

OUR LORD DESCENDED INTO HELL

TEXT: I PETER 3:19-22

Introduction:

1. This is one of the most difficult passages in the Bible to interpret.
2. Unfortunately, these verses have been used by many false teachers to support strange and unscriptural doctrines.
3. For example, the Roman Catholic Church uses this Scripture to defend their doctrine of purgatory.
4. In the Roman Catholic *Douay Version* of the Bible, there is a footnote under I Peter 3:19, which says, "Here is proof of a third place, or middle state of souls: for these spirits in prison, to whom Christ went to preach after His death, were not in Heaven; nor yet in the hell of the damned."
5. There is no intermediate place between heaven and hell. There is no place called purgatory. You will not find it in the Bible.
6. Our sins were purged at the cross. They will not be purged in some magical, mystical, make-believe place called purgatory.
7. "When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Hebrews 1:3).
8. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7).
9. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (I John 1:7).
10. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Rev. 1:5).

I. CHRIST DESCENDED INTO HELL

II. CHRIST PREACHED TO THE SPIRITS IN HELL

III. CHRIST HAS GONE INTO HEAVEN

I. CHRIST DESCENDED INTO HELL (3:19).

1. There is much disagreement over the interpretation of this Scripture.
2. Most of us are familiar with the so-called "Apostles Creed," which says, "He descended into hell." This creed was not actually written by the apostles, but was written several generations later.
3. Nevertheless, it reflects the generally accepted view that Christ descended into hell.
4. There is some debate over the word "prison" (I Peter 3:19). Does it refer to hell?

5. This same Greek word is translated "hold" and "cage" in Revelation 18:2. It is also translated "prison" in Revelation 20:7.
6. The Greek word translated "prison" here in I Peter 3:19 and Revelation 20:7 is found 47 times in the New Testament, and most of the references are to a literal prison.
7. But I Peter 3:19 and Revelation 20:7 (as well as Revelation 18:2) are obviously not referring to a literal prison.
8. When the Bible refers to hell, it often indicates that it is down in the lower parts of the earth.
9. Ephesians 4:9 says that our Lord "descended first into the lower parts of the earth." This is undoubtedly a reference to hell, which at this time is located in the lowest parts of the earth.
10. Deuteronomy 32:22 refers to "the lowest hell."
11. Job 11:7, 8 says, "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know?"
12. Psalm 55:15 says, "Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them."
13. Psalm 86:13 says, "For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell."
14. Proverbs 9:18 refers to "the depths of hell."
15. Proverbs 15:24 says, "The way of life is above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath."
16. Isaiah 14:9 says, "Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming."
17. Isaiah 14:15 says, "Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell."
18. Ezekiel 31:16 says, "I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to hell."
19. Ezekiel 31:17 says, "They also went down into hell..."
20. Ezekiel 32:27 also refers to sinners who have "gone down to hell."
21. Our Lord said in Luke 10:15, "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell."
22. Second Peter 2:4 says, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell..."
23. So according to Ephesians 4:9, our Lord "descended first into the lower parts of the earth," which is a reference to hell, in the lowest part of the earth.

24. This is only a temporary dwelling place for the damned, because Revelation 20:14 says, "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

II. CHRIST PREACHED TO THE SPIRITS IN HELL (3:19).

1. This apparently took place between our Lord's death and resurrection.
2. Who are these "spirits in prison"? Spirits usually refer to angelic beings, either elect angels or devils.
3. However, in Hebrews 12:23 the word "spirits" refers to men.
4. Therefore, it is my conviction that I Peter 3:19 teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ descended into hell and preached to the disembodied spirits of all the lost souls of the Old Testament dispensation.
5. They were "sometime...disobedient" (3:20), meaning they "formerly were disobedient."
6. This refers to the Old Testament sinners who disobeyed God and ignored His gracious message of salvation.
7. The lost sinners of Noah's day are mentioned as an example of Old Testament sinners who ignored God's warnings (3:20).
8. The days of Noah are referred to throughout Scripture as a warning to sinners not to ignore the righteous judgment of God (cf. II Peter 2:5; 3:5, 6).
9. Our Lord said, "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matt. 24:37).
10. Hebrews 11:7 says, "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."
11. Noah's ark is a "figure" or a type of salvation (I Peter 3:21). Those in the ark were saved. The water did not save them. Being in the ark (a picture of Christ) saved them.
12. Likewise, the water of baptism does not save us -- "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God" (3:21).
13. "By the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (3:21b). This is what the apostle Paul means in Romans 5:10, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."
14. His resurrection life.
15. Baptism is a picture (or a "figure" -- I Peter 3:21) of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:1-6).

16. Baptism is an outward sign of an inward act.

III. CHRIST HAS GONE INTO HEAVEN (3:22).

1. Our Lord's ascension into heaven, and His now being seated "on the right hand of God" affirm His triumphant position.
2. At God's right hand denotes His position of honor and authority.
3. *His Name above all names shall stand,
Exalted more and more,
At God the Father's own right hand,
Where angel hosts adore.* -- William H. Clark
4. There are many references in Scripture to Christ's exalted position at God's right hand.
5. Because Christ is now exalted and seated at the right hand of God the Father, He has sent the Holy Spirit.
6. Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).
7. Because Christ is now exalted and seated at the right hand of God the Father, He is in heaven interceding for us.
8. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).
9. However, most of the references to Christ at the Father's right hand signify His power (cf. Eph. 1:19-23).

CONCLUSION:

FB Meyer said:

The story of the Flood seems to have made a great impression on the mind and heart of the Apostle; and the event is constantly on his lips (2 Peter 2:5; 3:5-6). And here he follows closely on the words of his Master, who compared the days of Noah with those of the Son of Man.

We need not stay to describe in detail the days which were before the Flood, or the condition of the old world. Its course was precisely similar to that of the world around us still. "They ate; they drank; they married, and were given in marriage." The arts and sciences were richly cultivated. Gigantic engineering and architectural works must have abounded, or it would have been impossible to construct such a marvellous vessel as the ark. Refinement and civilization, side by side with abnormal and horrid crimes. The giddy

pursuit of pleasure; the eager search for wealth; the lawless gratification of evil propensity; the reckless disregard of the claims of God; the rush of the torrent of evil and unholiness, in spite of the remonstrances and pleadings of the grey-headed preacher for a hundred years. All these are what we see today around us in confused and grievous manifestation.

And there is as little need to describe the new world into which Noah and his children stepped down from the mountain slopes on which their ark grounded. How delicious the balmy air, the green grass carpeting the earth, the luxuriant growth of vegetation from the soil enriched and fructified by the alluvial deposit of the waters! It was a world from which sin, and crime, and evil, had been purged, and Creation seemed already to anticipate the vision of the seer: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea."

But surely that old world is very significant of the old life into which we are born by nature; and that new world of the new life into which we enter in regeneration. And the Flood of water, through which Noah passed from the old into the new, bearing him onwards on its broad and swelling bosom, from evil and familiar scenes into new and ecstatic surroundings, is a type of the blessed experience of which the Epistles so often speak; when believers through faith in Jesus pass out of the old life of selfishness and death, into the glorious new life of resurrection blessedness; when they sit with Christ in the Heavens; when they reckon themselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God; sharing the spirit of the Saviour's death, and of his resurrection: at such times they may be said to repeat the experience of the patriarch, when he passed from the old world into the new.

The early Church was accustomed to set forth this spiritual experience by the outward act of immersion in water. Believers, in confession that they had passed from their previous life of sin into the blessed life of fellowship with the risen Saviour, were buried under water in the likeness of his death, and were lifted again above the water in the likeness of his resurrection. The water in the pool or river might thus be compared to the waters of Noah's Flood, because through each there was a passage from the old to the new, just as in the grave of Jesus there was a passage from the more limited life of the flesh into the freer life of the spirit. "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Baptism, indeed, has no sacramental efficacy; but

there are no trifles in the kingdom of God; and obedience to a mere outward rite may make a world of difference between the uneasiness of an evil conscience and the answer of a good one (*Tried by Fire*).