

THESIS ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

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Title: THE SPIRITS IN PRISON: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF 1 PETER 3:19

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The purpose of this study is to discover the identity the spirits in prison in 1 Pet 3:19 and to examine the content of the proclamation made to them, the one who made the proclamation and the time it was made. The review of literatures shows that the spirits in prison are angels who once rebelled against the government of God in heaven as recorded in Rev 12:7-9 and were cast down. Jesus, after His resurrection proclaimed to these evil angels a message of victory over them and the judgment of doom that is awaiting them.

The believers who were going through a period of suffering from their hostile neighbors were addressed by 1 Peter to endure humiliation for the sake of Christ because their own victory will surely come as Christ, their example, suffered and finally triumphed over His foes. Believers today can draw inspiration from the victory of Christ in the face of trials and sufferings.

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THE SPIRITS IN PRISON: AN EXEGETICAL
STUDY OF 1 PETER 3:19

A research thesis

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies (New Testament)

by

Emmanuel Olugbenga Ayeni

December 2016

THE SPIRITS IN PRISON: AN EXEGETICAL
STUDY OF 1 PETER 3:19

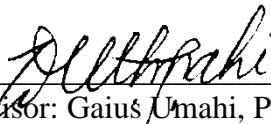
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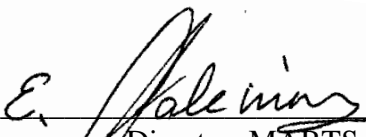
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1 Peter 3:18-22 contains some of the most difficult exegetical problems in the New Testament.¹ The difficulty in the interpretation of especially verse 19, “*by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,*”² has resulted in a variety of views. There are at least three issues on which commentators differ: Firstly, the identity of “the spirits in prison”. Were they unbelievers who have died or Old Testament believers who have died, or fallen angels? Secondly, what the content of Christ’s message to the spirits was. Was it a second chance for repentance or completion of redemptive work or final condemnation? Thirdly, the time that Christ preached or made the proclamation. Was it in the days of Noah or between His death and resurrection or after His resurrection?³ Identifying the person who made the actual proclamation is also a subject of debate among scholars.

A number of interpretations have been presented by different commentators, of which the five prominent ones and their ardent supporters are as follow: (1) John Calvin believes that, “the spirits are souls of the faithful of the OT and the ‘prison’ is simply the place they remained awaiting Christ, who proclaims his redemption to

¹Edwin A. Blum, “1 Peter 3:18-22,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 241.

²Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture texts used in this paper are from the New King James Version (NKJV). Copyright © 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc. All rights reserved.

³“Spirits in Prison,” *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*, April 12, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Spirits_in_prison&oldid=656071241.

them.²⁴ (2) C. E. B. Cranfield says that the spirits are the souls of those who died in Noah's flood, who are kept in Hades, and who hear the gospel proclaimed by Christ after his death and before his resurrection (or heard the gospel in the days of Noah before being put in 'prison').⁵ (3) Friedrich Spitta posits that the spirits are the fallen angels of Gen 6 and the prison is where they are kept bound and hear the proclamation of judgment by Christ.⁶ (4) Ramsey Michael argues that the spirits are the demons, the offspring of the fallen angels of Gen 6, who have taken refuge or who are being protected (rather than being imprisoned) in the earth and the proclamation is that of Christ's (post-resurrection) invasion of their refuge.⁷ (5) Edgar J. Goodspeed is of the opinion that the spirits are the fallen angels but the preacher is Enoch, who proclaimed judgment to them.⁸

It is obvious from the many views still being held that scholars are far from reaching a consensus on the interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19. Today, majority of

⁴John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Hebrews/1Peter/2Peter* (Edinburgh: Grand Rapids, 1963), 292-95 quoted in Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 138. It is insightful that Calvin puts the preaching after the resurrection of Christ although he believes Christ achieved this through the Spirit and not in person.

⁵Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 139. Other scholars that hold this view include Stauffer, Beare, Goppelt, Windisch, and Wand. Wayne Grudem has improved on this idea by arguing that Christ preached to human beings in the time of the flood by means of the preaching of Noah [See W. Grudem, *1 Peter*, (TNTC) (Grand Rapids, 1988), 157-61 and 203-39].

⁶*Ibid.* (Spitta puts the preaching in the days of Noah; most others put it after the death of Christ). This view is also accepted by Selwyn, Jeremias, Reicke, Dalton, and Davids.

⁷J. Ramsey Michael, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (WBC) 49 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1988), 210.

⁸Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 139.

commentators favor the third interpretation, the idea of “a proclamation of judgment by the resurrected Christ to the imprisoned spirits, that is, the fallen angels, sealing their doom as he triumphed over sin and death and hell, redeeming human beings.”⁹

If the question of the identity of the spirits in prison can be well resolved, it will pave the way to answering the other two questions: the content of the message and the likely time the preaching took place. This research aims at contributing a more plausible solution to the problem of the identity of these spirits in prison. While the majority of scholars favor the idea of these spirits being fallen angels, some recent commentators have accepted the idea that the spirits in prison are the spirits that came from the bodies of the giants fathered by the Watchers through human women as recorded in 1 Enoch 16:1.¹⁰

This study looks at this debate from a different perspective. In relation to Isaiah 14:12; Luke 10:18; Rev 1:20; and Rev 12:3, 4; it explores the possibility of finding a link between the stars that fell from heaven in these passages and the spirits that the author of 1 Peter is addressing in 1 Pet 3:19. Employing historical grammatical method of exegesis, each significant word in the original text has been studied in comparison with its use in other parts of the book of 1 Peter and the entire Bible in order to dig into the meaning of the passage and identify who the spirits are.

Statement of the Problem

Martin Luther identifies 1 Peter 3:18-22 as “a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament.”¹¹ Howard Marshall refers to verses 19 and 20

⁹Dauids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 141.

¹⁰Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 10 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academy, 2005), 10:344.

as “the most tricky part” because the passage “is open to different interpretations, and it is not easy to explain them or to show why one view is preferable to another.”¹²

Simon Kistemaker sees verse 19 as especially difficult when he says that, “in that relatively short sentence, the meaning of each word varies.” In fact, he argues that, “each of the nine words in the original text has been differently understood.”¹³

Marshall then suggests that the wisest course to follow “is to admit that the details of the passage are heavily disputed.”¹⁴

It is obvious that what constitutes this difficulty can be seen in the passage’s reference to Christ’s preaching in His death to certain spirits who were held in prison in the days of Noah. The questions that must be addressed, therefore, concerns the identity of the spirits in prison in verse 19, the content of the proclamation made to them, the person who did the actual proclamation, and the time the proclamation was made.

Purpose of the Study

Despite the many studies that have been carried out on the passage, divergent views still exist among scholars on the interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19. This research examines the text and seeks to introduce a new perspective to the various interpretations and commentaries that have been put forward by earlier researchers by

¹¹Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude*, 166 quoted in Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*. vol. 37. The New American Commentary (NAC) 37 (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 184.

¹²I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, The IVP New testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 122.

¹³Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Peter*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 141.

¹⁴Marshall, *1 Peter*, 122.

looking at other passages of scriptures that have been neglected by scholars. This is expected to shed new lights on the passage that will likely bring a new understanding to this difficult text. This has been achieved through textual, syntactical and grammatical analysis of the pericope (1 Peter 3:18-22) in which the text under consideration appears. Each of the nine original words in verse 19 has been studied with a view to discovering the original and contextual meaning of the text.

Significance of the Study

An attempt to give an interpretation that will shed new lights on the identified problem will put to rest among scholars the seeming disagreements on the exact meaning of 1 Peter 3:19. This will enhance future researches and commentaries on the text. It also will provide a new perspective to look at the debate over the teaching of the immortality of the soul (soul consciousness) and conditional mortality (soul unconsciousness) that has been raging in the evangelical circle for centuries.¹⁵

Delimitation

The focus of this study is the exegesis of 1 Peter 3:19. The pericope in which the text is situated (1 Pet 3:18-22) will be discussed briefly to help understand the context but full discussion of it will be left to other researchers to explore. To allow for exhaustive treatment of the topic, matters of authorship, audience, historical/geographical situation that occasioned the writing of the book and dating of

¹⁵Robert Osei-Bonsu, "Purgatory: A study of the Historical Development and Its Compatibility with the Biblical Teaching on the Afterlife," *Philosophy Study* vol. 2 (April 2012): 286. In this article, Osei-Bonsu points out that many Evangelical Christian scholars subscribe to soul consciousness but the Seventh-day Adventist scholars, though all of them also Evangelicals, teach that souls are unconscious in death.

the book have been discussed in order to provide the meaning the text had for the original recipients of the book.

Methodology and Procedure

A full exegesis of 1 Pet 3:19 has been undertaken to understand the meaning of the text as it appears in the pericope. This means, we have looked at the probable author of the book, the situation that occasioned the writing of the book, what the author intended to communicate to his original readers, and the implication of his message to the contemporary readers. Works of scholars who have written on the topic have also been critiqued with a view to understanding the past and current interpretations that have been given for the text.

The research is divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides the basic problem that necessitated the study and provides an overview of the works of previous researchers on the topic. It also discusses the method of carrying out the research. Chapter two surveys the various interpretations by scholars, and conducts textual criticism of these works. Chapter three looks at the passage in its context. It considers the authorship and date of 1 Peter, the audience, the historical situation, and the literary setting of the book. Chapter four employs a syntactical analysis to carry out an exegesis of 1 Pet 18-22 with an emphasis on verse 19. The concluding chapter, chapter five, summarizes the result of the analysis carried out in the previous chapters and gives a conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

SURVEY OF INTERPRETATIONS OF 1 PETER 3:19

This chapter reviews previous works of scholars who have attempted to give the meaning of 1 Peter 3:18-22, with focus on verse 19. It critically analyzes the breakthroughs and shortcomings of earlier researches on the topic. Mark Driscoll correctly remarks that, “considering there are nearly 180 different interpretations of 1 Peter 3:18–20, we can confidently say this passages is one of the most difficult in the entire Bible”¹ Martin Luther, bewildered by the passage, wrote: “A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means.”² We shall begin by looking first at attempts that have been made at interpreting the passage at different time periods.

Early Christian Tradition

From the time of the Church Fathers, Bible students have attempted to understand the statement of Peter about Christ’s proclamation to the spirits in prison. From that time also, different interpretations have been suggested which show that there have never been a time that commentators have taken the same position on the

¹Mark Driscoll “Tough Text Thursday: 1 Peter 3:19, <http://pastormark.tv/2012/02/02/tough-text-thursday-1-peter-3-19> (17/02/2014).

²Martin Luther, *Commentary on Peter and Jude*, 166 in Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 184.

subject. In this section, we are going to explore briefly, the attempts of Origen, Augustine, and Clement of Alexandria.

Origen

Origen was the first to attempt an interpretation of 1 Pet 3:19. He taught that, “Jesus descended into hell and preached to the spirits of those who perished in the flood in the time of Noah.”³ Those who subscribe to this view believe that what Jesus proclaimed to these spirits “was the gospel, offering them a further opportunity to repent.”⁴ Others in this category say that the message was preached to the righteous dead, “proclaiming their release from the prison where they awaited his coming.”⁵

Augustine

Augustine objected to the view of Origen and taught that though the spirits in prison are the unbelievers who lived in the time of Noah; it was the spirit of Christ dwelling in Noah that preached to them, but they rejected the message. Another possible interpretation in this school of thought is that Christ Himself, in His pre-existent form, preached while the ark was being built.⁶ This interpretation is assumed to be supported by 1 Pet 1:11 where Peter says that it was the Spirit of Christ who preached through the Old Testament prophets.

³Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 157.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. F. Hann, trans. J. E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 254 in Wikipedia, accessed 17 February 2014 (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/spirits_in_prison#cite_note-1).

Therefore, the supporters of the view hold that when Noah was building the ark, Christ was in Noah “in spirit,” preaching repentance and righteousness to the people of his day who were alive then but have now become spirits in prison (or people in hell).⁷ Though this view originated with Augustine, it was firmly supported by Thomas Aquinas. Wohlenberg also agrees with Augustine when he states that, “Peter means that Christ in his pre-existent state preached to those who rejected the preaching of Noah who are now in prison.”⁸ This interpretation dominated the theological scene for centuries until Bellarmine’s view, that Christ preached release to repented sinners in purgatory, overthrew it in the Roman Catholic Church.⁹ However many modern scholars still subscribe to this view.¹⁰

Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria was one of the Church Fathers who endeavored to interpret 1 Pet 3:19. In his own opinion, Christ’s soul went to Hades to preach conversion to those who disobeyed in the days of Noah and died in the Flood.¹¹ He believed that the souls of these sinners were detained in Hades where Christ had gone to preach to them to give them a second chance. This understanding suggests that there is a second chance for the wicked that have died and are already in hell.

⁷Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter*, ed. F. Hann, trans. J. E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 254 in Wikipedia, accessed 17 February 2014 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/spirits_in_prison#cite_note-1).

⁸Archibald Thomas Robertson, *First Epistle General of Peter*, Word Studies in the New Testament, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1933), 117.

⁹Kistemaker, *I Peter*, 145.

¹⁰Driscoll, 17/02/2014.

¹¹Bartolucci, 17/02/2014.

Modern Christian Interpretations

In the modern time, 1 Pet 3:19 has drawn the attention of many scholars that it can be regarded as one of the most debated passage in the NT. As a result, there are many modern interpretations that have been proposed for 1 Peter 3:19. Because of time and space constraint, we are going to limit ourselves to only a summary of the different views which have gained popular support among scholars. Of course, each of the views highlighted here have branches, but the main views are discussed.

The Pre-incarnate Christ Preached through Noah to Human Spirits

The idea of the pre-incarnate Christ preaching through Noah that began with the early Christian expositors has now been developed by modern scholars and one of the strongest modern supporters of this view is Wayne Grudem. He argues that the four additional phrases that follow the phrase “spirits in prison” lend support to the understanding that these spirits are human spirits and not angelic spirits. These phrases are: (1) who formerly disobeyed, (2) in the days of Noah, (3) when God’s patience waited, and (4) during the building of the ark.¹² Grudem rejects the idea that the “spirits in prison” are angelic beings. He believes that while some Jewish writings which were available and most likely accessible to the readers of 1 Peter links the spirits in prison with the sons of God who married the daughters of men and begot children by them in Genesis 6 are understood as sinful angels who married human women, nonetheless such an interpretation is not uniform in Jewish tradition. He presents at least nine texts where non-angelic interpretations are held.¹³

¹²Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 210-11.

¹³Ibid., 211-12. Grudem states that while Philo himself calls these ‘sons of God’ angels in one place, he later calls them ‘good and excellent men’ *Q.Gen.* 1.92).

Grudem summarizes his position thus: “In the spiritual realm of existence Christ went and preached through Noah to those who are now spirits in the prison of hell. This happened when they formerly disobeyed, when the patience of God was waiting in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”¹⁴ From this summary, it is clear that Grudem believes that there is a hell where those who disobeyed in the days of Noah are presently being kept, which in this text is referred to as prison.¹⁵

This argument has led Muriithi to see a correlation of this text with the African belief in transition in the state of death. He says, “When death separated Christ’s spirit from his body, he was enabled to go to preach in the spirit world (3:19). This suggests that there is a biblical support for the African belief in the continued existence after death, whether as the living dead (ancestors who are remembered) or as spirits.”¹⁶

One major problem with this conclusion is that it contradicts the clear affirmation of the

Moreover, the Targums and the Rabbinic literature are unanimous in viewing the ‘sons of God’ as human beings. Targum Onkelos on Genesis 6:2 and 4 reads ‘sons of princes’ (or great men, *rbrby*), and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan has the same. Targum Neofiti has ‘sons of judges’ (*dyyny*) in both verses. Tosefta, *Sotah* 3.9a interprets ‘sons of God’ as men of the generation of the flood. In the Midrash Rabbah, they are understood as ‘sons of judges’ (*dyyn*) and as ‘leaders’ (Gen.R. 26.5 on Gen. 6:2, quoting Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, c. AD140), or as the generation of men at the time of the flood (Num.R. 9.24, on 5:27). The Babylonian Talmud at *b.Sanh* 108a understands them as men at the time of the flood. Symmachus translates Genesis 6:2 as ‘the sons of the rulers, (*ton dynasteuonton*).

¹⁴Ibid., 139.

¹⁵John S. Feinberg, working independently from Grudem reached the same conclusions as Grudem and published his article titled “1 Peter 3:18-20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State in WTJ in 1986. Their view which is a rebranding of Augustine’s has now been widely accepted by many scholars. See the footnote on Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, 122.

¹⁶Sicily Mbura Muriithi, “1 Peter,” *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunbo Adeyemo (Nairobi Kenya: WordAlive Publishers 2006), 1522.

scriptures that human beings do not continue to exist after death either as ancestors or as spirits.¹⁷

Christ at His Death Preached to Fallen Angels

Friedrich Spitta promoted the interpretation that, after His death and before His resurrection, Christ preached to fallen angels who are also called “sons of God,” who had married “daughters of men” in the days of Noah.¹⁸ Support for the understanding that the spirits in prison are angelic beings is found in 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6. These passages refer to rebellious angels, punished by God with imprisonment, in agreement with 1 Pet 3:19.¹⁹ Marshall opines that it is least difficult to believe that the spirits mentioned in this passage are “evil supernatural beings” since the author also makes reference to “angels, authority and powers,” in verse 22.²⁰

Grudem disagrees with this conclusion and argues that it cannot be sustained since, according to Peter, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the Flood are both linked with angelic sin in 2 Peter 2: 4-7. According to Grudem, “Peter hardly thinks the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah happened at the same time as the flood!” He further states that, “This means that, far from seeing events such as angelic sin and the flood as contemporaneous, he is simply picking out three separate

¹⁷See prominent Bible references in footnote 1 of the third view, “Harrowing Experience in Hell,” below.

¹⁸Kistemaker, *I Peter*, 144.

¹⁹<http://www.afterlife.co.nz/2012/conditional-immortality-key-passages/the-spirits-in-prison-i-peter-318-20>, accessed 17/02/2014.

²⁰I. Howard Marshall, *I Peter*, 127.

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).”²¹

In agreement with Grudem, it is obvious from 2 Pet 2:4-7 that three examples of ungodliness are highlighted by the author of 2 Peter: (1) angelic sin (v 4); (2) the antediluvian sin (v 5); and (3) the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv 6, 7). So, it can be inferred that the three events took place at different times; and can be argued that the angelic sin did not coincide with the sin of the antediluvian world as recorded in Gen 6. In other words, those who disobeyed when the ark was being built were not angels in 2 Peter and might not necessarily be angels in 1 Peter either.

Second Chance for People in Hell or Harrowing Experience in Hell

As opined by Clement of Alexandria, many modern scholars have accepted the belief that Christ’s soul went to Hades to preach conversion to those who disobeyed in the days of Noah and died in the Flood.²² Clement had believed that the souls of these sinners were detained in Hades where Christ had gone to preach to them to give them a second chance. In support of Clement, Bigg argues strongly that the explanation of Augustine and others that Christ was preaching through Noah should be rejected since the event took place “between the Crucifixion and the Ascension.” He says, “In St. Peter’s view our Lord preached the gospel to these spirits, and offered them a place of repentance.”²³

²¹Wayne Grudem, *Christ Preaching Through Noah: 1 Peter 3:19-20 in the Light of Dominant Themes in Jewish Literature*, *Trinity Journal* 7 NS (1986) 11.

²²Tony Bartolucci, “Exegetical Notes for 1 Peter 3:18-22,” <http://www.tonybartolucci.com/.../1%20exegetical/1%20Peter%203.18-22>, accessed 17/02/2014.

²³Charles Bigg, *Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1902),

Spitta's opinion differs slightly from those proposed above in the sense that he understands the 'spirits' that Jesus offered the second chance to be angels and not human. Meanwhile, all these scholars support the idea of a second chance either for those who have died or for fallen angels. On the other hand, as we have seen earlier, Osei-Bonsu and Grudem disagree with the idea of a second chance for the dead or for angels and reject the belief that Christ went to hell to proclaim the gospel.

There is another aspect of this view. It is called the "harrowing of hell." It states that Christ's visit to hell was rather to instill fear in the occupants so that they will know that, with Christ's victory, there is no way of escape for them. One of the key supporters of this view, Edward Hayes Plumptre, argues for a "revival in the belief in *harrowing of hell* and the spirit of Christ preaching to the souls of the dead in Hades while His body was in the grave"²⁴ (emphasis in original). Plumptre asserts that, "Jesus, *between* his death and resurrection, descended into the place of the dead. This place is often referred to as Hades, which is where the dead are held until they're judged and thrown into hell, which is the second death (Revelation 20:11-15; cf. Revelation 2:11; 20:6; 21:8)."²⁵

Were the argument of Bigg to be valid, one important question posed by Robertson is why Jesus would confine His preaching to only the people who died in the flood.²⁶ This will present Christ as unfair to others who are lost because they also rejected God's offer of salvation while alive. For instance, Genesis 5 mentions the

²⁴Edward Hayes Plumptre, "The Spirits in Prison and Other Studies on The Life After Death," accessed 17/02/2014, <http://www.afterlife.co.nz/2012/conditional-immortality-key-passages/the-spirits-in-prison-i-peter-318-20>.

²⁵Ibid., in Mark Driscoll, "Though Text Thursday: 1 Peter 3:19," accessed 17/02/2014, <http://pastormark.tv/2012/02/02/tough-text-thursday-1-Peter-3-19>.

²⁶Robertson, *First Epistle General of Peter*, 117.

account of people who lived and died before the flood. Also, Gen 11:10-32 contains a record of people who lived and died after the flood. In fact, the OT is replete with records of deaths, both of the righteous and of the wicked. If indeed Christ went to preach to the dead, He probably would not have limited His preaching to those who died in the flood but to all the dead.

It is unlikely that Peter implies that there is hope for those who reject the gospel now and gamble with the idea of a possible second chance after death.²⁷ Also, this view puts to question the fairness of God if He would not give similar opportunity to those of other generations. The scriptures plainly teach that anyone who refuses to accept the gift of salvation before death will be lost (See Matt 16:27; Rom 2:6). They also teach that the dead are not conscious (Ps 146:4; Eccl 9:5, 6; Matt 10:28).²⁸

Paul argues in Heb 9:27 that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” In other words, to say that Christ preached a second chance for the dead is to disregard this plain teaching of Scriptures. Any interpretation of 1 Pet 3:19 that suggests a second chance for the dead should be discarded.

Many other passages of the Bible²⁹ support the notion that those who have died are not conscious, and so, it is impossible for them to receive any message in

²⁷Robertson sees a “very precarious exegesis” in the interpretation that suggests a second chance for salvation. To him, this is “gambling” of which the hope is very “slim.”

²⁸“Spirit in Prison” (1 Peter), *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (SDABC), rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1976-80), 7:575.

²⁹Prominent Bible passages that support the belief in soul sleep concept include Eccl 9:5, 6; Ps 146:3, 4; John 5: 28, 29; 1 Cor 15:51-54; 1 Thess 4:13-17; rev 20:1-10. These passages reveal that the dead know nothing but are resting in their graves till the time of the resurrection when God will raise them up to receive their rewards, either life eternal or everlasting destruction.

their graves, whether that of condemnation, terror, or a second chance at salvation. Osei-Bonsu has rightly observed that in the grave or Hades, “the dead person is in some sort of suspended state until the final judgment.”³⁰ Consequently, we can rightly conclude that this interpretation is far from agreeing with the clear teaching of the Bible that:

The living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun.... Whatever your hand finds to do, do *it* with your might; for *there is* no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going (Eccl 9:5-6, 10).

The theological implication of this belief in a second chance for salvation after death offers grave consequences. Many may be led into procrastination: If it is possible to have a second chance at death, why bother now? In light of this, Peter, in any case, would not have taught that Christ went to hell to offer a second chance for the lost or to terrify them there, since a time for judgment has been set.

Proclaiming Christ’s Victory over Death

Recent commentators teach that Christ, after His resurrection, proclaimed to imprisoned spirits His victory over death. These imprisoned spirits according to this viewpoint are believed to be fallen angels. It is believed that during His ascension, “the exalted Christ passed through the realm where the fallen angels are kept and proclaimed His triumph over them (Eph. 6:12; Col. 2:15).”³¹ Blum sees the use of the verb *kerysso* “to proclaim” or “to announce” instead of *evangelizo* “to proclaim good news” as suggesting that salvation for fallen angels is not implied here. Rather, “[t]he

³⁰Robert Osei-Bonsu, “Purgatory,” 286.

³¹Kistemaker, *1 Peter*, 145.

announcement is of his victory and of their doom that has come through his death on the cross and his resurrection.”³²

The SDA Bible Commentary observes that it is very unlikely that angels are being referred to here. It sees *kerysso* in this passage as referring to the preaching of Noah, when the Spirit of God waited patiently for the wicked to accept the message of salvation while the ark was being prepared (verse 20). The Commentary opines that the word “spirit” or “breath” is one of the conspicuous characteristics of living beings, and is used here as a figure of speech (synecdoche), in which a characteristic part of a thing stands for the whole. (See Luke 8:55 cf. Num 5:14). Therefore *pneuma* in this passage simply means “person.”³³ It concludes that the first part of 1 Pet 3:20 apparently identifies the “spirits” as people living on the earth immediately prior to the Flood.³⁴

A major weakness in this interpretation of Noah as the preacher is that he is not named as the one through whom Christ preached. Marshall maintains that, “The passage most naturally refers to an incident that took place after Christ had been *made alive*.”³⁵ He further argues that, “The spirit of Christ inspiring the prophets is not the same thing as Christ himself going and acting in Noah, and there are no other parallels to Christ temporarily inhabiting Old Testament characters.”³⁶ Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that Christ Himself, rather than Noah, made the proclamation.

³²Blum, “1 Peter 3:18-22,” 242.

³³“Spirit in Prison” [1 Pet 3:19], *SDABC*, 7:575.

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵Marshall, *1 Peter*, 124.

³⁶*Ibid.*

Repented Sinners in Purgatory

Another interpretation of this text is that of Christ preaching release to the people in Noah's day who had repented just before they died in the Flood. These are believed to have lived in purgatory until the time of Christ's death when He led them out of their imprisonment into heaven.³⁷ This view which originated with Robert Bellarmine has been well accepted by the Catholic Church commentators in relation to a belief in purgatory.³⁸ As is the case with views 3 and 4, the weakness of this view is its belief in purgatory where the souls of the dead are understood to be conscious, outside of human existence. The teaching outrightly contradicts the expressed teachings of scriptures. (See the weaknesses of views 3 and 4 above).

Gentiles in the Prison of Ignorance

Though not reckoned by most scholars as a major view, another interpretation of 1 Pet 3:19 is the belief that the "prison" in the passage is only a metaphor.

Adherents of this view assert that:

The words are to be understood of Christ's going to preach, by his apostles, to the Gentiles, as in Ephesians 2:17 who were in a most miserable condition, strangers to the covenants of promise, and destitute of the hope of salvation, and sat in darkness, and the shadow of death, and, as it were, at the gates of hell; were in the bonds of iniquity, and dead in sin, and had been for long time past foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, to which they were in bondage.³⁹

According to this viewpoint, the Gentiles who were once separated from the Kingdom of Christ have been given opportunity of salvation through the preaching of

³⁷Wayne Grudem, *Christ Preaching Through Noah*, 3.

³⁸Stanley E. Porter, Michael A. Hayes, David Tombs, *Resurrection*, 110 in Wikipedia, accessed April 12, 2015.

³⁹See *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_peter/3-19.htm, accessed 07/10/2016.

the apostles. Comparing 1 Pet 3:19 with Isa 42:7, where the prophet spoke about bringing “out the prisoners from the prison and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house;” one may be tempted to conclude that Peter also was speaking figuratively about “prison” of sin. But the evidence clearly shows that more than a figure of speech is being referred to in 1 Pet 3:18-22. Besides, “the apostle is speaking of such who were disobedient in the times of Noah; and therefore not of the Gentiles, in the times of the apostles”.⁴⁰ In addition to this, though this interpretation sounds plausible, it will be difficult to prove that men are called ‘spirits’ in this present state of existence.⁴¹

The Identity of the Spirits in Prison in 1 Peter 3:19

With all the divergent interpretations of 1 Peter 3:19 as outlined above, any bible student will know that there is still a necessity to re-examine the passage in order to proffer a more credible interpretation. This research aims at doing just that by looking at the five cardinal questions that will lead to our desired result. (1) Who are the spirits in prison? (2) Where is the prison located? (3) What is the content of the proclamation? (4) Who made the proclamation? (5) When was the proclamation made? Let us begin to address these five cardinal questions by looking at the five schools of interpretation outlined by Peter H. Davids.⁴²

⁴⁰ See *Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible*, http://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_peter/3-19.htm, accessed 07/10/2016.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 138, 139. While some scholars favor three major views of interpretation (e.g., Marshall, Bandstra, Heibert), Schreiner outlines four, many others adopt five major schools of interpretation (e.g., Davids, Grudem.etc).

1. The spirits are the souls of the faithful of the OT and the prison is simply the place they remained awaiting Christ, who proclaims his redemption to them.
2. The spirits are the souls of those who died in Noah's flood, who are kept in Hades, and who hear the gospel proclaimed by Christ after his death and before his resurrection (or heard the gospel in the days of Noah before being put in prison).
3. The spirits are the fallen angels of Gen 6:1-4 and the prison is where they are kept bound and hear the proclamation of judgment by Christ.
4. The spirits are the demons, the offspring of the fallen angels of Gen 6, who have taken refuge or being protected (rather than being imprisoned) in the earth and the proclamation is that of Christ's (post-resurrection) invasion of their refuge.
5. The spirits are the fallen angels but the preacher is Enoch, who proclaimed judgment to them.⁴³

Spirits in Prison as the Souls of OT Faithful

Calvin states that, "I therefore have no doubt but Peter speaks generally, that the manifestation of Christ's grace was made to godly spirits, and that they were thus endued with vital power of the Spirit."⁴⁴ To answer the suspicion of the critics who might ask why God should put godly spirits in prison he said, "It seems to me that *φυλακῆ* rather means a watchtower in which ... godly souls were watching in hope of

⁴³For comparison, see Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 204.

⁴⁴Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: Hebrews/1Peter/2Peter*, 114.

the salvation promised them, as though they saw it afar off”⁴⁵ (emphasis in original). Even if ‘prison’ is preferred for the meaning of φυλακῆ, Calvin says that the Law “was a sort of prison” in which the faithful were kept before the first advent of Christ, “so after death they must have felt the same desire for Christ; for the spirit of liberty had not as yet been fully given. Hence this anxiety of expectation was to them a kind of prison.”⁴⁶

Spirits in Prison as Those Who Died in the Flood

This view is supported by 1 Peter 1:10-11, which speaks of the Spirit of the pre-incarnate Christ preaching in times past, through the prophets. It is believed that Christ descended into Hades between his death and resurrection and preached to the sinful human beings who perished during Noah’s flood, offering them the opportunity to repent and be saved.⁴⁷ Most of those who adopt this interpretation believe that God will offer a second chance to all those in hell, especially to those who never heard the gospel.⁴⁸ This view has many variations.

The problem with views 1 and 2 is not hidden for, as Schreiner points out, “the word ‘spirits’ (*pneumasin*) fits much more plausibly with a reference to angels than to human beings, for ‘spirits’ (*pneumata*) in the plural almost without exception in the New Testament refers to angels.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries: Hebrews/1Peter/2Peter*, 114.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 185.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., 186.

Spirits in Prison as Fallen Angels

This is supported by Peter H. Davids who posits that 1 Peter 3:19 refers to a proclamation of judgment by the risen Christ to the fallen angels, sealing their doom as he triumphed over sin and death and hell, redeeming human beings.⁵⁰ Schreiner supports this view when he wrote that, “[t]he best solution, therefore, is that the verse proclaims Christ’s victory over demonic spirits after his death and resurrection.”⁵¹ He explains further that the word “spirits” mostly refers to angels in NT and the notion that the spirits are imprisoned fits with the imprisonment of Satan in Rev 20:7.

Support for the understanding that the spirits in prison are angels and not human beings is confirmed by 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6, which also refer to rebellious angels, their punishment by God of imprisonment, and Noah’s Flood. Even the number of people saved in the ark is mentioned in both cases.

Spirits in Prison as Offspring of Fallen Angels

Friedrich Spitta and Joachim Jeremias suggest that Peter was making a reference to Enochic traditions which was widespread among the Jews of the first century. Edward Selwyn is one of the most popular supporters of this view. The weakness of view 4 is in its interpretation of the spirits as the offspring of the fallen angels in Gen 6. It is based on the Jewish tradition of the Watchers as discussed above. But as we are going to find out, it is not likely that Peter was appealing to this book as some have thought.

⁵⁰Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 141.

⁵¹Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 188.

Enoch as Preacher

For view 5, the idea that Enoch made the proclamation is based on J. Bowyer's Greek New Testament published in 1763 in which he conjectured that the present phrase ἐν ᾧ καὶ was a substitute for an original Ἐνὼχ καὶ (Enoch also). But this is neither supported by any manuscript evidence nor does it make sense that a text which "has Christ as its subject" will suddenly refer to Enoch.⁵²

The first view is unlikely since human beings are never referred to as spirits in the NT. The offering of a second chance to sinners is in conflict with the teachings of the scriptures as suggested by the second view. So also, the notion of evil angels being protected as seen in the fourth view is not clearly mentioned in the Scriptures. The idea that Enoch made the proclamation as espoused by the fifth view is not supported by the context. Though, the third view is in agreement with the principles and teachings of the Bible, its weakness is in the identification of the "sons of God" in Gen 6 as fallen angels, who married the "daughters of men" and bore children through them. Since all the five views are not likely correct (given the demerits raised above), the view proposed and pursued in this work differs from them all and will be discussed below.

The Identity of the Spirits in Prison

The following is the submission of this research work which is hereby defended by the researcher: The spirits in prison are the fallen angels of Rev 12:3, 4. The location of their abode is the earth. The proclamation is that of Christ's victory over them. The preacher is Christ and the time the proclamation took place was after His resurrection from the dead. This interpretation partly agrees with the third view in

⁵²Elliott, *1 Peter*, 652.

that it identifies the spirits in prison as fallen angels and accepts the proclamation of Christ as that of judgment and not salvation. But it disagrees with the idea that these fallen angels are linked to the sons of God in Gen 6:1-4.

Since many commentators who accept the third view see that the spirits in prison are related to the evil spirits that came from the body of the giants produced through the union between the sons of God and the daughters of men, there is a need to properly differentiate between the sons of God in Gen 6:1-4 and the fallen angels who are likely to be referred to in 1 Pet 3:19. This will help to provide important evidence that have been overlooked in this debate. John E. Hartley gave a brief summary of the three prevalent propositions about the identity of the sons of God in Genesis chapter 6 when he wrote:

There are three leading proposals for the identification of the sons of God. The first is that they were heavenly beings. Consumed by lust, angels cohabited with human women. . . . The offspring from these unions possessed extraordinary abilities. . . . They used their abilities to promote wickedness. A second proposal is that the sons of God were the mighty rulers of old. Flaunting their power, they built harems by marrying whomever they wished. Thus, their sin was polygamy, which led to rapid increase in population. The third possibility is that the sons of God were the men of Seth's line and the daughters of men were the offspring of Cain. These women from the rebellious line of Cain led the Sethites into the pleasure of sin, thereby squelching the worship of the one God Yahweh.⁵³

Thus, it is correct to say that the identity of the “sons of God” is being debated by scholars. In the meantime, the researcher opts for the third option—that “the sons of God” are the descendants of Seth while “the daughters of men” are the descendants of Cain. Commenting on Gen 6:2, Ellen White wrote: The children of Seth, attracted by the beauty of the daughters of Cain's descendants, displeased the Lord by intermarrying with them.”⁵⁴ And what was the result of this intermarriage? She

⁵³John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, New International Biblical Commentary 1 (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2000), 96.

continues by saying that, “Many of the worshipers of God were beguiled into sin by the allurements that were now constantly before them, and they lost their peculiar, holy character. Mingling with the depraved, they became like them in spirit and in deeds.”⁵⁵ For this reason, she concludes that, “Sin spread abroad in the earth like a deadly leprosy.”⁵⁶

The three views may have their own strengths and weaknesses but we agree with Hartley that, “the scenario of righteous men chasing or marrying beautiful foreign women and being led into the worship of other gods is a recurring theme in the OT.”⁵⁷ Despite the fact that the view that the sons of God are angels was traditionally accepted for many centuries based on its link with Job 1:6; 2:1; and 38:7, the immediate context seems not to support this. The reason for this supposition is not farfetched: Why should human beings be punished for the sins committed by angels? In addition, Christ said in Matt 22:30 that angels do not marry. The “rulers” view also may not be able to account for the punishment of the whole world for the sins committed by a few leaders alone. The logical conclusion seems to favor the interpretation that the “sons of God” in Gen 6:1-4 are the descendants of Seth and not the fallen angels.

Another passage which is of great importance to understanding that the sin of the sons of God in Gen 6:1-4 is separate from angelic sin is 2 Pet 2:4-7. Here, the

⁵⁴Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Hagerstown: Review & Herald, 1953), 81.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Hartley, *Genesis*, 96. (For example, see Num 25:1-2 for the incident at Baal-Peor and 1 Kgs 11:1-13 for the apostasy of Solomon)

author clearly distinguished the sins of angels from the sins of the antediluvians. The text states:

For if God did not spare *the angels who sinned*, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare *the ancient world*, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in *the flood* on the world of the ungodly; and turning *the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah* into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked... —then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment (2 Pet 2:4-9 NKJ) [emphasis supplied].

In this passage, three examples of ungodliness are cited namely, (1) the angels who sinned, (2) the ancient world of Noah's time, and (3) the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Since it is unlikely that the three events happened at the same time,⁵⁸ it is also logical to conclude that the sins of angels did not take place in the days of Noah.

Now, having established the identity of the sons of God as the Sethites, we can safely conclude that the spirits in prison may not possibly be the descendants of the spirit-human union of Genesis 6:1-4 as has been widely accepted. And if this is the case, we need to turn to another passage for a plausible answer. One possible text is Rev 12:4 which mentions a third of the "stars" in heaven that were cast to the earth. This makes more sense when we connect it to Dan 8:10 where it is said that the enemy of God and His people "grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down." As we can see from Rev. 1:20, stars symbolize angels in the book Revelation. "In addition, Rev 12:7-9 makes it quite clear that those 'stars of heaven' the dragon dragged down with

⁵⁸See Grudem, *Christ Preaching Through Noah*, 11.

his tail are the fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion against God, and which were ‘cast down with him’ to the earth” (12:9).⁵⁹

William Barclay supports this idea that the stars in this passage are fallen angels when he wrote that, “The picture will become clearer if we remember that John thinks of the stars as living beings.... To the Jewish mind the stars were divine beings, who by disobedience could become demonic and evil.”⁶⁰ He also links the statement with the Jewish tradition of Enoch: “This is common in Enoch where, for instance, we read of wandering and disobedient stars being bound hand and foot and cast into the abyss (Enoch 86:1, 88:1).”⁶¹

In addition the prophet Isaiah said, “How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!” (Isa 14:12, NIV). Jesus also said, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). These two passages, when taken together, no doubt imply that Satan is the star that fell from heaven. In view of the fact that Rev 12:9 affirms that Satan’s angels were cast down to the earth along with him, it is therefore provable that the angels of Satan that were cast down with him after his rebellion in heaven according to this passage, are the same beings referred to as “spirits in prison” in 1 Pet 3:19. Consequently, it seems that the “spirits in prison” that Jesus made proclamation

⁵⁹Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2002), 382.

⁶⁰William Barclay, *Revelation of John*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976), 2:47.

⁶¹Ibid.

to in 1 Pet 3:19 are the devil and the “stars” that rebelled alongside with him and were cast down together with him according to the book of Revelation chapter 12.⁶²

Having established that the spirits in prison are the devil and his angels, our interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19 can be summarized as follows: The spirits in prison are the devil and his angels who fell after their rebellion in heaven as described in Rev 12:3-9. The prison where they were kept is the earth.⁶³ Christ proclaimed victory over them after his resurrection and sealed their doom while he restores the hope of human beings as they are now reconciled with heaven.

Graphically, the main interpretations of 1 Peter 3:19 is summarized as follows:

⁶²My position in this paper is that both Satan and all the fallen angels made up the “spirits in prison.” This submission is based on Rev 12:9 that “the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” Since both Satan and his angels were cast out, they both receive Christ’s proclamation of condemnation, sealing their doom.

⁶³ All evils and sufferings on earth can be attributed to the presence of these fallen angels and their master the devil as they carry out their evil intentions. In the book of Job, we see the manifestations of this evil intention of Satan as he afflicted him with different kinds of pains. He entered into Judas Iscariot and incited him to betray the Savior of the world. Paul, 1 Thess 2:3-10, says that more of Satan’s workings will be revealed through the man of sin.

Table 1. Views of Interpretation of 1 Peter 3:19

	Who are the spirits in prison?	Where is the prison located?	What is the content of the proclamation?	Who made the proclamation?	When was the proclamation made?
View 1	Faithful Believers of the OT	A waiting place for Christ	Redemption	Christ by the Spirit	Unspecified time
View 2	The wicked who died in the flood of Noah	Hades	Gospel	Christ or Noah	After Christ's death and before his resurrection or in the days of Noah
View 3	Fallen angels of Gen 6:1-4	Unspecified	Judgment or a call to repentance	Christ or Noah	Unspecified
View 4	Demons: offspring of fallen angels of Gen 6:1-4	A place of refuge in the Earth	Invasion of their refuge	Christ	After resurrection
View 5	Fallen angels	Earth	Judgment	Enoch	Unspecified
Ayeni View	Satan and the fallen angels of Rev 12:3, 4	Earth	Christ's victory over them	Christ	After resurrection

Conclusion

As can be seen from the table, recent scholarship has focused attention on Gen 6:1-4 to understand the identity of the spirits in prison while important evidence has been overlooked. This paper challenges the dependence of scholars on this passage and shifts attention to more plausible passages as it seeks to link the identification of the spirits in prison to the fallen stars of Isa 14:12, Dan 8:10, Luke 10:18, and Rev 12:3-4. This is only a call to look at other texts of the Bible in the debate concerning the identity of the spirits in prison.

If more researches are conducted and more evidences are found to support the position of this paper, it will help to resolve the confusion arising from the interpretation of 1 Pet 3:19. It will also help bible scholars to reinterpret Genesis chapter 6 which for centuries has been taken to mean that the sons of God are fallen angels and that they are the spirits in prison that disobeyed long ago and were addressed by Christ's proclamation. It will also help researchers to put in perspective the punishment of angels at the end of the age; although Christ has already announced, after his resurrection, his victory over Satan and his angels and their impending judgment.

In the meantime, this research clearly affirms that the cause of the deluge is the corruption that ensued because the godly descendants of Seth mingled with the ungodly descendants of Cain thereby polluting the worship of the true God. When God was removed from the picture, wickedness increased and the thought of human beings became "only evil all the time" (Gen 6:5).

CHAPTER 3

SURVEY OF THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF 1 PETER

Examination of the origin of 1 Peter will not be taken for granted in this paper. For this reason, this chapter has been devoted to examining the historical context of 1 Peter, focusing on the authorship, date, historical situation, genre and literary features, the recipients, and the structure of the book. The theme of the unit (1 Pet 3:18-20) is also dealt with in this section of the research paper.

Authorship

The authorship of 1 Peter has been a matter of dispute since the beginning of critical scholarship.¹ Bishop Stephen Neill has characterized 1 Peter as “the storm centre of New Testament studies.”² Neill made this observation when reacting to two major, but very different, commentaries on the epistle, namely those of E. G. Selwyn and F. W. Beare. After considering their disagreement on the origin and date of the letter, he remarked:

Now if two scholars can arrive at such widely divergent results, both on the basis of theoretically scientific methods of study, something must have gone seriously wrong somewhere. If it were possible to come nearer to agreement as to the date and origin of this beautiful and perplexing letter, this would provide us with another of those fixed points from which fresh studies could radiate in every direction, and perhaps new certainties be attained. It may be that definite solutions of this Petrine problem will forever evade us; we must

¹ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 3. It can be recalled that in Acts 4:13, Peter, along with John, was referred to by the religious authorities in Jerusalem as an “uneducated” and “untrained” man.

² Stephen Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961* (London: Oxford UP, 1964), 343 in J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, xxxi.

pursue the matter in hope, and not lie down too easily under the frustration of mutually contradictory solutions.³

Among those who accept the book as authentic are: Benetreau, Clowney, Cranfield, Grudem, Hunter, Michaels (with some hesitation), Neugebauer, Schelkle, Selwyn, Spicq, Stibbs, Walls, and Marshall. Those who support pseudonymity include Beare, Best, Brox, Goppelt, and Schutter. Kelly is undecided.⁴ Mark Dubis remarks that Beare “once claimed ‘the case against the attribution to Peter is overwhelming’, while Marshall has said, ‘if ever there was a weak case for pseudonymity, surely it is in respect to this letter’.”⁵

Those who deny Peter’s authorship on the one hand have advanced weighty arguments against attributing this epistle to Peter. Their weightiest evidence that the book is a pseudonymous work rests on the following points:

1. That the quality of the Greek language is one of the finest in the NT. Boring observes that 1 Peter “is written with a high level of literary and rhetorical competence by someone thoroughly at home in the Greek language, culture, and the LXX.... First Peter exhibits a better level of Greek than does Paul”.⁶ The proponents of this argument believe that Peter the apostle

³ Neill, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1961*, 344.

⁴I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, 21. Marshall notes that German scholarship seems to assume that the debate about the authorship of 1 Peter has been settled in favor of pseudonymity. He observes that critical scholars assume that the only New Testament writings which can be considered authentic are seven of the letters of Paul. All other writings are either pseudonymous or anonymous.

⁵Mark Dubis, “Research on 1 Peter: A Survey of Scholarly Literature Since 1985,” *Currents in Biblical Research* (2006): 201, accessed 09 March 2016, SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks CA and New Delhi) Vol. 4(2): 199-239 <http://CBI.sagepub.com> ISSN 1476-993X DOI: 10.1177/1476993X06059009

⁶Eugene Boring, *1 Peter*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (ANTC), (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 30.

of Christ was an ordinary Galilean fisherman whose native tongue was Aramaic, and could not have been able to write such a fine Greek.⁷

Marshall observes that “[t]he alleged difficulty is not simply that the letter is written in Greek but that it is written in a somewhat cultured style.”⁸

To this argument Michaels answers that if 1 Peter is accepted as a semi-official communication from the Christian community in Rome addressed as a diaspora letter to a wide circle of congregations on the far frontiers of the Roman Empire, then it need not be assumed that Peter composed it personally. He therefore concludes that, “The elegant Greek style could well be the work of a professional to whom Peter made known his ideas and whose finished work Peter approved”.⁹

2. The second argument against Peter’s authorship is that the book’s content suggests a situation in church structure and in social hostility that reflects a time later than the Apostle Peter’s time. But McKnight suggests that “the theology and church organization of 1 Peter are early and consistent with what Peter would have taught.
3. The third argument to be considered in this work is that 1 Peter exhibits a dependence on Pauline writings and therefore, it is thought to have been written after them, which will date the book to the late first century.

Archibald agrees that there are some indications that 1 Peter makes use of

⁷Dauids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 4.

⁸Marshall, *1 Peter*, 22.

⁹Michaels, *1 Peter*, lxii. Papias’s testimony is that Peter, for a different purpose, made use of Mark as his interpreter (See Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.15).

Romans and Ephesians.¹⁰ But Michaels asserts that there is “no conclusive evidence that 1 Peter knows or makes use of any of the letters of Paul (contrast 2 Pet 3:15-16).” Yet, he admits that 1 Peter contains some parallels with Ephesians and Colossians, but “they are not of the kind that suggests literary dependence.”¹¹

Dubis observes that Elliot has continued to press his earlier call that, “1 Peter be liberated from its ‘Pauline bondage’ ... and the trend is now very much in this direction.”¹² Thus, Dubis concludes that, “Rather than viewing 1 Peter as dependent on the Pauline corpus as did earlier scholars, the tendency of most scholars now is to emphasize the independent creativity of 1 Peter.”¹³

4. The fourth argument against Apostle Peter’s authorship is that Christianity could not have reached the remote areas of Asia Minor and become a target for persecution until a decade or more after Peter must have died.¹⁴ A cursory reading of Acts 2:9 gives a clear evidence that there is the

¹⁰Archibald, *First Epistle General of Peter*, 73.

¹¹Michaels, xliii-xliv.

¹²Dubis, “Research on 1 Peter,” 109.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Jobes, *1 Peter*, 6. Additional evidences advanced against Peter’s authorship of this book are: (1) That there is a lack of known links between Peter and the Christians in Asia Minor hence, he has no reason to write to them. (2) That the worldwide persecution reflected in the letter arose after Peter’s death. Also, the description of the persecuting power of Rome as Babylon is said to have been developed by the Jews after A.D. 70. (3) That the letter shows no concrete characteristics of the apostle Peter, such as eyewitness recollections of Christ. The reminiscence of the sayings of Jesus in the book is said to rest on church’s tradition rather than on personal memory. (4) That the letter shows a religious idiom that developed against the background of Hellenistic Judaism rather than Palestinian Judaism. (See I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, 22).

possibility that those areas of northern Asia Minor could have had established Christian churches by the time the letter was written. Three (Pontus, Cappadocia, and Asia) of the five communities mentioned in 1 Pet 1:1 are also mentioned in Acts 2:9. If Peter gave his address on the day of Pentecost around A.D. 31, and if there were some from the region who were baptized that day it is not unlikely that the church could have been well established about thirty years later.

On the other hand, from the earliest days, 1 Peter had been accepted as the apostle's work. Both Clement of Rome (AD 95) and Polycarp attest the book as authentic.¹⁵ “The letter of Polycarp of Smyrna to the Philippians in the early second century provides clear evidence of a familiarity with 1 Peter in at least one geographical area to which the epistle was addressed (i.e., western Asia Minor).”¹⁶ Thomas Schreiner argues that, “There is no evidence that anyone in the early church believed that the letter was written by anyone other than Peter.”¹⁷

There are also few pieces of biographical information in the epistle which provides a clue to the identity of the author. The author identifies himself clearly at the beginning of the book as “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1:1), and at the closing chapter of the book as “a witness of the suffering of Christ” (5:1). This is

¹⁵Norman Hillyer, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: BakerBooks, 2011), 16:1.

¹⁶Michaels, *1 Peter*, xxxii. Polycarp quotes many passages in 1 Peter in his own letter to the Philippians. For example Pol. *Phil.* 1:3 “in whom, though you did not see him, you believe with inexpressible and glorious joy—into which [joy] many desire to enter...” reflects 1 Pet 1:8, 12. Pol. *Phil.* 2:1 reflects 1 Pet 1:13, 21; Phil. 2:2 reflects 1 Pet 3:9; etc. Since Polycarp resided in Smyrna, there is clear evidence that he read 1 Peter from which he got the quotations he used in his own letter.

¹⁷Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary (TNAC) 37 (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 26.

consistent with what Peter said in Acts 10:41.¹⁸ In addition, Peter's speeches in Acts are echoed in 1 Peter.¹⁹ In fact McKnight firmly contends that, "Similarities between the teachings of Jesus and 1 Peter support an author who spent time with Jesus."²⁰

Having discussed both sides of the arguments about the authorship of 1 Peter, it is safe to agree with the suppositions of Schreiner²¹ that: (1) There are no decisive grounds to reject Petrine authorship for the letter since both internal and external evidences support it. (2) There are no evidences from antiquity that the letter was pseudonymous since there was no controversy over the author of the letter in the early church. (3) The objections raised against Peter's authorship are not compelling, and credible responses can be given to each one. (4) A number of pieces of evidence indicate that the apostle Peter knew Greek well and could have written the letter. (5) The reference to Babylon points to Rome, where Peter possibly wrote the letter.

Date

Discussion about the date hinges on the question of authorship. "Those who reject Petrine authorship typically date the letter in the time of Trajan (A.D. 98-117), Domitian (A.D. 81-86), or even Vespasian or Titus (A.D. 69-81)."²² Senior posits that

¹⁸John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, Anchor Bible (AB) 37b (New Haven: Doubleday, 2000), 818.

¹⁹Hillyer, *1 & 2 Peter, Jude*, 2. (cf. 1 Pet 1:3, 21 and Acts 2:32; 3:15; 1 Pet 3:21 and Acts 4:10; 1 Pet 1:17 and Acts 10:34; 1 Pet 1:20 and Acts 3:18; 1 Pet 2:4 and Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:8 and Acts 1:16; 1 Pet 2:24 and Acts 5:30, 10:38; 1 Pet 3:18 and Acts 3:14-15; 1 Pet 3:19 and Acts 2:27).

²⁰Scot McKnight, *1 Peter*, The New Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 17:28. Comparing these pairs of passages listed McKnight sees supporting evidences that the writer of 1 Peter must have personally spent time with Jesus of Nazareth: Luke 12:35 and 1 Pet 2:12; Luke 11:2 and 1 Peter 1:17; Matt 5:16 and 1 Peter 2:12; Luke 6:28 and 1 Pet 3:9; Matt 5:10 and 1 Pet 3:14).

²¹Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 32.

1 Peter was probably written during the last quarter of the first century for the following reasons: (1) The establishment of churches in the regions of Asia Minor (1:1); (2) the presence of Peter in Rome; (3) and the post-A.D 70 use of the term “Babylon” for Rome.²³ According to Boring, “More recent study has convinced most scholars that 1 Peter reflects a time of distress and social harassment, but not an official persecution initiated by the government, and that in any case there was no empire-wide Roman persecution until the time of Decian in the third century.”²⁴ He maintains that the fact that the letter refers to persecution does not necessarily indicate the period when the book was written. So, an attempt to date it on the basis of specific persecution will not be helpful.

Another important factor for determining the date of the letter is the series of references to suffering and persecution scattered throughout the letter. Some commentators have argued that the persecution of Nero was being referred to in 1 Peter. “However, Nero’s persecution of the Christians, while brutal, was largely confined to Rome and did not extend to the communities of Asia Minor addressed in the letter.”²⁵ In addition, Schreiner argues that the Neronian persecution had not started at the time of writing this epistle. He said, “there are good grounds for thinking that Peter would have mentioned the Neronian persecution if it had started, so that he could remind the believers in Asia Minor of the intensity of suffering experienced by Roman Christians.”²⁶

²²Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 36.

²³Donald P. Senior, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, Sacra Pagina Series 15 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2003), 7.

²⁴Boring, *1 Peter*, 33.

²⁵Senior, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, 7.

As Peter is arguably the author of the book, the letter must have been written “prior to A.D. 64 or 65, when Peter was martyred at the hands of Nero.”²⁷ McKnight argues that, “Peter’s conciliatory attitude toward the state (2:13-17) and his optimism about Christian life in the context of an unbelieving society (2:11-3:12) suggests that Peter wrote this letter near the beginning of Nero’s persecutions”.²⁸ Schreiner concurs with McKnight that, “the letter was likely written near the end of Peter’s life when he was in Rome.”²⁹ But he cautioned that, “Assigning a specific date is conjectural, but it is likely that the letter was written in the 60s.”³⁰

Historical/Geographical Situation

Peter’s mention of Babylon in 5:13 is widely accepted by scholars as a reference to Rome. This is an indication that the letter was written in Rome to the churches in Asia Minor.³¹ The fact that the Christians of northern Asia Minor, the location of the five regions mentioned in 1 Pet 1:1, were being maltreated is obvious from the beginning of the epistle. Firstly, they were called “strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1:1, KJV); and secondly, they “have been grieved by various trials” (1:6, NKJV).

²⁶Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 36, 37.

²⁷McKnight, *1 Peter*, 29.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 36.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Only Beare believed that the letter was actually written in Asia Minor but he later changed his view according to Achtemeier. (See Paul D. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 64.

As Schreiner pointed out, at the time Peter was writing, Bithynia and Pontus were a single province. So, “Peter probably wrote generally, designating a geographic area north of the Taurus mountains (in what is now modern-day Turkey) as the recipient of the letter.”³² He supports Goppelt’s assertion that it is likely Peter “designated the area by province instead of geographically”.³³ “The order in which the areas are listed probably designates the order in which the courier ... carried the letter.”³⁴

The situation of the readers shows a “people who were discriminated against. ... The discrimination arose out of the unwillingness of Christians to take part in societal life associated with idolatry.”³⁵ Schreiner observes that this discrimination is in form of “verbal abuse from former colleagues and friends” though “the line between discrimination and mistreatment and physical punishment is often a thin one, and hence the former could lead to the latter.”³⁶ It should be noted that the statement in 5:9 that “because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings (NIV), does not suggest there was an empire-wide persecution. It “simply reveals that the faith of believers was under threat in the entire Greco-Roman world. Threat, discrimination, and occasionally loss of life were the lot of Christians everywhere. Hence, Peter reminds the believers in Asia Minor that their situation is not unique.”³⁷

³²Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 37.

³³If it were the latter, he probably would have included Paphlagonia, Phrygia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia. (See Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 37; Goppelt *1 Peter*, 3, 4).

³⁴Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 37.

³⁵Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 161 in Marshall, *1 Peter*, 24.

³⁶Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 30.

The notion that Christians were misunderstood by the general public in Peter's days is attested by the response of the Jews in Acts 28:22 that the Christians were a "sect spoken against everywhere." Since the society considered the Christian community to be "an unwelcome, even dangerous, sectarian movement," they were subjected to abuse. Thus, "First Peter attempts to offer realistic encouragement and instruction to Christians attempting to live faithfully in such a situation."³⁸

Genre Analysis/Literary Features of 1 Peter

It seems obvious that 1 Peter is a letter, with the style of address and formal salutation, the thanksgiving or blessing, and exhortation that are typical of Hellenistic letters of the first century.³⁹ It also resembles other letters in the NT. It has been proposed that the letter really consisted of two separate letters⁴⁰ joined into one: The first part (1:3-4:11) was a baptismal homily full of the joy of the new life in Christ and the second (4:12-5:11) was a word of encouragement in a time when persecution had moved from possibility to reality.⁴¹

Boring has observed that, "In the late-nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, many scholars began to argue that the bulk of 1 Peter was not

³⁷ Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 30.

³⁸ Boring, *1 Peter*, 44.

³⁹ David L. Bartlett, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New Interpreter's Bible (NIB) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 242.

⁴⁰ Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 43. (Schreiner puts the two sections as 1:3-4:11 and 4:12-5:14. Those who defend a partition theory argue that the suffering in 3:17 is only hypothetical but that of 4:12 is present. Similarly, joy is present in 1:6, 8 whereas it is confined to the future in 4:12, 13. Another important argument of this theory is that the doxology and the "amen" in 4:11 signals the end of the first letter. This is repeated in 5:11. Also, the claim that the letter is a short letter in 5:12 can only be credible if 4:12-5:14 constitute a separate letter.)

⁴¹ Bartlett, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 242. (See also, Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 43)

originally composed as a letter.” Adolf Harnack had confidently declared in 1887 that the book was “a sermon not a letter,” and that a baptismal homily found in 1:3-5:11 had later been inserted into a letter framework.⁴² Perdelwitz refined the theory in 1911 and argued that 1:3-4:11 was a baptismal sermon to new converts, later incorporated into a letter that added exhortations to a new situation of persecution.⁴³ This view was widely accepted. But further research has shown the unity of the letter⁴⁴ of which practically all scholars are now convinced.⁴⁵ Marshall believes that the theories which identify the letter as a baptismal homily or as a combination of baptismal liturgy and a sermon have not gained support. He submits that what can be observed in 1 Peter is a “free and creative use of material from different teaching situations in the early church.”⁴⁶

Boring notes that 1 Peter, “was written all at once as a real letter, but does include a large proportion of traditional parenetic materials, including baptismal imagery and allusions, that have provided the occasion for other hypotheses.”⁴⁷ It is not a letter to individual churches, but a “circular” letter to all the Christian in a wide area. Unlike the letters of Paul, 1 Peter does not reflect any awareness of particular events in the life of specific congregation. The author of 1 Peter knew of the addressees’ situation only what he knew theologically of Christians as such. And of

⁴²Boring, *1 Peter*, 37.

⁴³Ibid

⁴⁴William J. Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18-4:6* S.J. *Analecta biblica* 23. Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965)

⁴⁵Boring, *1 Peter*, 37. (See also, P. Senior, *1 Peter, Jude, And 2 Peter*, 10).

⁴⁶Marshall, *1 Peter*, 20.

⁴⁷Boring, *1 Peter*, 37, 38.

course, the letter, like Pauline letters, was intended to be read in the worship services of the congregations, not for private study.⁴⁸

The author wrote in elegant Greek style with rich vocabulary.⁴⁹ Elliot points to the Old Testament as the most cited source of the materials in 1 Peter. Schutter “observes the book’s ‘extraordinary dependence on the OT’, asserting that ‘few early Christian documents incorporate as much of its material in proportion with their size’.”⁵⁰ He found a total of forty-six quotations and allusions to the OT especially Isaiah, Psalms and Proverbs.

The Recipients

The letter is addressed to Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1:1)—places in modern day Turkey. Edwin Blum claims that Peter may have evangelized this northern region of Asia Minor while Paul founded churches in the southern and western areas of Asia Minor.⁵¹ But 1 Pet 1:12 clearly “indicates no connection between the author... and the readers.”⁵² The audience were largely Gentiles who had formerly not known the true God and who had lived the sinful,

⁴⁸Boring, *1 Peter*, 37, 38.

⁴⁹Senior, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, 11. According to Senior, there are sixty-one Greek words found nowhere else in the New Testament except 1 Peter.

⁵⁰Dubis, “Research on 1 Peter,” 210.

⁵¹Edwin A. Blum, *1 & 2 Peter*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (EBC), ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:212. Eusebius of Caesarea wrote that, “Peter seems to have preached in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia and Asia to the Jews of the dispersion, and afterwards, having come to Rome, he was crucified head downward, for he himself had asked to suffer so. See Gerald Bray, *James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (ACCS) XI (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity, 2000), 65.

⁵²Boring, *1 Peter*, 43.

idolatrous life of pagans as shown in 1:14, 18, 2:9-10, 3:6, 4:3-4.⁵³ In fact, the reason why they were suffering social marginalization and distress could be due to the fact that they have withdrawn from participating in pagan rituals and ways of life which they now considered sinful (4:2-4).⁵⁴ But there are indications that some Jewish Christians were also in the churches that were addressed in the letter.⁵⁵

Peter has a pastoral purpose in mind in writing this epistle. His counsel is woven in the peril of persecution that was imminent and the awareness of the troubled times in which the believers were living.⁵⁶ Because they are Christians, they are misunderstood and subjected to cruel treatment. Their basic problem is to live for God in the midst of a society ignorant of the true God.⁵⁷

Those who subscribe to an earlier date believe that the book was written under Nero's persecution before A.D 64. Later date subscribers say that the book was written under the persecution of Domitian (AD 94-95) or Trojan (AD97-117). But both schools of thought accept that the book was situational, written to comfort those under persecution.

Structure

On the structure of 1 Peter, scholars seem not to have arrived at any clear consensus as indicated by the differing identifications of major units. Some divide the

⁵³Dauids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 8.

⁵⁴Boring, *1 Peter*, 43.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶"The First Epistle General of Peter," in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (SDABC) rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1980), 4:548.

⁵⁷Blum, *1 & 2 Peter*, 12:213.

letter into two sections (Antoniotti, Talbert, Kendall), others into three (Michaels, Dalton), and still some others divide it into four major sections (Elliot, Schreiner).⁵⁸ In this research work, we have chosen the narrower units which can be found in the epistle:

- i. Greetings – 1 Peter 1: 1-2
- ii. Praise to God – 1 Peter 1: 3-12
- iii. God’s holy temple – 1 Peter 1:13-2:10
 - a. Being Holy – 1:13-25
 - b. Being God’s people – 2:1-10
- iv. Life in Exile – 1 Peter 2:11-4:11
 - a. Living honorably among Gentiles – 2:11-17
 - b. Living honorably in the household – 2:18-3:7
 - c. Faithful in suffering – 3:8-22
 - d. Living out salvation – 4:1-11
- v. Steadfast in Faith – 1 Peter 4:12-5:11
 - a. The impending crisis – 4:12-19
 - b. Caring for the household of God – 5:1-11
- vi. Final Greetings – 1 Peter 5:12-14⁵⁹

The Theme of 1 Peter 3:18-22

Senior has opined that, as was the case twice before in the letter (1 Peter 1:18-21; 2:22-25), an exhortation to Christian good conduct and witness is followed by a reflection on the redemptive sufferings of Christ. He summarizes his position thus:

⁵⁸Dubis, “Research on 1 Peter,” 208, 209.

⁵⁹The structure adopted in this paper is from Bartlett, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 12:243.

The overall thrust of this passage is that Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection are not only exemplary for Christian conduct in the world, but provide the effective power to be able to lead this way of life with confidence. In this segment, which is part of the major exhortation that began in 2:11 and will conclude in 4:11, the author extends his reflections on the drama of Christ's redemption beyond his resurrection to his heavenly ascent to God, his triumphant enthronement at God's right hand, and the final subjugation of the hostile spirits of the cosmos. This definitive victory of Christ is the ultimate basis for Christian hope.⁶⁰

In verse 18, Peter brings in the example of Jesus, who himself suffered for doing good, as a reason why suffering for doing good is better than suffering for doing evil. In suffering this way, Christians identify with Christ and complete this identification in resurrection with Christ.⁶¹ Yet in citing Christ's suffering, the author intends more than simply lifting up the example of Christ, his suffering was for sin. This is where the Christian hope and ability to lead a life of integrity stand. As the author says directly to his readers, Christ suffered "to bring you to God" (3:18).

Tracking how the author conceives of Christ's journey to God is the major challenge of this passage. Verse 19, as translated above, shows that the journey took place after Christ's resurrection. The opening phrase of the verse "in which" refers not simply to the immediately preceding word ("in spirit") but to the entire preceding phrase that describe the newly resurrected state of Jesus ("being made alive in spirit"). The verb "having gone" describes neither a descent nor an ascent.⁶² As J. Ramsey Michael notes, the location of the spirits' stronghold, and hence the geography of Christ's mission to them, is not Peter's main concern.⁶³

⁶⁰Senior, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, 106, 107.

⁶¹Dauids, 134.

⁶²Senior, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, 108.

⁶³Michaels, *1 Peter*, 210.

The final verse of the passage (3:22) forms an inclusio with 3:18; the purpose of Christ's suffering for sin and the resurrection and triumph to which his suffering lead was to bring the Christian to God. Christ himself leads the way on that heavenly journey, boldly proclaiming victory to the evil spirits in their prison and finally subjugating all the cosmic powers that threaten the universe.⁶⁴

⁶⁴Michaels, *1 Peter*, 210.

CHAPTER 4

EXEGESIS OF 1 PETER 3:19

A good place to begin the exegesis of 1 Pet 3:19 is to first look at the Greek rendering of the passage and then attempt a provisional translation. After this, major English translations will be examined and compared with the independent translation.

Translation of 1 Peter 3:19

ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν¹ (1 Pet 3:19 BNT).

Provisional Translation

Here, we will attempt to give a tentative translation before presenting the exegesis of the text that led to this provisional translation. Emphasis is placed on ἐν ᾧ and ἐκήρυξεν since those are the two phrases that account for the differences in translation. The provisional translation goes thus: *In which* also he went *and made proclamation* to the spirits in prison.

Other Translations

In this part, nine different translations from popular versions of the English Bible are analyzed, taking note of the differences and similarities between them and the personal translation above.

¹All Greek texts used in this research paper are from Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition. Copyright (c) 1993 Deutsch Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart in *BibleWorks 8: Software for Biblical Exegesis and Research* (BibleWorks, 2008).

By which also he went *and preached* unto the spirits in prison (KJV)

In it he also went *to preach* to the spirits in prison (NAB)

Through whom also he went *and preached* to the spirits in prison (NIV)

By whom also He went *and preached* to the spirits in prison (NKJ)

In that state he went *and made proclamation* to the imprisoned spirits (TNIV)

In which also he went and *made a proclamation* to the spirits in prison (NRS)

In which he went *and proclaimed* to the spirits in prison (ESV)

In which also he went *and preached* unto the spirits in prison (ASV)

In which also He went and *made proclamation* to the spirits *now* in prison (NAS)

Differences in the Versions

The first major difference in the translations considered is the rendering of ἐν ᾧ by each of the versions. While the personal translation of ἐν ᾧ is “in which,” it can be observed that the KJV uses “by which,” NAB “in it,” NIV “through whom,” NKJV “by whom,” and TNIV “in that state.” The translation of ἐν ᾧ as “in which” in NRS, ESV, ASV, and NASV is in agreement with our translation above. The justification of rendering ἐν ᾧ as “by whom” or “through whom” is that the antecedent πνεύματι in verse 18 refers to the person of the Holy Spirit. But the rendering “in which” or “by which” links the πνεύματι to a sphere of Christ’s proclamation to these spirits in prison. The use of ἐν ᾧ by Peter in other passages in his letter seems to agree with “the state of being” or “sphere of being” (cf. 1:16, 2:12, 3:16, and 4:4).

Another notable difference in the translations is the rendering of ἐκήρυξεν. While NAB translates it as “to preach,” KJV, NKJV, NIV, and ASV translate it as “and preached.” Further, TNIV, NRS, and NAS translate it as “made proclamation” in agreement with our original translation. Only ESV uses “and proclaimed.” As we shall see later, the use of ἐκήρυξεν in OT and NT and even during the Intertestamental

period is not limited to preaching. It is mostly that of announcement or proclamation. Since these spirits in prison are likely to be evil angels, proclamation of their judgment or defeat may be implied.

Lastly, while most of the translations render φυλακῆ πνεύμασιν as “spirits in prison,” TNIV uses “imprisoned spirits” and NAS translates it as “spirits now in prison.”

The inclusion of “now” by NASV suggests that the spirits were still in prison at the time the author of the book of 1 Peter was writing.

Syntactical Analysis of 1 Peter 3:19

Since ἐν ᾧ forms a link between verses 18 and 19, there is a need to do a syntactical analysis of the phrase in order to understand its antecedent. With the antecedent successfully identified, we will be able to understand its function in the text which will further enhance the interpretation of the passage. ἐν ᾧ appears 107 times in the LXX and NT but 1 Peter uses it five times.² We will look at how it is used in 1 Peter in order to understand the author’s literary meaning. The table below illustrates the meaning of the phrase in each of the occurrences in 1 Peter.

²This number and all other number of Greek word occurrences used in this paper are based on Novum Testamentum Graece, *BibleWorks 8: Software for Biblical Exegesis and Research* (BibleWorks, 2008).

Table 2. The Use of ἔν ᾧ̃ in 1 Peter

	Text	Context	Meaning
1.	1 Pet 1:6	In his greetings Peter encourages his listeners that they could rejoice in God's mercy even though they had to suffer for a while.	In this
2.	1 Pet 2:12	Peter exhorts the believers to comport themselves among unbelievers so that when they are accused of doing wrong, their accusers may see their good work and glorify God in their behalf	whereas, when, in the thing
3.	1 Pet 3:16	Peter exhorts the believers to have a good conscience so that when they are falsely accused, their accusers may be put to shame	Wherein, whereas, when, in the thing
4.	1 Pet 3:19	Peter said that Jesus in spirit made a proclamation to the spirits in prison	In this, in which state, in which
5.	1 Pet 4:4	Peter told believers that the unbelievers were surprised that they were no longer participating with them in the state of sinful lifestyle	In this, in regard to this, wherein

Even though the phrase ἔν ᾧ̃ appears altogether 107 times in the whole of the Bible and the apocrypha, we have limited ourselves to its use by 1 Peter only. In its first occurrence, ESV, NAB, NIV, NKJV, and RSV translate it as “in this” while ASV and KJV translate “wherein.” It gives the idea of a “state of being” because it talks about their hope of an incorruptible inheritance after their suffering for awhile. In the second and third passages, Peter also admonished the believers to live a life that will make them stand above reproach so that their accusers will have nothing to say against them. In the last occurrence, Peter told the believers that their new life in Christ is a surprise to unbelievers. This suggests that in our passage the word probably carries the same meaning.

So it is obvious from the five passages above that ἔν ᾧ̃ refers to a “state of being” or “sphere of being.” For this reason, we can infer that the antecedent of ἔν ᾧ̃

is not likely the πνεύματι that is immediately preceding it but the phrase ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι (but being made alive in the spirit), that is, the state of Christ being alive.

Lexical Analysis of 1 Peter 3:19

Three key words that are very significant in determining the meaning of 1 Pet 3:19 will be studied here. Their use in the OT, Intertestamental period and the NT will be surveyed. A proper understanding of each of the words in context will inform our proper interpretation of the text. The words are: ἐκήρυξεν, πνεύμασιν and φυλακῆ.

Ἐκήρυξεν

The Greek word ἐκήρυξεν will help us to understand the meaning of 1 Pet 3:19. It comes from the word κηρύσσω meaning “to proclaim.”³ Table 3 below reveals the number of occurrences and the meanings the word carries in some selected passages of the OT, Apocrypha, and the NT.

³“κηρύσσω,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament (EDTN)*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 2:288.

Table 3. The Use of Κήρυσσω in Selective Passages of the LXX and the NT

	Text	Context	Meaning
1.	Gen 41:43	People proclaimed before Joseph, “Bow the knee” when Pharaoh made him his second in command	Announce/shout/proclaim
2.	Exod 32:5	For the dedication of the golden calf, Aaron proclaimed a festival	Announce/shout/proclaim
3.	Exod 36:6	When contribution for the building of the tabernacle was enough, Moses sent messengers to proclaim that the people should stop bringing more gifts	Announce/shout/proclaim
4.	2 Chr 20:3	When Jehoshaphat was threatened by enemies he proclaimed a fast throughout Judah	Announce/shout/proclaim
5.	1 Esd 2:1	Cyrus proclaimed that whoever was willing should go to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of God	Announce/ proclaim
6.	1 Macc 5:46	Judah proclaims that his army should camp near Ephron	Proclaim
7.	1 Macc 10:64	After king Alexander made a proclamation to honor Jonathan the high priest, his enemies fled away	Announce/shout/proclaim
8.	Jonah 3:4	Jonah proclaimed God’s judgment on Nineveh	Announce/shout/proclaim
9.	Dan 5:29	Belshazzar proclaimed Daniel the third ruler in Babylon	Announce/shout/proclaim
10.	Matt 4:17	Jesus begins to preach in Galilee	Preach/proclaim
11.	Acts 10:37	Peter mentioned the baptism proclaimed by John in his sermon at Cornelius’s house.	Preach/proclaim
12.	Rom 10:8	Paul preaches the word of faith	Preach/proclaim
13.	Phil 1:15	Some preach Christ out of envy	Preach/proclaim
14.	1 Pet 3:19	Jesus proclaimed judgment on the spirit in prison who were disobedient in the days of Noah	Proclaim
15.	Rev 5:2	An angel makes a proclamation in heaven with a loud voice	Proclaim

Observations from Table 3. The word κηρύσσω is used 93 times in 33 different forms in the LXX and the NT. From the table above it can be observed that 15 passages are selected in order to understand how the word was used at different times in sacred history. Most of the times, it is used in connection with proclamation or announcement. It is only in few passages that it has an idea of preaching. Furthermore, while 1 Peter refers to the proclamation of the gospel clearly four times (1 Pet 1:12, 25; 4:6; 4:17), it never uses κήρυσσω. Instead εὐαγγελίζω is used in the four passages.⁴ It will therefore be more meaningful to translate ἐκήρυξεν as “made proclamation” “made announcement” “proclaimed” or “announced.”

Πνεύμασιν

The second important word to understanding the passage under consideration is the word πνεύμασιν. It comes from the word πνεῦμα which is derived from πνέω meaning “wind,” or “breeze.”⁵ The word is used 760 times in 9 different forms in the LXX and the NT. The table below shows the number of occurrences and the meaning of the word as used by Luke and Paul compared with its use in 1 Peter.

⁴ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 140.

⁵ “πνεῦμα,” (*EDTN*), 3:118.

Table 4. The Use of Πνεύμα in the NT

	Text	Context	Meaning
1.	Luke 4:36	Jesus casts out an evil spirit at Capernaum on the Sabbath	Demon/evil spirit
2.	Luke 10:20	Evil spirits are subject to the disciples	Evil spirits
3.	Luke 12:10	Sin against the Spirit cannot be forgiven	Holy Spirit
4.	Acts 1:2	Jesus commands the apostles through the Spirit	Holy Spirit
5.	Acts 6:10	Stephen's opponents cannot withstand him because of the wisdom and Spirit by whom he spoke	Holy Spirit
6.	Acts 28:25	Paul quotes what the Spirit says by Isaiah	Holy Spirit
7.	Rom 1:9	Paul serves God in his spirit	Human spirit
8.	1 Cor 2:4	Paul's wisdom is a demonstration of the Spirit	Holy Spirit
9.	Gal 5:25	We live in the Spirit	Holy Spirit
10.	Gal 6:18	The grace of God is to be with the spirits of the believers in Galatia	Holy Spirit
11.	Eph 2:2	Evil spirit works in disobedient people	Evil spirit
12.	1 Tim 4:1	Paul predicts that in the later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and demons	Deceiving spirit/demon
13.	Heb 9:14	Jesus offers Himself through the Spirit	Holy Spirit
14.	Jas 2:26	The body without the spirit is dead	Human spirit
15.	1 Pet 3:19	Jesus makes proclamation to the spirits in prison	Evil spirit/demons
16.	2 Pet 1:21	The Spirit inspires the writers of Scripture	Holy Spirit
17.	1 John 3:24	God abides by believers by His Spirit	Holy Spirit
18.	Jude 1:20	believers to pray in the Spirit	Holy Spirit
19.	Rev 1:4	The seven Spirits are before the throne of God	God's Spirit
20.	Rev 16:13-14	Three unclean spirits come out of the mouth of the dragon, beast, and false prophet	Evil or unclean spirit

Observations from Table 4. The word πνεύμα appears 760 times in nine different forms in the entire Bible. From Table 4 above it can be seen that the study of the word πνεύμα in this paper is limited to the NT. The dative neuter plural common noun form of the word (πνεύμασιν) appears only three times (i.e., Luke 4:36; 1 Tim 4:1; and 2 Pet 3:19). Luke uses the word to refer to an evil or demonic spirit cast out by Jesus; and Paul, writing to Timothy, employs the word in reference to deceiving or demonic spirit that will manifest in the last days. In these two occurrences πνεύμασιν means “demons,” “evil spirits,” or “deceiving spirits.” Neither is a reference to human beings whether dead or alive. In 1 Pet 3:19, it follows that Peter, a contemporary of Paul and Luke, is likely using the word in the same sense.

Φυλακη

The third Greek word that we are examining in order to understand our passage is the word φυλακῆ. The word occurs 168 times in six forms in the Scriptures. It is variously translated as prison, dungeon, jail, guard, or watch. But its usage in the NT is considerably limited to prison.⁶ Table 5 below shows 21 out of the 168 places it occurs in the OT, the Apocrypha, and the NT.⁷

⁶R. Kratz “φυλακή” (*EDTN*), 3:441.

⁷Since the meaning the word φυλακή carries in most passages is the same as the ones listed above, I have chosen to restrict myself to these 21 passages to save space and time, picking instances from each of the OT, the Apocrypha, and the NT.

Table 5. The Use of φυλακῆ in the LXX and the NT

	Text	Context	Meaning
1.	Gen 40:3	Joseph was put in prison in Egypt	Prison house
2.	Exo 14:24	God looked down on the Egyptian army during the morning watch and threw it into confusion	Morning watch/last watch of the night
3.	Num 3:25	The Gershonites were responsible for the care of the tabernacle and tent	Guard duty/in charge/duty/care
4.	Num 8:26	The Kohathites are commanded to take charge of the vessels in the tabernacle	Take charge/care
5.	1 Sam 11:11	Saul fought the Ammonites during the last watch of the night.	Morning watch/last watch of the night
6.	2 Kgs 11:6	Jehoiada instructs the guards to watch over the young king Joash	Guard/care/watch over
7.	Neh 12:39	The choir stands still at the prison gate during the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem	Prison
8.	Jdt 12:5	Holofernes arises from her sleep toward the morning watch	A watch of the night
9.	1 Macc 14:3	A general of king Arsaces of Persia, having defeated army of Demetrius, put him (Demetrius) in prison or under guard	Prison/under guard
10.	Sir 34:16	The Lord guards those who love Him against stumbling	A guard
11.	Bar 3:34	The stars shine in their watches or posts	A watch or post
12.	Matt 14:3	Herod arrested John and put him in prison	Prison house
13.	Matt 24:43	Jesus said if one knows the time the thief is coming he would be prepared	Watch/time of the night
14.	Mark 6:17	Herod imprisons John	Prison house
15.	Mark 6: 48	Jesus approaches His disciples walking on the sea during the fourth watch of the night	Watch/time of the night
16.	Luke 3:20	Herod arrested John and put him in prison	Prison house/jail
17.	Acts 5:25	The apostles were arrested and put in prison	Jail/prison house
18.	Acts 12:4	King Herod imprisons Peter	Jail/prison house
19.	2 Cor 11:23	Paul experiences imprisonment more than anyone else	Jail/prison house
20.	1 Pet 3:19	Christ made proclamation to the spirits in prison	Jail/prison house
21.	Rev 18:2	Babylon a home for demons, a haunt for evil spirits and unclean birds	home for demons/a haunt for evil spirits

Observations from Table 5. As mentioned earlier, φυλακῆ occurs 168 times in entire Jewish sacred writings and the NT but 21 of the passages have been examined in the table above. In most of its occurrences, φυλακῆ is translated “prison house,” “jail,” “guard,” “a watch,” “take charge,” “watch over,” or “a home of demons and evil spirits.”

From the study of the three key words in 1 Peter 3:19, it may be correct to conclude that the meaning of this text is that “Christ being made alive by the spirit, after His resurrection, proclaimed judgment on the evil spirits or demons who have been imprisoned before His death.” Taken together with Jude 6, these spirits are likely “the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode ... reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jud 1:6).

Historical Background of 1 Peter 3:19

To survey the historical background of this passage a number of questions need to be addressed, which are: (a) What is the content of the message Christ proclaimed? (b) Where was the proclamation made? (c) To who did Christ preach? And (d) When did Christ preach?

In order to decide among many alternatives, we need to examine the meaning of the terms used. Augustine, and many other scholars after him,⁸ understood the text to refer to Christ’s preaching through Noah to those who perished in the flood. Davids argues that “spirits” (*pneumata*) in the New Testament always refer to non-human

⁸Other scholars who follow the interpretation of Augustine are J. S. Finberg, “1 Peter 3:18-20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State,” *WTJ* 48 (1986): 303-36 and J. H. Skilton, “A Glance at Some Old Problems in First Peter,” *WTJ* 58 (1996): 1-9.

spiritual beings unless qualified.⁹ According to Schreiner, “The only place in which the term clearly refers to human beings is Heb 12:23, and in that instance the addition of the word ‘righteous’ (*dikaion*) removes any doubt that human beings are in view.”¹⁰ He also adds that “the normal use of the plural ‘spirits’ points toward angels, not human beings.”¹¹ Consequently, one would expect the spirits (*pneumasin*) in 1 Pet 3:19 to also mean angelic or demonic beings.

Although the NT never speaks of anyone evangelizing spirits, it does speak of the victory of Christ over spirits (2 Cor 2:14; Col 2:15; Rev 12:7-11; cf. Eph 6:11-12). The Jewish tradition as documented in the pseudonymous book of 1 Enoch also has a proclamation to spirits in prison (16:3), and it is a proclamation of judgment.¹²

Jobes proposes a solution based on this Jewish tradition.¹³ Here, there is a connection between rebellious spirits and Noah’s flood. 1 Enoch 12:1-2 explains that when Enoch was taken away from the earth, he went to dwell with the Watchers and the holy ones. This tradition is an embellishment of the mysterious story of Gen 6:1-4, where the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. In Genesis, this story immediately precedes the Noah narrative and appears to give justification to the Flood. 1 Enoch tells a similar but more elaborate tale.

Jobes gives a detailed account of the tradition as recorded in 1 Enoch 12-16: “The Watchers were the fallen angels who had abandoned heaven (12:4), slept with

⁹Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 139.

¹⁰Schreiner, *1 Peter*, 187.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*, 141.

¹³Jobes, *1 Peter*, 243-244.

human women (15:3), and produced children, referred to as ‘giants’ from whose bodies evil spirits have come (15:9).”¹⁴ She continues:

These evil spirits have taught people ‘deeds of shame, injustice and sin’ (13:2) and will continue to corrupt the earth until ‘the day of the great conclusion.... The Watchers appealed to Enoch to intercede with God on behalf of themselves and the evil progeny they have produced. Enoch obliges and returns with God’s proclamation to the Watchers: ‘[You will] not be able to ascend into heaven unto all eternity but you shall remain inside the earth, imprisoned all the days of eternity.’ Moreover the Watchers would see the destruction of their sons (referred to as ‘the spirits’) because the petitions ... will not be heard by God (14.5-6). These ‘spirits’ that came from the bodies of the giants fathered by the Watchers through human women were the cause of the human evil that led to the great flood during the time of Enoch’s grandson, Noah.¹⁵

According to Jobes, this tradition appears to be the background to 1 Peter 3:19-20 because of the parallel that exists between them. Jobes believes that the spirits to whom Christ preached should be understood as fallen angels or demonic spirits who came from the union of the Watchers and human women. She concludes that the reason for seeing difficulty in the text was the loss of 1 Enoch for many centuries. For her, with the discovery of this book, the meaning has become very clear.¹⁶

In contrast to the interpretation of Jobes, a reading of Gen 6:1-7 makes it clear that the “sons of God” were human beings, not angels. This point has been well established in chapter two of this paper while conducting literature review. And in addition to what was said earlier, the text clearly reads, “Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them” (Gen 6:1). It should also be noted that these “sons of God” did not just commit immorality with the “daughters of men”, they got married to them. Verse 2 reads:

¹⁴Jobes, *1 Peter*, 244.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

“The sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose.”

Moreover, those whom God punished were men as can be gleaned from verses 3 and 7: “And the LORD said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he *is* indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years” (v. 3). So the LORD said, “I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them” (v. 7). Finally, the offspring that were produced from the union are also human, not demons as expressed in the story of the Watchers in the Jewish tradition: The book of Genesis 6:4 states that “when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men... they bore *children* to them. Those *were* the mighty men who *were* of old, men of renown” (emphases in original).

Since it has been established that the phrase “sons of God” in Genesis chapter 6 do not refer to angels but men, then it follows that it cannot likely be the background of 1 Pet 3:19, and we must look for another passage in the Bible for a possible background. Some probable texts where allusions are made to angelic rebellion include Isa 14:12, Dan 8:10, Luke 10:18, and Rev 12:3-9.¹⁷

The Spirits in Prison as Stars Cast Down in Revelation 12

In order to understand how the spirits in prison, already identified as the evil angels above, relate to the stars of Revelation, it is necessary to examine the meaning of stars in the book of Revelation since the book is mainly symbolic.¹⁸

¹⁷It may be surprising that the book of Revelation is considered a probable text for 1 Peter. The underlining reason is that, the event described in Revelation chapter 12 likely preceded the time of Peter as would be argued in this paper. For example, See Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, (NIVAC), 318; Michael Onyedikachi Akpa,

Meaning of Stars in Revelation 12

The Greek word translated “stars” is ἀστέρ. Ἀστέρ appears forty-six times in six forms in the entire Scriptures. In most cases it refers to the luminary body that God created on the fourth day to give light to the earth (Gen 1:16-18; Ps 136:9; Jer 31:35). Stars also signify huge numbers as in Gen 15:5, an object of worship as in Deut 4:19, and symbol of people as in Dan 12:3.¹⁹ In Rev 1:20, ἀστέρων refers to the angels of the seven churches.

Among other possible meanings of the symbolism of stars in the Bible, the book of Daniel, which many scholars believe forms a background for Revelation chapter 12:3-12, identifies the righteous with stars: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Dan 12:3). However Jude describes the false teachers of his day, who deviate from the truth, as “raging waves of the sea, foaming up their own shame; wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness” (Jude 1:13).²⁰

In the two passages above, we can see that Daniel compares the righteous to “shining stars” while Jude equates the false teachers to “wandering stars.” The picture in Rev 12:4 resembles the description of Jude here. For, from a careful study of the passage, it will be seen that it is unlikely that the stars the dragon drew with his tail

¹⁸Leon Morris, *Revelation*, 2nd ed., vol. 20, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 17.

¹⁹Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, "Stars" *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (InterVarsity Press, 1998), 813.

²⁰ Akpa notes that several commentators on Revelation 12 look to both Daniel and Jude in their interpretation of the book, See Akpa, “The Identity and Role of Michael in the Narrative of the War in Heaven: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Rev 12:7-12,” (PhD Dissertation, Adventist International Institutes of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2007), 203.

are the shining stars but the wandering ones. This is because, verses 7-9 confirms that the dragon has his own angels with whom he fought against Michael and his angels. “Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and *the dragon and his angels* fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; *he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with*” (Rev 12:7-9) [Emphasis supplied].

Commenting on the activities of the dragon and his resulting expulsion from heaven, Smalley writes that “the background to this imagery is to be found in Dan. 8:10, where the ‘little horn’ ... threw down to the earth ‘some of the host (of heaven) and some of the stars’, and trampled on them.”²¹ He remarks that the text echoes “the narrative of the descent of Satan and his angels in the traditional saga of the Watchers in 1 Enoch 6-11.” According to him, in this Jewish apocalyptic literature, the “stars can represent evil angels.”²² Kenneth Matthews echoes Osborne’s argument that the record of Satan sweeping away a third of the stars of heaven is a reference to the original war in heaven.²³ He supports the view that in that primordial event, Satan and his followers (one third of the host) rebelled against God.

In Revelation chapter 12, this battle is viewed from two points: (1) The dragon throws the stars to the earth, or takes them away from their allegiance to God (v. 4). (2) Satan and his angels are thrown out of heaven to the earth by Michael and the

²¹Stephen S. Smalley, *The Revelation of John* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 318.

²²Ibid., (See also 1 Enoch 18:14-17; 21:3-6; et al.)

²³Kenneth Mathews (Jr.), *Revelation Reveals Jesus: An Explanation of the Greek Text and Application of the Symbolism Therein* (Second Coming Publishing, LLC, 2012), 637.

heavenly host (vv. 7-9). Matthews opines that “verse 4 refers to the initial victory of Satan in convincing a third of the heavenly host to join him in the rebellion against God, and verses 7-12 refers to the actual battle, when they are cast out of heaven to the earth.”²⁴

Philip Hughes is of the opinion that the dragon of Rev 12:4 is the same person identified as “Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” in Rev 12:9. He suggests that “the stars cast down by the dragon’s tail are his followers, the angels who joined him in his rebellion against God.”²⁵ Ranko Stefanovic believes that the stars in Rev 12:4 are “the fallen angels who joined Satan in his rebellion against God, and which were ‘cast down with him’ to the earth.”²⁶ Massyngberde Ford affirms that, “doubtless, the stars which his tail sweeps down are the fallen angels who traditionally turned away from God with Satan as their leader.”²⁷ He also believes that the text alludes to Dan 8:8-11 and he compares the text with Rev 9:1 that also mentions a fallen star or angel.

Michael Akpa supports this view that the stars in the passage are fallen angels. He comments: “In the introduction of the war in heaven (Rev 12:4a), the associates of the δράκων are depicted as ‘stars’ that were cast into the earth. But in the expansion of the war in heaven (Rev 12:7-9) the associates of the δράκων are depicted as

²⁴Kenneth Mathews (Jr.), *Revelation Reveals Jesus: An Explanation of the Greek Text and Application of the Symbolism Therein* (Second Coming Publishing, LLC, 2012), 637.

²⁵Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation: A Commentary* (Inter-Varsity Press, 1990), 136.

²⁶Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 390.

²⁷J. Massyngberde Ford, *Revelation*, Anchor Bible (AB), (New Haven: Doubleday, 1975), 200.

‘angels’ that were cast into the earth. From this pattern stars ... refer to the angels that fell with the δράκων.”²⁸

Ellen White agrees with this notion when she wrote that “when Satan became disaffected in heaven ... he went among the angels who thought him perfect and represented that God had done him injustice in preferring Christ to himself. The result of this misrepresentation was that through their sympathy with him one third of the angels lost their innocence, their high estate, and their happy home.”²⁹ In other words, the stars in Revelation chapter 12 are the angels who joined the devil in his rebellion.

The Time of the War in Heaven

Understanding the time of the war in Rev 12:3-9 is key to understanding the time the evil angels sinned and the time they were cast out. This will lead us to knowing the time this evil angels became spirits in prison. Akpa well observes that “several proposals have been made toward the interpretation of the time of the war in heaven in Rev 12:7-12.”³⁰ Now we will look at these proposals one after the other.

Attempting to locate a time for this event, Keener asserts that if Rev 12:5, 6 is read together with the Gospel of John, one will see the cross as the beginning of Christ’s enthronement, for “it was at the cross that Satan was ‘cast out’ of heaven

²⁸Michael Onyedikachi Akpa, “The Identity and Role of Michael in the Narrative of the War in Heaven,” 200, 201.

²⁹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Boise ID: Pacific Press, 1886), 5:291.

³⁰Michael Onyedikachi Akpa, “The Identity and Role of Michael in the Narrative of the War in Heaven: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Rev 12:7-12,” (PhD Dissertation, Adventist International Institutes of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2007), 193. Akpa identifies six proposals which include: (1) the war that engendered the primeval fall of Satan, (2) the war at the cross, (3) the war at the enthronement of Christ after His ascension, (4) the war against the saints of the Middle Ages (5) an eschatological war that ushers in the consummation of the cosmic conflict, and (6) a blending of the war motif drawn from the above backgrounds.

([John] 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; cf. Rev. 12:9, 13); it was by the cross that Jesus ‘prepared a place’ for his followers (John 14:2-3; cf. Rev. 12:6).³¹ That is to say that Rev 12:5, 6 was fulfilled on the cross.

John McArthur thinks that this war will be fought at the end of the age. He says, “While it is impossible to be dogmatic, this ultimate battle may be triggered by the Rapture of the church.... As the raptured believers pass through their realm, the prince of the power of the air and his demon hosts will try to hinder their passage. That may trigger the battle with Michael and the holy angels.”³² While Mounce opines that “the battle in verses 7-9 takes place in heaven itself, the dwelling-place of God,”³³ Smalley sees Michael’s victory over the dragon here as “the defeat of the devil in the resurrection of Jesus”; and believes that in the future there will be “a final celestial battle before the end-time.”³⁴

Akpa argues that “the expression ‘cast down’ in Rev 12:7-12 primarily refers to (1) the primeval casting down of Satan by Michael (Rev 12:4a, 9) and (2) the defeat of Satan by the Lamb on the cross (Rev 12:10b).”³⁵ He explains how these two expressions can be brought together to mean the victory of Christ over Satan:

In view of this, the role of Michael in the narrative of the war in heaven is both military and judicial. As Michael, the pre-incarnate Christ played a military role of forcing Satan out of heaven in the primeval war (Rev 12:4a, 7-9). As

³¹Craig S. Keener, *Revelation*, The NIV Application Commentary (NIVAC), (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 318.

³²John McArthur, *Revelation 12-22*, The McArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2000), 17.

³³Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT), rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 235 in Stephen Smalley, *The Revelation to John*, 322; Akpa, *The Identity of Michael*, 188.

³⁴Smalley, “*The Revelation to John*,” 322, 324.

³⁵Akpa, “*The Identity of Michael*,” 264, 265.

the Lamb, Christ played a judicial role by answering to Satan's accusations against the brethren through His death on the cross (Rev 12:10b-11).³⁶

What this means is that Christ, as Michael, defeated the devil in heaven, leading to his expulsion; and as the Lamb, He defeated the devil again on the cross. This is well expressed in Akpa's own submission: "Since there is an apparent consensus among interpreters of Revelation that the Male Child is the Messiah-Jesus Christ, there is no doubt that the δράκων had cast a third of the stars of heaven into the earth before the incarnation, birth, and ascension of the Messiah-Jesus Christ."³⁷ Consequently, "it is therefore proper to identify this war with the primeval fall of Satan and his angels."³⁸

The above-mentioned arguments can be summarized in the words of the SDA Bible Commentary in its comments on Rev 12:7 below:

In ch. 12:9-11 John speaks most particularly of the phase of the conflict waged in heaven in connection with Christ's death on the cross.

Though the revelator is focusing primarily on the turning point of the controversy reached at the time of the cross, it is proper to understand the word 'there was war in heaven,' as referring also to the time prior to the creation of the earth, when the hostility of the dragon began, and Lucifer aspired to be like God. At that time he and the angel who sympathized with him were expelled from heaven. The loyal angels did not then understand fully all the issues involved. But when Satan basely shed the blood of Christ, he stood exposed completely and forever before the heavenly world.³⁹

Now that it has been established that the expulsion of Satan and his allies (the fallen stars or angels) took place in the pre-historic time, as has been argued above, then one can confidently suggest that 1 Peter's reference to the spirits in prison has

³⁶Akpa, "The Identity of Michael," 266.

³⁷Ibid., 196, 197.

³⁸Ibid., 202.

³⁹"War in Heaven," (Rev 12:7), *SDABC*, 7:809. (See also, Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 761.)

something to do with the primordial fall of Satan and his angels which is well documented in Rev 12:3-9 and attested to in the OT writings such as Isa 14:12-15; Daniel 8:10; and NT writings such as Luke 10:18; Jude 6.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, the summary of all the findings in this paper has been presented. After the summary has been undertaken, we gave a conclusion by proposing answers to the pertinent questions created by the text—that of the identity of the spirits in prison, the content of the message, the time of the proclamation and the one who did the proclamation.

Summary

This paper opened with an examination of 1 Pet 3:19. Most scholars see it as a difficult text. Martin Luther calls it the most “obscure” passage in the NT. Howard Marshall calls it a tricky text that is open to different interpretations and suggests that the wisest course to follow in interpreting it is to admit that the details of the passage are highly disputed. Mark Driscoll remarks that there are over 180 interpretations of 1 Pet 3:18-20, and confesses that it is one of the most difficult texts in the NT.

What constitutes the difficulty in 1 Pet 3:18-20 is its reference to Christ going to preach to certain spirits in prison purportedly during the period between His death and resurrection. Consequently, the questions posed by the text to any interpreter are: who are the spirits in prison? What is the content of the message? When was the message given? Who made the proclamation? Commentators from the early church to the contemporary time have struggled with these questions. Their findings have produced wide varieties of interpretations, which shows that there are still divergent opinions as to what the text actually means. There is therefore a need to reexamine the

text in order to discover possible new passages of scripture that shed more light on the text which, probable, have not appealed to the attention of scholars. That is exactly the focus of this paper.

During the early Christian era, Origen, Augustine, and Clement of Alexandria attempted interpreting 1 Pet 3:19. Origen taught that Jesus, between His death and resurrection, descended into hell and preached to the spirits of those who perished in the flood in the time of Noah, offering them a further opportunity to repent and be saved. Augustine on the other hand opined that though the spirits in prison are the unbelievers who lived in the time of Noah, it was the spirit of Christ dwelling in Noah that preached to them, but they rejected the message. Clement further advanced the theory of Origen by teaching that it was Christ's soul that went to Hades to preach conversion to the souls of those who perished in the flood.

In modern time new interpretations have been built on the works of early interpreters. Six prominent views of contemporary scholars were examined in this paper.

First, that the pre-incarnate Christ preached through Noah to human spirits. Wayne Grudem is one of the strongest supporters of this view. To him, the four phrases (who formerly disobeyed, in the days of Noah, when God's patience waited, and during the building of the ark) that follow in 1 Pet 3:20 are the key to understanding 1 Pet 3:19.

Second, that Christ at His death preached to fallen angels. The idea, which was propagated by Friedrich Spitta, is that Christ, after His death and before His resurrection, preached to fallen angels who are also called sons of God, who had married daughters of men in the days of Noah. Support for this understanding that the spirits in prison are fallen angels is found in 2 Peter 2:4-5 and Jude 6, where

references to rebellious angels, punished by God with imprisonment, in agreement with 1 Peter 3:19, are found.

Third, that Christ presented a second chance for people in hell or terrified them. This view has two versions. The first is that Christ, between His death and ascension, went to preach conversion to those who disobeyed in the days of Noah, whose souls have been detained in Hades and offered them a second chance. This is the position of Charles Bigg. The second is what has been referred to as harrowing experience in hell. It states that Christ went to Hades to instill fear in the occupants so that they will know that, with His victory, there is no way of escape for them. This is the position of Edward H. Plumptre.

Fourth, that Christ proclaimed victory over death. This is the most widely accepted view among modern-day scholars. The idea here is that Christ, after His resurrection, proclaimed to imprisoned spirits, who are believed to be fallen angels, His victory over death. Howard Marshall believes that the key to understanding the text is found in verse 22 which contains references to angels, authorities and powers that have been made subject to Christ. The use of the verb κηρύσσω “to proclaim or announce” rather than εὐαγγελίζω “to proclaim good news” has also been observed to be suggesting that salvation for fallen angels is not implied in the text, but a proclamation of victory.

Fifth, that Christ preached release to repented sinners in purgatory. This view, which originated with Robert Bellarmine and forms the backbone for the Catholic Church’s doctrine of purgatory; holds that Christ went to preach release to the people in Noah’s day who had repented just before they died in the Flood. They are believed to have lived in purgatory until the time of Christ’s death when He led them out of their imprisonment into heaven.

Sixth, that the apostles preached the gospel to Gentiles in the prison of ignorance. Adherents of this view believe that Christ preached through his apostles to the Gentiles. Using Isa 42:7, where the prophet spoke about bringing “out the prisoners from the prison and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house” as background, they teach that Peter only used the word prison figuratively.

In the translation of 1 Pet 3:19, this research work employed: “In which also he went and made proclamation to the spirits in prison.” The antecedent of the phrase ἐν ᾧ is the πνεύματι of verse 18. This πνεύματι is not a reference to the Person of the Holy Spirit but to a sphere of Christ’s proclamation to these spirits in prison. It describes “the state of being” in which Christ made the proclamation. Peter’s employment of the word κήρυσσω instead of εὐαγγελίζω clearly shows that the gospel is not being referred to but another kind of announcement. In the four other passages where he meant the good news, he used εὐαγγελίζω.

Another point of consideration is the use of the word πνεύμασιν. In the three passages where the word occurred in the OT and NT (it never was used in the writings of the Intertestamental period), it means “demons,” “evil spirits,” or “deceiving spirits.” It never was used for human beings whether dead or alive. The word φυλακῆ is translated “prison house,” “jail,” “guard,” “a watch of the night” or “a home of demons and evil spirits,” in all its occurrences.

This paper also discussed the possible background to 1 Pet 3:19. Instead of tracing the origin of the spirits in prison to the traditional saga of the Watchers as recorded in the Pseudepigraphic book of 1 Enoch, instead of understanding the sin of the antediluvians as angelic sexual sin with human women, which has led many scholars to recourse to Gen 6:1-7 as the background, this research work has ventured into a new alternative. Whereas the SDA Bible Commentary takes the position of

Grudem and identifies the spirits in prison as “people living on the earth immediately prior to the Flood”,¹ and also employed Genesis chapter 6 as background; a more recent article by Ekkehardt Mueller identifies them as the fallen angels who are also called demons. Mueller sees a parallel between the spirits in 1 Pet 3:19 and the angel that sinned in 2 Pet 2:4-5 and links Christ’s proclamation in the passage to Jonah’s proclamation of judgment in Jonah 1:2; 3:2.²

This paper follows Mueller’s identification but considers Isa 14:12, Dan 8:10, Luke 10:18, and Rev 12:3-9 as more plausible passages that present more bible-based results. It sees the fall of the morning star in Isaiah, the fall of stars in Daniel, and the fall of Satan in Luke as a reference to the fall of Satan and his angels described in Revelation chapter 12. This fall is responsible for the sins of evil angels and the consequential proclamation of judgment on them by Christ.

Conclusions

In answering the questions posed by the difficulty of 1 Pet 3:19—that of the identity of the spirits in prison, the content of the proclamation made to them, the time the proclamation was made, and the person who did the actual proclamation, the following conclusions which have been proposed.

First, the spirits in prison are fallen angels who are also referred to as stars in Rev 12:3-9. They became spirits in prison when they rebelled against God’s government and were banished from heaven and confined to earth.

Second, the spirits in prison are not the demons that came from the union of angels and human beings as recorded in 1 Enoch.

¹“Spirit in Prison” [1 Pet 3:19], *SDABC*, 7:575.

²Ekkehardt Mueller, “1 Peter 3:18-22,” *Biblical Research Institute General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*, January 2006.

Third, angelic sin did not take place during the time of Noah, and so, the possibility of using Gen 6:1-4 as background to 1 Pet 3:19 is highly contested. The sons of God who married the daughters of men in this passage are the descendants of Seth.

Fourth, the content of Christ's proclamation is that of victory over death and the judgment of the fallen angels. His victory over death is recorded in Rev 1:18 and the condemnation of Satan is recorded in John 12:31. This victory was achieved when Christ defeated Satan the second time as a Lamb on the cross, having defeated him as Michael in primordial time. Christ also announced to His disciples that all powers have been given to Him in heaven and on earth in Matt 28:18.

Fifth, the person who made the proclamation is Jesus Christ Himself. It cannot be established that Noah or the apostles did the proclamation.

Six, the place of the imprisonment of the spirits is the earth, where they have been confined since their rebellion and resultant expulsion from heaven.

Seventh, Jesus made the proclamation after His resurrection.

These conclusions can be summarized thus: Christ being made alive by the spirit, after His resurrection, proclaimed victory over death and judgment on evil spirits or fallen angels who have been imprisoned on the earth since their primordial fall.

APPENDIX

THE APOSTLE'S CREED¹

	The Old Roman Form	The Received Form
1.	I believe in God the Father Almighty	I believe in God the Father Almighty [<i>Maker of heaven and earth</i>].
2.	And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;	And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
3.	Who was born by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary;	Who was [<i>conceived</i>] by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;
4.	Was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried;	[<i>Suffered</i>] under Pontius Pilate, was crucified [<i>dead</i>], and buried [<i>He descended into Hell (Hades)</i>];
5.	The third day he rose from the dead;	The third day he rose from the dead;
6.	He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of the Father;	He ascended into heaven; and sitteth on the right hand of [<i>God</i>] the Father [<i>Almighty</i>];
7.	From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.	From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
8.	And in the HOLY GHOST;	[<i>I believe</i>] in the Holy Ghost;
9.	The Holy Church;	The Holy [<i>Catholic</i>] Church [<i>The communion of saints</i>];
10.	The forgiveness of sins;	The forgiveness of sins;
11.	The resurrection of the body (flesh).	The resurrection of the body (flesh);
12.		[<i>And the life everlasting</i>].

This table show the difference between the original Roman creed, as given by Rufinus in Latin (about A.D. 390), and by Marcellus in Greek (A.D. 336–341), and

¹Phillip Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical notes: The History of Creeds* (CCEL 1877) created 26 September 2003. Accessed 09 March, 2016, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds1.html>

the received form of the Apostles' Creed, which came into general use in the seventh or eighth century. The additions are enclosed in brackets.

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