
BIBLE TALK

This the question is: **Did Jesus preach to departed spirits when He died?**

There are two passages in the book of 1 Peter which has lead some to think that Jesus, when He died, preached to the spirits of dead men. Here are the passages in question:

1 Peter 3:18-20

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

1 Peter 4:6

6 For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

It is believed, by some, that men who never had an opportunity to hear God's word were given a second chance to hear it and obey it in order to be saved. Our question concerns these passages. Are they really teaching that men receive a second change after this life to obey the Gospel? Did Jesus really preach to the spirits of dead men and give them an opportunity, after they were dead, to obey God and be saved?

NO SECOND CHANCE

First, notice the Bible repeatedly warns us **there is no second chance given to men**. If men do not seek after God, if they do not seek out His will and obey it during this life, there will be no opportunity given in the next life.

In Luke 16 a story is told of a rich man who died and found himself in the flames of torments because he had refused to give assistance to a beggar named Lazarus. Lazarus also had died and was at peace in paradise in the bosom of Abraham. Here's what the rich man said to Abraham:

Luke 16:24-26

24 "Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

25 But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented.

26 And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'

Listen to this. There is a great gulf between the saved and the lost. This gulf is "fixed" -- no one can remove it. Those who are saved and at peace might wish they could cross over and give assistance to the ones being tormented, but they cannot. Likewise, the ones being tormented are wishing they could cross over and enjoy a moment of comfort in paradise, but they cannot cross over either. This passage teaches plainly that the destiny of man is sealed when he dies. If anyone is ever going to hear the gospel and be saved, they must certainly do it during this lifetime, for they cannot change their destiny after they die.

Again, listen to this passage of Scripture:

2 Corinthians 5:10

10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Here we are told plainly that we will be judged based on what we did in our bodies. The things we did, or did not do while alive on the earth will be the basis of our trial before God on Judgment Day.

WHAT DID PETER MEAN?

If, then, the destiny of man is sealed at death, **what did Peter mean in these passages which say Jesus "preached to spirits in prison"?**

If you will examine 1 Peter 3:18-20 carefully you will discover these things:

Verse 18 states Jesus was "quickenened," or "made alive" by the Holy Spirit.

Verse 19 says "by which," or "by whom" he went and preached to the spirits in prison. That is, by means of the Holy Spirit Jesus had preached to spirits that are now in prison.

Verse 20 informs us the ones who were preached to were men who were disobedient during the days of Noah.

Now, notice carefully this very critical point. Verse 19 says that by means of the Holy Spirit Jesus "preached" (that's past tense) to spirits that are "in prison" (that's present tense). In other words, the spirits of these disobedient men were in a spiritual prison at the time Peter wrote his book, but it does not say they were in prison at the time they heard the preaching.

Almost any preacher today can say the same thing. Most preachers today have preached in days gone by to men whose spirits are now in torments. 1 Peter 3:19 is not teaching some men were given a second chance to be saved. Instead, this passage is showing us Noah was an inspired preacher. Jesus had sent the Holy Spirit to Noah to help him preach. Noah, by inspiration of the Spirit, preached for 120 years while he was building the ark. He was warning those men and women to repent and come into the ark with him but they were disobedient; they refused to listen. Now, at the time when Peter was writing his book, the spirits of those disobedient men were in prison, or torments awaiting the Judgment Day.

Again, 1 Peter 4:6 is teaching the same thing. The gospel was "preached" (past tense) to men that "are dead" (present tense). In other words, at the time Peter was writing his book they were dead, but at the time the preaching was done they were alive.

Instead of teaching a second chance for men to obey the Lord, these passages teach us the fate of men who have heard gospel preaching but refused to obey -- they end up in the prison of torments with no one to blame but themselves for their predicament. We should all heed the warning, then, given in:

Hebrews 4:7

7 ... "Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

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