

*Dear Aebi: I still don't understand
1 Peter 3:19; please explain it.*

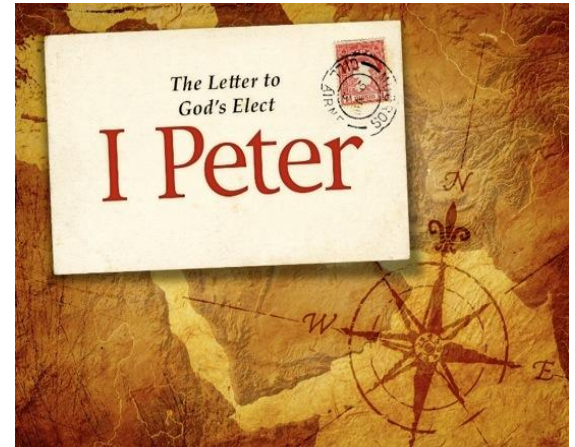
One must look at verses 18-20, which say that Jesus was resurrected by the same Spirit by (or in) which He had preached to the spirits of the disobedient people before the flood of Noah's day. The context shows that Peter brought this matter up to lead his readers from their suffering to the sufferings of Christ to the water of baptism 3:14-21.

Some think 1 Peter 3:18-20 could be saying that Jesus went into Hades and preached across the great gulf (Luke 16:26) to the souls of those who had been disobedient before the flood, which included all but Noah and his family. At the time of Jesus death, these spirits or souls must have been in the place of torment where the rich man went after his death. Since Jesus, when He died, went to Paradise (Luke 23:43), not to torment, He would have had to preach across the gulf to those condemned sinners. But what could He have said to them? And why preach to only that one group of them? No reasonable answer can be given. Luke 16:26 precludes salvation for them: the gulf cannot be crossed. Peter doesn't mention Hades here.

A better possibility is that Peter refers to Jesus inspiring Noah with the Holy Spirit so Noah could preach to the disobedient people of his time. In 2 Peter 2:5, Noah is said to have been a preacher of righteousness, but those who heard him are said to not have been spared. God's Spirit was striving with Noah's world and continued to do so, through Noah's preaching, for 120 years (Genesis 6:3). Jesus did preach through others: the Spirit of Christ inspired prophets and apostles. Jesus is said to have preached to Gentiles (Ephesians 2:17) as well as to Jews, but Jesus said He had been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 15:24). The answer to this dilemma is that Jesus preached to the Gentiles through Paul and others whom He sent to do the actual preaching. God worked through His preachers (Acts 14:27).

This idea of Noah preaching by the Spirit of Christ harmonizes better with other passages and avoids the pitfalls of the other view. This view is reasonable, and agrees with earlier teaching in 1 Peter 1:11, which refers to the Spirit of Christ in the prophets. Noah was one of those prophets; he allowed himself to be an instrument of Christ to teach others of his day what was right. They rejected his preaching and therefore were drowned and imprisoned in the torment section of Hades.

When Peter wrote 1 Peter 3:19, these souls or spirits had been in prison for thousands of years. They had had their chance to obey, but they had rejected it. They had spurned the Holy Spirit's words through Noah. Christ had preached to them by sending His Spirit to Noah to inspire that righteous man to warn them, just as He has sent His Spirit to preach to us through the words of His apostles in the New Testament. We must heed Christ's words so we can end up on the Paradise side of the great gulf after our lives are over rather than be imprisoned with the souls of the disobedient of Noah's day.



Charles Aebi