

WHO ARE THE SPIRITS IN PRISON?

(CP 1Pe 3:18-20) Firstly, we must reject out of hand any teaching that these are the spirits of humans being given another chance of eternal life, as some in the contemporary church teach (CP He 9:27; Rev 22:11-12). These scriptures clearly refute any suggestion that there is further opportunity for salvation after death. As someone is when they die, that is how they will remain throughout eternity. Furthermore, human spirits are never just called spirits in scripture. Where human spirits are referred to in scripture, they are qualified as such (CP Nu 16:22; 27:16; 1Cor 14:32; He 12:23).

The spirits in prison in 1Pe 3:18-20 are fallen angels – the angels God cast down to hell in 2Pe 2:4, and bound in chains in Jude 6-7. They rebelled against God and sinned in the days of Noah, precipitating the flood that destroyed everyone on earth except Noah and his family (CP 1Pe 3:18-20 with 2Pe 2:4). Hell in 2Pe 2:4 is **tartarus**, a prison for fallen angels. These angels are the spirits in prison Jesus preached to in 1Pe 3:19. They are the same angels that are bound in chains in Jude 6-7 (CP Jude 6-7). The angels' "first estate" is their original status in God's order – the exalted position they held in heaven above earthly humans (CP Psa 8:4-5; He 2:6-7). The "habitation" they left was their heavenly abode; the "strange flesh" they went after were human women, and the sin they committed was fornication. These angels left their heavenly abode and went in unto earthly women, taking them for wives and producing the giants of the Old Testament which corrupted all flesh and precipitated Noah's flood (CP Gen 6:1-8, 11-13, 17). A great many Christians do not believe that the "sons of God" in Gen 6 are angels because both Paul and John refer to believers as the sons of God in the New Testament (CP Jn 1:12; Ro 8:14, 19; Php 2:15; 1Jn 3:1, 2). But we must remember that when Moses wrote Genesis he would not be using New Testament expressions – there were no believers in Christ as such in his day. Also, sons of God in the Old Testament always refers to angels in the three other places in scripture where the expression is used (CP Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). In Job 1:6 and 2:1, we see Satan, a fallen angel, come *also* among the sons of God who presented themselves before the Lord, and in 38:7 God told Job that the sons of God shouted for joy when they saw the universe spring into existence. The clear inference in all these scriptures is that the sons of God are angels, and the fact that both Paul and John designated believers sons of

God in the New Testament, has no bearing on angels being called sons of God in the Old Testament.

Another objection to the sons of God being angels in Gen 6, although it is purely academic in light of what the foregoing scriptures teach, is that the sons of God were men of the righteous line of Seth, Adam's third son, who took wives from the evil line of Cain. The main objection though to the sons of God being angels, is because it is generally supposed that angels are sexless and therefore it is not possible for them to fornicate with women. Those who espouse this view claim that is what Jesus teaches in Mt 22:23-30 (CP Mt 22:23-30). Jesus is not teaching here that angels are sexless, but that in the eternal state marriage will be unnecessary for believers who have part in the first resurrection. In the divine order, the basic purpose of marriage is for procreation, but as those having part in the first resurrection will no longer be subject to death, the need for procreation will no longer exist, so in this regard resurrected believers will be like the angels in heaven. Angels, as created beings do not die, and therefore do not reproduce themselves (CP Lu 20:34-36). (Jesus is also not teaching here that Christians will *become* angels.)

One thing more needs to be noted here and that is that the word "preached" in 1Pe 3:19 would be more appropriately translated *herald* or *proclaim*. The Greek word used in this passage is **kerusso**, which means to herald or proclaim, as a public crier, whereas the Greek word for *preach* (the gospel for salvation), is **euaggelizo**. This also teaches us that Jesus was not giving the spirits in prison a second chance at eternal life, but that He was making a proclamation to them. Scriptures do not tell us what the proclamation was but the general consensus among Christians who subscribe to this view is that Jesus proclaimed His victory over death and Satan on the cross to them, which is outlined for us in Col 2:15 (CP Col 2:15). Jesus preached to these spirits, exactly as 1Pe 3:18-20 teaches, between His death and His resurrection, while He was in hell (CP Psa 16:10; Ac 2:27 with Mt 12:38-40). We learn from Mt 12:38-40 how this all ties in: *heart* in V40 means a vault or cell; by implication, a prison. This is Tartarus, the prison for fallen angels in 1Pe 3:19 and 2Pe 2:4. Jesus spent three days and three nights here between His death and resurrection, just as He prophesied He would in Mt 12:40.