

ty years the ark was “being prepared.” This is what Peter is referring to when he says that Christ went and preached to the spirits in prison. This preaching was done “in the days of Noah” (1 Pet. 3:20). Through obedience to God’s word (Heb. 11:7) eight souls were saved through water.

The people of Noah’s day were in bondage to sin, imprisoned to condemnation, through their rebellion against God (cf. Rom. 6:3-6, 17-18). However, Noah was not silent while he prepared the ark for the saving of his household. Peter says he was a “preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet. 2:5). What was Noah preaching during this time? Peter calls him a “preacher of righteousness,” and says that, by the Holy Spirit, Christ was preaching salvation at that time (1 Pet. 3:19-20). God’s “Divine longsuffering” provided those people an opportunity to repent and be saved from the destruction to come.

Studies on the size of the ark and the required space for what Noah was supposed to take shows that there would have been room on the ark for many, many more people than just Noah and his family, with all the animals and feed included. God did not have salvation preached by Noah for one hundred and twenty years without providing a place for any who would respond to that preaching. Sadly, the only ones that were ready to get on the ark when the time came were eight souls.

Peter goes on to show how Noah’s preaching during that time could be said to be Christ

going and preaching to them (1 Pet. 3:21). The flood was a type of salvation pointing forward to the anti-type of salvation in Christ through baptism. Just as Noah and his family were provided a place of safety from the destruction caused by sin and rebellion, we have a place of safety and salvation from sin today through Christ. Noah was called into the ark by God (Gen. 7:1). Today, through the preaching of the gospel, people are called into the church – the place of the saved (Acts 2:37-41, 47). Just as the flood separated Noah and his family from the corruption of sin in his day, baptism separates one from the corruption of sin and brings “newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4; cf. Acts 22:16; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:12; et. al.).

“There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” (1 Peter 3:21, NKJV)

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Bible Q-n-A

Did Jesus Go To Hell?

The statement by Peter in 1 Peter 3:19, that Jesus preached to the spirits in prison, has been the source of a great deal of debate and controversy over the years. What exactly does it mean that Christ preached to the spirits in prison?

There are those who believe that Jesus went into Hell itself to preach the gospel to those who died before His redeeming sacrifice was made on the Cross, to give them a chance to be saved. There are those who teach that Peter is referring to a place called Purgatory where people can get a second chance to be saved after they have died. And, there are all manner of variations on these ideas that men over the years have come up with.

Before I go into the teaching of this passage I want to show why the two ideas above – and their variations – **cannot** be correct.

First, we can know for certain that Jesus did not go to hell when He died.

He told the thief on the cross, “today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). ***Paradise is not Hell!*** When we look at the other statements concerning the time Jesus’

“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.” (1 Peter 3:18–20, NKJV)

body lay in the grave, they clearly state that His spirit was in *Hades*, not Hell (Acts 2:27, 31). By harmonizing what Jesus said to the penitent thief and Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, we see that “Paradise” is part of *Hades*.

Also, in Luke 16:19-31 – the account of the rich man and Lazarus – what Jesus refers to as “Paradise” is called “Abraham’s bosom.” In that account, there are two places in *Hades* (Abraham’s bosom and Torments) separated by a great gulf with no crossing over. “Paradise” (aka “Abraham’s bosom”) is on one side of the great gulf dividing *Hades* and “Torments” (aka *Tartarus*, 2 Pet. 2:4) is on the other side of the great gulf. *Hades* is the place of departed souls, both good and bad, awaiting the coming of Christ and Judgment Day (John 5:28, 29; Acts 17:30, 31; 2 Thess. 1:6-10; et. al.).

Part of the confusion over where Jesus’ spirit was while His body was in the grave is that the King James Version incorrectly translates the word *Hades* (a Greek word) as “hell.” However, the Greek word for the place of everlasting damnation is *Gehenna*, not *Hades*

(Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:38; etc.). A close study of the passages where the two words are used will show that they *are not* the same place. Acts 2:27 and 31, among other places in the KJV, should say *Hades*, not *hell*. So, the idea that Jesus went to hell when He died is actually based on a mistranslation of the text and not what Peter was referring to when he spoke of “the spirits in prison.”

Second, those who “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11) cannot speak of a place called Purgatory because God never spoke of it in His word.

The word “purgatory” is nowhere in Holy Scripture and, therefore, cannot be taught from the Bible. The Bible never speaks of a place where departed souls are held for probation while their loved ones pray and do good deeds to get them into heaven. That cannot be what Peter was referring to as “preaching to the spirits in prison” because such a thing is never taught in the Bible. Such an idea would also contradict the clear teaching of Scripture in many of the passages given above for the coming Judgment Day. We must all give account for the things done “in the body” (2 Cor. 5:10). After we leave this earthly body it will be too late to affect any changes in our spiritu-

al condition.

Now that we have clarified what “preaching to the spirits in prison” *cannot* be, we will study what the statement actually does mean.

1 Peter 3:19 and the statement, “... by whom [the Holy Spirit] also He [Christ] went and preached to the spirits in prison....” In the paragraph where this statement is found (1 Pet. 3:18-22), Peter makes reference to Christ’s willingness to suffer for the will of God (1 Pet. 3:18), that He was willing to suffer and die, even though He Himself was guilty of nothing, so that we could have the hope of salvation. His death was to “bring us to God” by His resurrection from the dead (1 Pet. 3:18, 22). He was raised by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Then the comparison is made between the salvation we have in Christ and the salvation that was made available in Noah’s day through obedience to God (1 Pet. 3:19-21).

The “spirits in prison” is referring to those who lived in the days of Noah (1 Pet. 3:20), who were disobedient to God and, through their violent rebellion against the will of God, brought about the destruction of the flood (Gen. 6:13). The “Divine longsuffering... while the ark was being prepared” refers to the one hundred and twenty years that God waited before sending the flood (Gen. 6:3). Salvation was being preached “in the days of Noah,” i.e. during the one hundred and twen-