

1 Peter 3:18-20 (Frances George Burkitt) 54918

Christian Truth: Volume 33, Noah's Preaching (3:18-20)

"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water."
1 Pet. 3:18-20.

Much erroneous teaching as to Christ's preaching to spirits in prison has been built upon the misuse of this passage. Let us remember that Peter was writing to Christian Jews who were but a small and despised company saved out of the mass of the nation. It was as much as to say, "Do not be discouraged; even in the days of Noah's preaching, when the long-suffering of God waited so long, only eight souls were saved."

It was the Spirit of Christ in Noah who preached to them before the flood, when they were alive. We have the same expression in chapter 1:11: the "Spirit of Christ" in the Old Testament prophets testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. In Gen. 6:3 we have the contrast between flesh and the Spirit (of God), where we read, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh."

The idea that Christ went and preached to spirits in prison between His death and resurrection is quite a mistake. But the spirits of the men to whom the testimony was rendered through Noah in his day, are now "in prison" awaiting judgment, because they are unbelieving as to the testimony given by the Spirit of Christ through Noah, when they were alive.