

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 8

Baptism and Problem Passages: 1 Peter 3:14-22

Recorded in 2012

Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

1 Peter 3:14-22 is an odd, controversial passage since it amalgamates, baptism, salvation, Noah, the ark, and Jesus' descent to preach to spirits in the Underworld. The key to understanding the passage is to recognize that Peter embraces the worldview of non-canonical Jewish literature like 1 Enoch and seems an analogy between the events of Genesis 6-8, salvation, and baptism.

Transcript

Welcome once again to the Naked Bible Podcast. The last podcast episode ended my summary of the problems with the way baptism gets talked about any my solutions to those problems. Now I want to take some time in the next few episodes to go through some difficult passages relating to baptism. In today's episode we'll tackle 1 Peter 3:14-22. So I want to read that to you now.

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of

God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

It's not hard to see how this passage is controversial. I was actually in a church service once where a pastor was preaching through 1 Peter, and when we got to this passage he simply said it was too weird and skipped it. There's nothing like giving people the whole council of God or putting some research time into your sermon! It's too bad, too, since this passage actually portrays baptism in a dramatic way. It shows baptism to be a declaration of spiritual warfare—whose side you're on.

The overall theme of 1 Peter is that Christians must withstand persecution and persevere in their faith. That much is clear in this passage. But what's with baptism? And then adding the ark of Noah and spirits in prison? And does this passage say that baptism saves us? It doesn't. But to understand what's going on in Peter's head, we have to understand a concept that scholars have called "types" or "typology."

Typology is a kind of prophecy. We're all familiar with predictive verbal prophecy (when a prophet announces that something is going to come to pass in the future). Sometimes that comes out of the blue, with God impressing thoughts on the prophet's mind that the prophet utters. On other occasions, a prophet might take an object or perform some action and tell people that the thing or action prefigures something that will happen. Ezekiel was notorious for this, like the time God told him to shave his head and beard and then weigh the hair in the balances, then burn a third of it, beat a third of it with a sword, and scatter the last third to the wind to visually portray the future of the city of Jerusalem (Ezekiel 5). But we only know what Ezekiel's antics meant because they're spelled out in his prophecies. Ezekiel 5 tells us these are prophecies and what the fulfillment would be. But types work differently.

A type is basically an unspoken prophecy. It's an event, a person, or an institution that foreshadows something that will come, but which isn't revealed until after the fact. For example, in Romans 5:14, Paul tells us that Adam was a *typos* of Christ. This Greek word means "kind" or "mark" or "type." It's actually where "typology" comes from. Paul was saying that in some way, Adam foreshadowed, or echoed, something about Jesus. In Adam's case, that something was how his act (his sin) had an effect on all humanity. Like Adam, Jesus also did something that would have an impact on all humanity—his death and resurrection. Another example would be Passover, since it prefigured the crucifixion of Jesus, who was called the Lamb of God. The point is that there was some analogous connection between the type (Adam) and its echo, or anti-type (Jesus).

So how does this relate to our weird passage in 1 Peter? Peter uses typology in 1 Peter 3:14-22. Specifically, he assumes that the great flood in Genesis 6-8 and the sons of God event in Genesis 6:1-4 typify or foreshadow the gospel and the

5:00

resurrection in some way. For Peter, these events were commemorated somehow during baptism. That needs some unpacking.

There are some tight connections between Genesis 6:1-4 and the epistle of 2 Peter and Jude. Peter and Jude were very familiar with Jewish tradition about Genesis 6, found in books like *1 Enoch*, and believed them. 1 Enoch 6-15 describes how the sons of God (also called "Watchers" in that book) who committed the offense of Genesis 6:1-4 were imprisoned under the earth (in the underworld) for what they had done. The Watchers appealed their sentence and they asked Enoch (in the book of *1 Enoch*), the biblical prophet who never died (according to Genesis 5) to intercede for them. Now 1 Enoch 6:4 puts it this way:

They [the Watchers] asked that I [Enoch is the speaker] write a memorandum of petition for them, that they might have forgiveness, and that I write the memorandum of petition for them in the presence of the Lord of Heaven.

Now God sent back his response, also by way of Enoch, who went to the imprisoned spirits and announced to them that their appeal had been denied. That is described in 1 Enoch 13:1-3 and chapter 14:4, 5. Here are some excerpts. Verse 1 from chapter 13 says (with God as the speaker):

And Enoch, go and say to Azazel, "You will have no peace." A great sentence has gone forth against you to bind you. You will have no relief or petition because of the unrighteous deeds that you have revealed, because of all the godless deeds and the unrighteousness and the sin that you revealed to men. And then I [Enoch] went and spoke to all of them [the spirits in prison] together, and they were all afraid, and trembling and fear seized them.

Now *1 Enoch* goes on to describe the prison term as being "until the end of days," language that refers to the end-times. 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 make specific reference to the episode of Genesis 6:1-4 and the imprisonment of these fallen divine beings in the underworld. The incident was also on Peter's mind when he wrote his first epistle in our strange passage. Peter saw a theological analogy between the events of Genesis 6 and the events of Enoch's intercession from *1 Enoch* and their fallout with the gospel and the resurrection. In other words, he considered these events to be types or prefigurements or precursors to New Testament events and ideas.

So what we have is that just as Jesus was the second Adam for Paul, Jesus is the second Enoch for Peter. Enoch descended to the imprisoned fallen angels to announce their doom. 1 Peter 3:14-22 has Jesus descending to these same spirits in prison—the fallen angels—to tell them they were still defeated, despite his crucifixion. God's plan of salvation and kingdom rule was still intact. In fact, it was right on schedule. The crucifixion actually meant victory over every demonic force opposed to God. The spiritual war was won at the crucifixion, and following

10:00

the Enochian typology here shows us that just as Enoch proclaimed the Watchers' doom, so Jesus repeats the act, announcing that his death certified victory over the realm of death and all those spiritual forces consigned to the dark world. The victory declaration of 1 Peter 3:14-22 ends with Jesus risen from the dead and set at the right hand of God above all angels, authorities, and powers.

So how does this relate to baptism? How is baptism tied to the logic of the passage? Here's the relevant portion once more, starting with verse 18:

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water.

And now the anti-type, that is, baptism:

²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

Now, two words in verse 21 need consideration. The word most often translated "appeal" (*eperotema*) in verse 21 is best understood as "pledge" here, a meaning that it has in other material. Likewise, the word "conscience" (*syneidesis*) does not refer to the inner voice of right and wrong here as it does elsewhere. Rather, the word refers to an attitude or decision that reflects one's loyalty, or perhaps something like "conscientiousness" (a usage that is also found in other contexts).

So how does this help us understand the passage? Briefly, baptism is not what produces salvation. It saves in that it first involves or reflects a heart decision—a pledge of loyalty—to the risen savior. In effect, baptism in New Testament theology is a loyalty oath—a public avowal of who is on the Lord's side in the cosmic war between good and evil. But in addition to that, it is also a visceral reminder to the defeated fallen angels. Every baptism is a reiteration of their doom in the wake of the gospel and the Kingdom of God. Early Christians understood the typology of this passage and its link back to the fallen angels of Genesis 6. Early baptismal formulas included a renunciation of Satan and his angels for this very reason.

Baptism was—and still ought to be—spiritual warfare.