that widely known or even familiar to the great majority of churches to which Peter was writing. In a recent introduction to *1 Enoch*, E. Isaac writes, "Information regarding the usage and importance of the work in the Jewish and Christian communities, other than the Ethiopian Church, is sparse. . . . It seems clear, nonetheless, that *1 Enoch* was well known to many Jews, particularly the Essenes, and early Christians, notably the author of Jude."²⁵ Yet this statement says nothing about whether it was known at all among Gentiles in Asia Minor — indeed, it implies that we have no positive evidence which would indicate such knowledge. *1 Enoch* is cited or alluded to by several early Christian writers from the 2nd century AD onward, but once again that gives no reason to think that it was known by Peter's readers in the 1st century who were far removed both geographically and culturally from the Palestinian Jewish origins of this book. Yet if this crucial fact must simply be assumed rather than demonstrated by those advocating the view that Christ preached to fallen angels, then it must be seen as an additional fundamental weakness in the position.

Furthermore, a hermeneutical and to some extent theological question arises for the modern interpreter: Is the usual nature of the New Testament writings such that knowledge of a specific piece of extra-biblical literature would have been required for the original readers to understand the meaning (not the historical origin, but the meaning) of a specific passage? Is there any other text in the NT where readers simply would not have understood the meaning of the passage unless they were familiar with some extra-biblical text? I, at least, am unaware of one.

The reason this is seldom if ever the case is not far to seek: The NT writers were writing in order to communicate clearly with wide audiences of diverse backgrounds. In such a situation, they could of course assume knowledge of the OT, for that was the "Bible" for all Christians. But other than that, there was no one piece of literature which they could assume to be familiar to all their readers. And if they could not assume that, then it would seem to be irresponsible if they had ever written something which *required* knowledge of another piece of literature in order to be understood.

Of course, for the modern interpreter extra-biblical literature frequently provides information which gives more precise understanding of specific

²⁵E. Isaac, "1 Enoch," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 1:8.

details about the force of a passage, and in many cases (as in this one) it can provide additional certainty about the correctness of an interpretation. But advocates of the "fallen angels" view are claiming more than either of those things: they are claiming that a knowledge of the content of specific parts of *1 Enoch* is *necessary* today (and, by implication, was *necessary* for the original readers) if one is to come anywhere near a correct understanding of the force of the passage.

On the other hand, and again in favor of the "human disobedience" view, we must consider the fact that the NT authors regularly assume a knowledge of the OT on the part of their readers. In the case of 1 Pet 3:19-20 that means that the OT background must be given greater weight in evaluation of the readers' understanding than any background derived from extra-biblical literature. And for readers with only the background of the OT, a reference to disobedience "while the patience of God was waiting, during the building of the ark" would not be ambiguous, needing to be explained by acquaintance with extra-biblical literature. The phrases would be understandable and they would point unmistakably toward human beings who sinned during the time of Noah.

Who are the "spirits in prison"? A vast preponderance of biblical and extra-biblical evidence seems to require the conclusion that they were not sinful angels but human beings who disobeyed God while Noah was building the ark. This conclusion by itself, if accepted, would rule out View 5 (above).

II. WHAT DID CHRIST PROCLAIM?

The citations regarding Noah's preaching which were quoted in the previous section indicated a frequent use of Peter's verb κηρύσσω in connection with Noah's preaching to those around him, calling them to repentance and faith. This is not a necessary meaning of κηρύσσω, for the word just means "to proclaim," and the message which is proclaimed must be understood from other elements in the context.

However, it must be noted that the verb is very commonly used in the NT and the LXX to refer to evangelistic preaching — preaching the gospel of Christ, or calling people to repentance and faith. Moreover, Peter's use of the related noun κήρυξις in 2 Pet 2:5 must be taken as very significant. Whether one understands that text to mean that Noah preached righteousness, or that Noah was a righteous preacher (a less likely but grammatically possible view), in either case it is Noah's preaching of repentance to those around him which is in view.

Furthermore, it was noted earlier that the phrase "when the patience of God was waiting," in connection with "who formerly disobeyed" strongly suggests that the preaching is a preaching calling for repentance on the part of those who are disobeying — otherwise there would be no need to mention that the patience of God was "expectantly or eagerly waiting."

In connection with these observations, it is fair to say that if a proclamation of condemnation were in view (as Dalton argues), Peter would have had to make that clear by further specifying it within the context. The contextual markers suggesting a preaching of repentance are too strong on the other side. Therefore, if Peter had wanted to state

something like View 3 (Christ proclaimed final condemnation to people in hell) or View 5 (Christ proclaimed final condemnation to angels in hell), he would have needed to say something like "proclaimed condemnation" (κατάκριμα) or "proclaimed judgment" (κρίσιν), otherwise his meaning would not have been understood by his readers.

Furthermore, if one holds to a preaching of condemnation in this text, it seems difficult to explain in a satisfactory way why the proclamation of final condemnation was made only to these specific sinners (or fallen angels) rather than to all those who were in hell. Why were only those who disobeyed during the building of the ark worthy of receiving this special proclamation of condemnation? Of course they are viewed — in biblical and extra-biblical literature — as especially ungodly sinners, yet it still does not explain why only they receive this decisive condemnation at the time of the turning point of all history, the death and resurrection of Christ.

One might respond that these are mentioned by Peter as representative of all fallen angels (or all sinners), but that is not a convincing explanation — if Peter had meant "all," why did he just mention some? To know that he intended these to be representative of "all," the reader would need some indication in the text, such as "to all those like the spirits in prison who disobeyed when . . . [etc.]" or "to the spirits in prison who formerly disobeyed . . . and to all like them who have sinned . . . [etc.]" But there is no such indication in the text, and an interpretation which understands Christ's preaching to be only to those specifically mentioned is surely to be preferred.

With regard to View 4, which holds that Christ proclaimed the completion of redemption to OT believers, it must be said that this interpretation is also contrary to the context. The mention of "prison" and disobedience, as well as the waiting of the patience of God, and the comment that only eight were saved, all point to a preaching to sinners who need repentance, not to righteous saints waiting to hear a glad cry of victory. Once again, with so many contextual indicators pointing the other direction, if Peter had meant "proclaim victory and triumph" he would have had to specify it further by saying "proclaim victory" (νίκος or some similar term), but in the absence of such specification Peter's readers would not have inferred that sense for "preached." And here also the objection must be registered that there is no convincing reason why the proclamation of the completion of redemption would be made only to those spirits who disobeyed during the building of the ark, instead of to all OT believers.

Thus, the content of the proclamation is best understood to be a proclamation to sinners of their need to repent and trust in God.

This meaning is most suitable to the larger context of 1 Pet 3 as well. The entire section from 2:11 up to this point has been concerned with living as Christians in the midst of an unbelieving world, and Peter has frequently called attention to the need for a good witness to unbelievers who are hostile toward his Christian readers (see 2:12, 15; 3:1-2, 15-16). Especially relevant is the call to witness in 3:15-16 which provides the immediately preceding context to 3:19-20. Peter encourages his readers "to be ready always to give an answer to everyone who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you," while doing it with meekness and reverence and keeping their consciences clear. In the context of such an exhortation to witness to unbelievers, it

would be appropriate to speak of preaching to those who disobeyed during the building of the ark if that preaching were a calling of unbelievers to repentance and faith. This would also fit with the emphasis on Christ's willingness even to suffer "in order to bring us to God" (1 Pet 3:18). These indications from the larger context give additional confirmation for the conclusion that the preaching to the spirits in prison in 3:19 is a preaching which calls unbelievers to repentance and faith.

III. WHEN DID CHRIST PREACH?

The previous discussion has concluded that the spirits in prison are people who disobeyed during the time of Noah, and that the preaching Peter speaks of was a preaching which called them to repentance. These conclusions, if correct, will rule out Views 3, 4, and 5, listed at the beginning of this discussion. But these conclusions would nevertheless be consistent with both View 1 (Christ preached through Noah at the time the ark was being built) and View 2 (Christ preached between his death and resurrection, giving those who disobeyed before the flood a second chance for salvation). The issue here is the time at which the preaching was done.

A. The connection between verse 18 and verse 19

The time of Christ's preaching in v 19 can only be determined after understanding the last phrase of v 18, "being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit," and, in light of that, the sense of "in which" (ἐν ᾧ) at the beginning of v 19.

Being put to death in the flesh indicates the fact that Jesus' "flesh" or physical body was put to death (so NIV: "He was put to death in the body"). Although "flesh" (σάρξ) has a range of meanings in the NT, whenever "flesh" is contrasted to "spirit" (πνεῦμα), as it is here, the contrast is between physical, visible, transitory things which belong to this present world and invisible, eternal things which can exist in the unseen "spiritual" world of heaven and the age to come. That is the sense of the contrast a few verses further on, at 4:6: "In order that though judged in the flesh like men [that is, they died physically], they might live in the spirit like God [that is, they might gain spiritual life in heaven]." It is also the sense in Matt 26:41; Mark 14:38; John 3:6 ("that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit"); 6:63; Rom 8:4, 5, 6, 9, 13; 1 Cor 5:5; 2 Cor 7:1 ("every defilement of flesh and spirit" means every moral impurity in either realm, or pertaining to either aspect of our human natures); Gal 3:3; 4:29; 5:16, 17; 6:8; Col 2:5; 1 Tim 3:16 (which is somewhat parallel in content to 1 Pet 3:18); and Heb 12:9 (earthly fathers are called in the Greek text "our fathers of the flesh," while God is called "the Father of spirits"). A similar contrast is seen when related adjectives for "fleshly" or "of the flesh" are used: 1 Cor 9:11; 2 Cor 3:3; 10:4; cf. the adjective "spiritual" in 1 Pet 2:5 in the sense "unseen, belonging to the heavenly realm, characteristic of the realm of the Holy Spirit."

But made alive in the spirit, in light of the contrast noted above, must mean "made alive in the eternal, spiritual realm, in the realm of the Spirit's activity." Here it refers specifically to Christ's resurrection, because "made

alive" must be the opposite of "put to death" in the previous phrase. "In the spiritual realm, the realm of the Holy Spirit's activity, Christ was raised from the dead." This is important because in the NT generally this "spiritual" realm is the realm of all that is lasting, permanent, eternal.

The NIV translation, "but made alive by the Spirit" (similarly, KJV), is also possible grammatically: there is no distinction in Greek between "spirit" and "Spirit," and the form of the term here (dative case) can be translated either "in" or "by." But it would be somewhat unusual to expect readers to see exactly the same grammatical structure (in Greek) in parallel parts of the same sentence, and yet to know that Peter wanted the two parts understood differently (put to death *in* the body but made alive *by* the Spirit). Moreover, a different grammatical construction (ὕπό + genitive, as in 2 Pet 1:21, "carried along by the Holy Spirit"; also in 1 Pet 2:4; 2 Pet 1:17; 3:2) would have been more normal — and certainly more clear — if Peter had wanted to say "made alive *by* the Spirit."

The contrast *put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit* is appropriate to Peter's emphasis throughout the letter on the relative unimportance of temporary suffering in this world compared to the surpassing importance of an eternal inheritance in the spiritual realm which we do not now see. (Note this theme in 1:6-7, 8, 11, 13, 23; 2:11; 3:3-4, 14; 4:1-2, 6, 13, 14, 16, 19; 5:1, 4, 10.) Christ is the great example of one who willingly suffered physical harm, even death, for the sake of spiritual, eternal gain — here, "that he might bring us to God." Peter's readers should not be surprised to find themselves "following in his steps."

In light of this sense of "put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" in v 18, the phrase *in which* at the beginning of v 19 should be understood to refer back to "in the spirit" in v 18.²⁶ It means "in which realm, namely, the spiritual realm." It does not necessarily mean "in the resurrected body"²⁷ (which Peter could easily have said, had he wanted to), but rather "in the realm of the Spirit's activity, the eternal, spiritual realm" (the realm in which Christ was raised from the dead, v 18).

It might be argued that ἐν ᾧ ("in which") in v 19 means "in the new eschatological age, the realm of the Holy Spirit's characteristic activity after Christ's resurrection." This would be evident, one might say, from the fact that the NT authors often use πνεῦμα, "spirit," in this strongly eschatological sense.

²⁶Reicke, *Spirits* 110-111, understands ἐν ᾧ to mean not "in which" but "on which occasion" (on the basis of similar meaning in 2:12; 3:16, and [so he argues] elsewhere in 1 Peter). But the words and the phrase itself are so common that there is no reason to think that Peter only used it in one specialized way: relative pronouns should be understood to refer to whichever (grammatically correct) antecedent makes the most sense in each particular context. Here, "spirit" is near at hand and makes good sense; it is the antecedent Peter's readers would have naturally understood.

²⁷As argued by France, "Exegesis," 268-9. France rightly sees the contrast in v 18 as between the "natural human sphere of existence" and the "eternal spiritual state of existence" (p 267), but then (p 268) overly restricts the "eternal, spiritual sphere" to mean only the resurrected state of Christ. The "flesh-spirit" contrast in v 18 is between spheres of activity, not exactly between the two things mentioned in those spheres in v 18, the pre- and post-resurrection states of Christ.

However, while such a sense for πνεῦμα is common in Paul, it is not clearly the case in Peter's writings. Non-eschatological uses of πνεῦμα include 1:11 ("the spirit of Christ" speaking in OT prophets), 2 Pet 1:21 ("men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God"). And Peter's frequent emphasis on the reality of the unseen "spiritual" realm (see 1:4, 8, 12; 2:5; 3:7, 12, 22; 4:14; 5:5, 8) makes it likely that "in which" (spiritual realm) just means in the unseen dimension of existence, in the "spiritual" world.

In opposition to this conclusion, Selwyn (pp. 197, 315, 317) says ἐν ᾧ cannot refer to "in the spirit" in v 18 because there are no other instances in the NT where a relative pronoun (here, ᾧ, "which") has as its antecedent an "adverbial dative." In fact, he says this grammatical difficulty is the "most serious of all" (p. 317) among the objections to the view that Christ was preaching through Noah before the flood.

But in spite of Selwyn's claim, there are several "adverbial datives" in the NT which serve as antecedents to a relative pronoun:

Verse	Rel. pronoun	Adverbial dative antecedent
Acts 2:8	ἧ	τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ
Eph 2:2	αἷς	τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἀμαρτίαις ὑμῶν
Eph 2:3	οἷς	τοῖς υἱοῖς τῆς ἀπειθείας
2 Pet 1:4	ὧν	ἰδίᾳ δόξῃ καὶ ἀρετῇ ᾧ, A, C, etc)
2 Pet 3:16	αἷς	πάσαις ἐπιστολαῖς

Thus Selwyn's objection is not valid. However, it would be unpersuasive even without these examples, because it is exegetically illegitimate to demand parallel examples which are so narrowly specified that one would not expect to find many, if any, examples. (It would be similar to saying that ὧν, "of whom," in 3:3 cannot refer to "wives" because there is no other example of a relative pronoun taking as its antecedent an articular feminine plural vocative — a claim that would be harder to disprove by examples than this one, in fact!) There is nothing in the nature of NT Greek which would require that relative pronouns only take antecedents that function in their own clauses in certain ways and not in others. Thus Selwyn, in spite of his massive erudition, has here (and elsewhere: see his note on "spirits" used "absolutely" at p. 199, with the discussion above) based his exegetical judgment on an artificial distinction which has no real significance in the actual use of the language.

We are now in a position to examine the two major options regarding the time at which Christ's preaching to the spirits was carried out: sometime after his death (or resurrection), or during the time of Noah.

B. Between his death and resurrection, or after his resurrection

In favor of the view that the preaching occurred between Christ's death and resurrection, or perhaps even after his resurrection, is the fact that Christ's death and resurrection are mentioned so specifically in v 18, which immediately precedes this section. On first reading, Peter seems to be connecting Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison quite closely in time

with the fact that "he was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit" (v 18).

However, this observation loses most of its force when one realizes that elsewhere in this epistle Peter is seen to be in the habit of using a word or idea at the end of one section as a springboard to an entirely new section with clearly distinct subject matter. He does this regularly by using a transitional relative pronoun ("who" or "which"), sometimes with and sometimes without a preposition in front of it.

This is seen in 1:6 ("in which you rejoice," marking a transition to the discussion of suffering); 1:8 ("whom having not seen," marking a transition to the discussion about present fellowship with Christ); 1:10 ("concerning which salvation," marking a transition to the discussion about OT prophets); 2:4 ("to whom coming," marking a transition to the discussion of the church as the new people of God), 2:22 ("who committed no sin," marking a transition to a discussion of Christ's sufferings and redemptive work); and 3:21 ("which also now saves you," marking a transition to a discussion of baptism). Note the same kind of transition, but to less distinct material, also in 1:12; 3:3, 6b; 4:4 and 5:9. This stylistic device means that one simply cannot argue that the phrase "in which" at the beginning of v 19 means that v 19 must be continuing the same subject or the same line of thought (or the same chronological sequence) as v 18 — Peter uses this literary device too frequently when changing to a distinct subject.

Furthermore, against the view that Christ proclaimed a second chance for salvation sometime after his death on the cross is the great difficulty of making this thought appropriate in the context. Peter is exhorting his readers to be faithful witnesses for Christ even if they have to suffer for it. But if Peter then proceeds to tell them that even the worst sinners in all history, the generation of the flood, can be given a second chance for salvation after they die, he would then be defeating his purpose in writing: What need would there be to endure suffering for the sake of witnessing if those who fail now can repent later, after they die? And what point is there in enduring suffering as a Christian now if one will have another chance to be saved after death?

Moreover, it is difficult to explain why only the sinners who disobeyed during the building of the ark are given such a second chance for repentance. Why not others as well, especially those who had no chance to hear the warnings to repent?

In addition to this, the idea of a second chance for salvation after death is difficult to reconcile with other parts of the NT (cf Luke 16:26; Heb 9:27), and we would rightly expect Peter's views on this matter of central doctrinal concern to be consistent with those of the rest of the NT church leadership.

These considerations leave us with View 1: the preaching to the spirits in prison was done at the time when Noah was building the ark.

C. At the time of Noah

1. Could Peter have thought this?

In consideration of View 1 (Christ preached through Noah when Noah was building the ark), one must ask if it was possible for Peter to think that

Christ was preaching through Noah.

This certainly seems possible in light of the fact that Peter calls Noah a "preacher of righteousness" (2 Pet 2:5), and in light of the fact that Peter understands the "spirit of Christ" to have been active in men during the time of the OT. In fact, he says (1 Pet 1:11) that the "spirit of Christ" which was "in the Old Testament prophets" was "indicating" and "predicting" "the sufferings of Christ and the glories which were to follow." Although Noah is not specifically called a prophet by Peter it is sufficient that Peter sees the spirit of Christ as active in a whole series of OT prophets and active specifically in the speech activities of "indicating" and "predicting." It would certainly be consistent with what Peter has already written to say that Christ — not the incarnate Christ, but Christ active in the "spiritual realm" — was also speaking through Noah the preacher of righteousness.²⁸

2. Relationship to the larger context (1 Pet 3:13-22)

a. Christ preaching through Noah

One objection which Dalton makes to View 1 is that it has no clear link with its larger context. However, the opposite is actually the case. If we understand Peter here to be referring to Christ preaching through Noah, then the passage functions well in the larger context of 3:13-22. In fact, there are several remarkable parallels between the situation of Noah before the flood and the situation of Peter's readers.

(1) Noah was in a small minority of believers surrounded by a group of hostile unbelievers (who were perhaps even persecuting him). The readers are also a small minority and are surrounded by hostile unbelievers who make the threat of persecution very real (vv 13, 14; 4:4).

(2) Noah was righteous (Gen 6:22; 7:5; 2 Pet 2:5). Peter exhorts his readers to be righteous in a similarly difficult situation (vv 10-12, 13, 16, 17; 4:1-3).

(3) Noah witnessed boldly to the unbelievers around him, preaching repentance and warning of judgment soon to come (cf 2 Pet 2:5, 9). Similarly, Peter exhorts his readers not to fear (v 14) but to bear witness boldly (vv 15-16), even in suffering if necessary (v 16; also 4:16), in order to bring others to God — just as Christ was willing to endure suffering in order to bring us to God (v 18). Peter also sounds a clear warning of judgment to come (4:5, 17-18; cf 2 Pet 3:10) which makes the reader's situation prior to judgment similar to that of Noah.

(4) Christ, though he was in an unseen "spiritual realm," was preaching through Noah to the unbelievers around him (vv 19-20). Similarly, Christ is working in an unseen spiritual way in the lives and hearts of Peter's readers (v 15; cf 1:12; 4:11, 14). Thus, Peter by implication is reminding his readers that if Christ was preaching through Noah he certainly is also preaching through them as they bear witness to the unbelievers around them.

²⁸Note that Philo, *Quis Her* 260, calls Noah a "prophet" because, as the context shows [see 259-60], Philo said that Noah's speech was not his own but was from God.

(5) In the time of Noah, God patiently awaited repentance from unbelievers, but finally did bring judgment. Similarly, at the time Peter is writing, God is patiently awaiting repentance from unbelievers (cf 2 Pet 3:9) but will certainly bring judgment on the unrepentant (4:5; cf 2 Pet 3:10).

(6) Finally, Noah was rescued with a few others (3:20). Similarly, Peter reminds his readers that they too will be saved, even if their numbers are few, for Christ has certainly triumphed (3:22), and they will share in his triumph as well (4:13, 19; 5:10; cf 2 Pet 2:9).

The attractiveness of View 1 is thus enhanced by its clear compatibility with the context at several points. It fits well into Peter's purpose of encouraging suffering believers that they need not fear to be righteous and to bear faithful witness to the hostile unbelievers surrounding them, for Christ is at work in them as he was at work in Noah, and they, like Noah, will certainly be saved from the judgment to come.

In fact, it is the remarkable similarity between Noah's situation and that of Peter's readers which best explains why Peter, in reaching back to the OT for an encouraging example, selects the incident of Noah preparing the ark. Far from being surprising or unusual, this example is contextually quite appropriate.

b. Contextual difficulties with Dalton's view

The appropriateness of this view in the context gives another argument for the superiority of View 1 over View 5 (Christ's proclaiming victory over fallen angels). For on the basis of view 5, the compatibility with context would not be nearly as great.

For the sake of the argument, let us assume for the moment that Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison refers to his proclamation of condemnation to fallen angels, either between his death and resurrection or after his resurrection from the dead. And let us assume that the background in 1 Enoch claimed by Dalton and others is correct, so that Christ imitates and fulfills the pattern established by the preaching of condemnation to fallen angels by Enoch.

In this case, it is true that in a general way the fact that Christ proclaimed his victory would function as an encouragement to believers who were being persecuted. Thus, there is some application to the larger context from this view.

But there are many points at which the application is imprecise or inconsistent. First, on this view Christ proclaims his triumph over fallen angels or evil spirits. But while Peter does mention the devil's opposition to believers (1 Pet 5:8), that is certainly not the emphasis of the entire book nor of the immediate context, both of which clearly focus on human, not demonic sources of persecution (3:13-16; 4:3-4, etc). Moreover, in the one place where Peter does mention the devil's activities, it is not a passage in which he calls attention to the devil's past defeat, but one which warns about his present danger as he "prowls around like a roaring lion" (5:8).

Second, the parallel to the reader's situation is not a good fit because neither Christ nor Enoch (in 1 Enoch) was being persecuted any longer by

those to whom they proclaimed final condemnation. But this is unlike the situation of Peter's readers, who are at the moment still being persecuted.

Third, although Enoch and Christ, according to this view, both went to declare condemnation to angels in hell, the readers would not find an example for imitation in that, for they certainly would not travel to hell and proclaim condemnation to sinful angels.

Fourth, the very important aspect of witness to unbelievers, which is a major emphasis of Peter in this passage (vv 14, 16-17; cf "bring us to God" in v 18), is not at all furthered directly by what Peter says according to this view. One does not encourage the preaching of repentance to sinful men by calling to mind two examples of the proclaiming of final condemnation to sinful angels!

3. The translation "when they formerly disobeyed"

One final consideration in favor of View 1 is that it makes possible a grammatically preferable translation of "formerly disobeyed" (*ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε*) at the beginning of v 20. The phrase is usually translated "who formerly disobeyed," but there is no single word for "who" in the Greek text and this translation is the result of understanding the participle *ἀπειθήσασιν* as an adjectival participle modifying "spirits" in the previous verse. The difficulty with understanding it this way turns on a technical point in Greek usage.

In order to make it clear that he wanted the phrase to be understood as an adjective modifying "spirits" Peter should have written, according to the normal standards of Greek usage, *τοῖς ἀπειθήσασιν*, putting the definite article in front of the participle (and thus putting it in "attributive position"). This is ordinarily necessary for adjectives (including participles) which modify articular nouns (nouns which have a definite article).

Thus, BDF, sec 270, say:

An attributive adjective (participle) when used with an articular substantive must, as in classical, participate in the force of the article by taking an intermediate position . . . or, if placed in postposition (to which the participle with additional adjuncts is especially susceptible) it *must* have its own article [emphasis mine].

They give two types of exceptions to this rule:

(a) (BDF, sec 269) A noun with two or more adjectives or adjectival phrases need not have all of them between the definite article and the noun (which may become awkward), and those following the noun need not have the article, but only when needed for emphasis or to avoid ambiguity.

One example of this is *γενομένην* in Acts 13:32. But note that in all the examples they give, there is little chance for ambiguity because the adjective (or participle) immediately follows the noun and is not separated by an intervening main verb as in 1 Pet 3:20. (b) (BDF, sec 416) Supplementary participles following verbs of perception or cognition (knowing, seeing, hearing, etc) do not have the definite article. Examples are Mark 5:30; Luke 10:18; 2 Pet 1:18.

But apart from these categories where the absence of the definite article is allowed there do not seem to be any clear examples in the NT of anarthrous participles (participles which lack the definite article in front of them) which have an arthrous antecedent (that is, an antecedent with a definite article) *and* which are adjectival (in that they modify the noun which is their antecedent). Even among the examples which fall in the categories of exceptions noted by BDF, in most cases the anarthrous adjectival participle will follow immediately after the noun it modifies, and 2 Pet 1:18 (with the verb of perception "we heard") is the only example, even from those in the exceptional categories, where I found the participle separated from its antecedent by the main verb of the sentence, as it is in 1 Pet 3:19-20.

This means that there may be no clearly parallel example anywhere else in the NT which would justify the translation "who formerly disobeyed."²⁹

The difficulty of translating it this way is felt by at least one grammar, which refers to the participle in 1 Pet 3:20 as "unclassical" (MHT 3, p 153) and "not good Greek" (MHT 4, p 129).

On the other hand, the ordinary and rather predictable way of translating anarthrous participles in the kind of construction found in 1 Pet 3:19-20 is to understand them adverbially (as modifying the verb in the sentence, rather than the noun which is their antecedent). Such adverbial participles may be translated in several different ways according to the context. Thus, if the context allowed it, a very proper grammatical translation of ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε might be "because they formerly disobeyed" or "although they formerly disobeyed" or "when they formerly disobeyed": in each case the phrase would modify the verbal idea "preached."

Such adverbial modification of a sentence by a participle is clearly possible even when the antecedent of the participle is a noun which is not the subject of the main verb (this is the case in 1 Pet 3:20). The following examples are fairly close parallels to 1 Pet 3:20.

Mark 16:10 (v.l.)	πενθοῦσι	temporal: "while they mourned"
John 1:36	περιπατοῦντι	circumstantial: "as he walked"
Acts 7:2	ὄντι	temporal: "when he was in Mesopotamia"
Acts 7:26	μαχομένοις	circumstantial: "as they were quarreling"
Acts 8:12	εὐαγγελιζομένῳ	temporal: "when he preached"
Acts 11:17	πιστεύσασιν	temporal: "when we believed"
2 Cor 5:14	κρίναντας	causal: "because we are convinced"
Heb 7:1	ὑποστρέφοντι	temporal: "when he was returning"

(Note also Matt 9:28; Luke 17:7; Acts 15:25; 22:17.)

These grammatical considerations open at least the possibility and perhaps the strong probability that we should translate ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε in 1 Pet 3:20 adverbially.

²⁹Luke 2:5; 16:14; Acts 24:24; and 1 Pet 4:12 all have participles which might be thought to be exceptions, but they are all actually adverbial (of attendant circumstance), even though they may be loosely translated in an adjectival way. 2 Cor 11:9 is not a clear exception, for here again the participle immediately follows the noun, unlike 1 Pet 3:20; moreover, ἐλθόντες may well be adverbial rather than adjectival in 2 Cor 11:9 (the NASB understands it adverbially: "when the brethren came from Macedonia"); cf. P. Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 386.

Now in light of the preceding discussion the translation "when they formerly disobeyed" would fit the context well. And it must be said that it is not merely grammatically possible, but it is grammatically preferable to the translation "who formerly disobeyed."

One might object to this that translating the participle in a temporal sense ("when") is unlikely because the next phrase gives a further specification of time, namely, "when the patience of God was waiting." It might be argued that the presence of this next temporal clause would make a temporal sense for ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε unnecessary and perhaps even redundant.

However, this objection is seen to be invalid when we look at other instances of similar constructions which have two or more time references in a row. Similar examples are found in Col 3:7 (with a combination of aorist and imperfect tenses which parallels 1 Pet 3:19-20 quite closely); Philo, *Cher.* 58; *Decal.* 58; *Spec. Leg.* 3.1; cf. *Ep. Barn.* 7:9 (manuscripts A, V read ποτε). In fact in 1 Pet 3:20 itself there is already more than one time reference: "when God's patience waited," "in the days of Noah," "while the ark was being built." The addition of "when they formerly disobeyed" to this sequence would not be awkward or difficult to understand.

Moreover, the ποτε ("formerly") is helpful in making Peter's meaning clear, for it immediately indicates to the reader that the "disobeying" is not at the same time as Peter is writing, but is at an earlier point in time, "formerly."

This translation "when they formerly disobeyed," also answers the objection by Dalton³⁰ that if Peter had meant to speak of spirits of persons who disobeyed he would have written πνεύμασιν τῶν ἀπειθησάντων, "spirits of those who disobeyed." If our understanding is correct, Peter wrote exactly what he meant to say, namely, that Christ preached to the spirits who are now in prison but he did it "when they formerly disobeyed."

4. Remaining objections

a. The verb πορευθείς ("went")

There remain three other objections to this view. First, Dalton³¹ objects that the verb πορευθείς ("went") cannot be used to describe Christ's divine activity at the time of the OT. But this objection is not a strong one, because the OT often talks about a divine activity of God in terms of God's "going" to a certain place (Gen 3:8; 11:7; 18:21; etc; compare 1 Cor 10:4 which speaks of Christ following the people as they travelled through the wilderness).

In fact, the use of πορευθείς here is almost necessary for Peter's purpose, for if Peter had just said that "in the spiritual realm" Christ "preached," it might suggest a distant activity of speaking out of heaven, whereas "he went and preached" implies more personal involvement in going to the place of the hearers and therefore preaching through Noah.

³⁰Proclamation 148.

³¹Proclamation 35.

b. The sequence death-resurrection-ascension

It might be objected that the sequence "died . . . made alive . . . having gone into heaven" in vv 18-22 shows that the events coming between vv 18 and 22 must come between Christ's resurrection and his ascension.

Someone making such an objection might argue that three aorist participles show the structure of the passage: θανατωθείς ("died") and ζωοποιηθείς ("made alive") in v 18, and πορευθείς ("having gone") in v 22. Therefore (one might conclude) the aorist participle πορευθείς ("going" or "having gone") in v 19 must fit within this structure and must refer to some event between Christ's resurrection and ascension.

In response, we can certainly agree that there is a clear connection between "died" and "made alive" in v 18, since both are aorist participles in adjacent phrases in the same sentence, and since their linkage is made explicit by the μὲν . . . δέ construction in this part of the sentence.

It is quite another matter with "having gone into heaven," however. It comes not in an adjacent phrase but 60 words (or 10 clauses) after "made alive in the spirit."

Ordinary readers (and listeners) would naturally settle on a sense for πορευθείς, "he went" which was suitable to its immediate context in v 19 long before they reached another πορευθείς εἰς οὐρανόν in v 22.

And not every event between v 18 and v 22 occurred between Christ's resurrection and ascension on any account (note "days of Noah" and "baptism now saves you" as parenthetical items). Even in v 22 itself such a suggested sequence is not followed, because "who is at the right hand of God" is placed before "having gone into heaven," though in a chronological listing of Christ's activities the idea of going into heaven would come first, and being at God's right hand would come second.

So the idea of a sequence in the aorist participles should only be acknowledged as a possible argument against the "Christ preaching through Noah" view, an argument that may carry weight for readers who somehow "see" the passage in that perspective. But it must be said that such a structure is not made explicit by any clear contextual pointers, nor is it required by the context. Such a sequence may have been Peter's intention, or it may not. And even if it was, v 19 can still be understood as a parenthetical statement outside the chronological sequence (just as vv 20 and 21).

Furthermore, the mention of Christ's ascension in v 22 is probably better accounted for by the fact that it is the naturally sequential event to include after the mention of Christ's resurrection at the end of v 21 (not the end of v 18).

Finally, the discussion above on Peter's frequent use of a relative pronoun to introduce a new subject indicates that there is a strong possibility of a lack of clear chronological sequence in this section. Certainly it must not be demanded if other factors in the context point in another direction. Similarly, Peter's exchange of subject in which he first uses Christ as an example for believers (v 18), and then refers to Christ as the one who empowers and Noah as the example for believers (vv 19-20), should not be seen as unusual for Peter, who frequently can change metaphors and combine various ideas closely together in his writings (compare 1:7-8; 2:3-4, 9-10; 3:21-22).

c. Why didn't Peter say Christ preached "through Noah"?

Finally, one might wonder why, if this was indeed Peter's meaning, he did not make it clear by simply saying that Christ "preached *through Noah* to the spirits in prison when they formerly disobeyed."

But a similar question must be answered on any view. No one has claimed that the verse is easy to understand on the first reading! Why didn't Peter say, "Christ preached condemnation to sinful angels, just as Enoch did" (on Dalton's view), or why didn't Peter say, "Christ preached the gospel of repentance to those who had not repented during their lifetimes" (on View 2)? In this difficult passage the question must not be, "Wasn't there a more explicit way to express this sense?" but rather, "Does this sense best account for all the factors in the text and its context?"

Of course we cannot say with certainty why an author did not say something else. But we should realize at least that Peter's readers, with native-speaker ability in Greek, would have heard in Peter's words the sense "when they formerly disobeyed" much more readily than we do, especially since our minds are cluttered by English translations which say "who formerly disobeyed."

In addition to this grammatical factor, the abundance of extra-biblical testimony to Noah's preaching to rebellious unbelievers during the building of the ark is a background which most modern readers do not share, but which would have made the sense proposed here much more readily understood. In fact, if we could have asked any first century Jew or Christian the question, "Who preached to those who disobeyed in the days of Noah while the patience of God was waiting during the building of the ark?" there would certainly be only one answer: it was Noah who did this preaching (To such a question clearly no one would have answered "Enoch.")

To a group of Christians who had such an understanding of the biblical narrative, Peter then wrote that Christ did just this kind of preaching. It might not have been asking too much of his readers to expect them to realize that he meant that it was through Noah that Christ did this preaching. In short, the sentence may not have been as obscure to the original readers as it has long seemed to subsequent interpreters.

IV. CONCLUSION

Our conclusions on this passage may now be expressed in an extended paraphrase: "In the spiritual realm of existence Christ went and preached through Noah to those who are now spirits in the prison of hell. He did this preaching when they formerly disobeyed, when the patience of God was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built."

In its context, this passage functions: (1) to encourage the readers to bear witness boldly in the midst of hostile unbelievers, just as Noah did; (2) to assure them that though they are few, God will surely save them; (3) to remind them of the certainty of final judgment and Christ's ultimate triumph over all the forces of evil which oppose them.

Perhaps this passage, rightly understood, can provide similar encouragement to Peter's readers of today.³²

³²After completing this article I obtained a copy of John S. Feinberg's article, "1 Peter 3:18-20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State," *WTJ* 48 (1986) 303-36. I am pleased to see that Dr. Feinberg and I, working entirely independently and with widely differing methods of approaching this text, have reached very similar conclusions. His arguments on pp. 327-36 are especially forceful in showing several still-unresolved contextual and theological difficulties faced by any view which argues for a "preaching of condemnation," whether to human beings or to angels (Views 3 and 5 above).