

## Baptism as the Antitype of the Flood

### Exegetical Study

#### 1 Peter 3:18-21

Note: [Viewing Greek fonts](#)

#### 1 Peter 3:18: (Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> Edition)

ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἀμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν, δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων, ἵνα ὑμᾶς  
προσαγάγῃ τῷ θεῷ θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι·

#### Translation:<sup>1</sup>

Because Christ also suffered [ἔπαθεν φρομ πάσχω]for sins once [ἅπαξ], the righteous in the place of the unrighteous [δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων], in order that he might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh [θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκι], but made alive in the spirit [ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι];

#### Comments:

Twice in the verse we read of the substitutionary atonement of Christ. In the first, we find a general statement, i.e., "Christ also suffered for sins once" [ἅπαξ]. In the second, we are given an explanation of the nature of the substitution, namely "the righteous in the place of the unrighteous" [δίκαιος ὑπὲρ ἀδίκων]. Peter, here, uses the preposition ὑπὲρ like Paul so often does, namely, in the substitutionary sense, "in the place of."

For our purposes, the phrase that carries special weight is the μὲν δὲ clause. It begins the *locus classicus* for Christ's descensus *ad inferos*. We are told that, on the one hand (μὲν), Christ was "put to death in the flesh" [θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ], and, on the other hand (δὲ), he was "made alive in the spirit" [ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι]. In terms of time, Christ's "death in the flesh" occurred on Good Friday. His being "made alive in the spirit" took place on Easter Sunday. The terms flesh and spirit are correlative terms concerning the person of Christ. Those who understand spirit to be a reference to the Holy Spirit must explain how the μὲν refers to Christ and the δὲ refers to the Holy Spirit. This seems entirely at odds with the grammar. It is also grammatically inconsistent to render the two datives σαρκὶ and πνεύματι as "in the flesh" in the first case, and "by the Spirit" in the second. Yet, this is the reading of the KJV, NIV, NKJV, and NLT. The NASB, RSV, AAT, NRSV, NET, and Lenski read per the author's translation above.

It seems clear that "being put to death in the flesh" was the last event of Christ's life on Good Friday, and "being made alive in the spirit," i.e., his vivification, was the first event that we commonly ascribe to Easter Sunday. His vivification (the joining of his soul to his now glorified body) and all that follows is to be ascribed to Christ in his state of exaltation.<sup>2</sup>

Lenski make the same point. He writes:

We now see why Peter stops with the *vivificatio* in v. 18 and does not at once proceed to the resurrection by saying "raised up." The latter term is regularly used so as to include both the vivification of Christ's dead body and its appearance to chosen witnesses. Peter must restrict his thought to the vivification because he intends to speak of what occurred *before* Jesus appeared to his disciples on earth. Until Easter morning Christ's body lay dead in the tomb while his spirit (in English we may also say his "soul" because we use "soul" much as we do "spirit"; to use ψυχή in the Greek would be wrong) was in heaven. Then Christ's spirit was suddenly reunited with his body. This is the *vivificatio*.<sup>3</sup>

### **1 Peter 3:19**

ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν,

#### **Translation:**

In which also, after he had gone [πορευθεὶς, aorist passive participle of πορεύομαι], he preached [ἐκήρυξεν, aorist active verb of κηρύσσω] to the spirits in prison,

#### **Comments:**

Immediately after his vivification, the glorified Christ descended (body and soul) into prison. Φυλακῇ (prison) occurs 47 times in the New Testament. In all but 6 instances, it means a jail or prison.<sup>4</sup> We are told, here, that Christ went to a prison where there were spirits, i.e., souls. If no more were said further on, we still would have sufficient evidence to state that Christ descended into hell, for Scripture knows of only one "prison house" for souls. Never, of course, does Scripture refer to heaven as a prison.

Christ's preaching was not evangelical but accusatory. The damned were not given a second chance to repent. They had sealed their fate by their unbelief. They surely had their opportunities to repent, but they refused to do so. Thus, Christ declared his victory over Satan, the demons, and them. How terrible, but nevertheless, true.

### **1 Peter 3:20**

ἀπειθήσασίν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ εἰς ἣν ὀλίγοι, τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὀκτῶ ψυχαί, διεσώθησαν δι' ὕδατος.

### **Vocables:**

- ἀπειθήσασίν [from ἀπειθέω] [to disobey] (μασὶ πλ δατιε, aorist active participle).
- ἀπεξεδέχετο [from ἀπεκδέχομαι] [to wait] (3rd, singular, imperfect, indicative, mid or pass).
- κατασκευαζομένης [from κατασκευάζω] [to construct] (fem., sing., genitive, present, passive participle).
- διεσώθησαν [from διασώζω] [to bring safely through or to save] (3rd, pl., aorist, ind., passive)

### **Translation:**

Who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting ["kept" = the force of the imperfect ἀπεξεδέχετο] in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

### **Comments:**

The damned (spirits in prison) are specifically cited as being those who died in the Flood of Noah. The usual exegesis is to regard these Flood victims as a sample or example of the lot of all of the damned . That is, Peter presents only an isolated case of the sufferers because he wants to use the saved in the Flood (Noah and his family) in his later comments about baptism. Other scholars employ various kinds of exegetical explanations to explain why Peter only mentions those who died in the Flood. The feature common in these various explanations is the assumption that those perished in the cataclysm are small when compared to all that resided in hell in Peter's day.

But is this assumption valid? That is to say, were those who died in the Flood a small percentage of the total damned? If one takes the genealogy of Genesis 5 seriously, it would not seem so. In Genesis 5, we are given the lifespans and fertility spans of the 10 generations from Adam to Noah. See the Chart entitled "Patriarchal Ages at Maturity and Death."

We learn from Genesis 5 that the patriarchs fathered children from age 65 (so Mahalalel, v. 15, and Enoch, v. 21) to age 500 (so Noah in verse 32). We surmise from this that these ten generations of men and their wives were capable of having children for over 400 years. If we assume that each couple had a child every 40 years (likely a low estimate), each would have 10 children in their lifetimes. Given this, the

number of children born from the time of Adam to Noah can be estimated. Since there are 10 generations from Adam to Noah, and if each couple had 10 children, the number of births in that time period would be 10 raised to the 10th power, or ten billion children. If, during these 1656 years (assuming no gaps in the genealogical record), half of the population died, that would mean that 5 billion people were living at the time of the Flood. The population of the world today is about six billion. In other words, almost as many people died in the Flood as there are people living today!

Other population estimates, using more rigorous mathematical models, range from a low of 235 million people (using extremely low numbers of children per couple) to highs of over 20 billion. Tom Pickett's [analysis](#) based upon reasonable assumptions puts the pre-Flood population in the range of 5 to 17 billion. Other reputable estimates put the range of from 5 to 10 billion people.<sup>5</sup> The point is that, any way you look at it, the number who perished in the Flood was exceedingly large.

The estimated population of the world at the A.D. 1 is 200 million (The World Almanac 2000, p. 599). That is to say, in the 2500-3000 years from the Flood to A.D. 1, the population grew from only 8 people to 200 million people. This reflects the lower lifespans and fertility spans in the years following the Flood.

If we assume that all who lived after the Flood to the time of Christ went to hell, we are speaking of the total number at somewhere between 200 to 400 million people. If we take the larger figure of 400 million, and take Pickett's lowest number of pre-Flood dead (5 billion people), the percentage of pre-Flood people in hell at A.D. 1 is:

$$5,000,000,000/5,000,400,000 \text{ or } 99.9\%$$

Given this, perhaps Peter chooses the pre-Flood damned, not as a sample group, but because they represent nearly all of the population in hell! This makes the waters of the Flood as a type of baptism particularly strong, for the waterline is the line of demarcation between the saved and the damned. Baptism, thus, is the waterline of demarcation between the saved and the damned as well. The argument is compelling: Be baptized and be saved, or despise baptism (as so many despised the floodwaters) and be damned. Peter could hardly be making a stronger point for baptism!

### **1 Peter 3:21**

ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκῶς ἀπόθεσις ῥύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν, δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

### **Translation:**

Which [water], as an antitype [ἀντίτυπον], baptism now saves you [ὑμᾶς ἄρτι νῦν σώζει], not as a removal of dirt [ἀπόθεις ρύπου] from the flesh [σαρκός], but as an appeal to God for a good conscience [συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς], through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

### **Comments:**

The relative pronoun ὃ has as its antecedent "water " [ὔδατος], that is, the water of the Flood. Baptism is, then, specifically identified as the antitype of the water that saved Noah and his family. We often think of Noah's ark as type of Christ (although Scripture does not say that it is). Rarely, do we think of the floodwater as a type of Christian baptism, although it is explicitly stated here. Why? I would guess that it is rather hard for the mind to think of the floodwaters as being something good. When we think of the Flood, we think of judgment. The waters suggest to our minds the imagery of an angry God. It is difficult to think otherwise, especially since the Flood points forward to the greater destruction of the earth by fire at Christ's parousia.

It is important to keep the *water* as the point of comparison. A. Andrew Das offers a good explanation between the type and the antitype.

. . . Noah's salvation through the flood of wrath in the ark by water foreshadowed water baptism. Water drew the line of separation between the old world and the new world after the Flood. Water delivered Noah from the old world into the new one. So water baptism also delivers us from the world of sin into the new world in Christ. In water baptism, we are spared the judgment that the Flood prefigures.<sup>6</sup>

This passage is one of the strongest in Scripture that speaks of the saving efficacy of baptism. How one can read this passage and reject baptismal regeneration is difficult to comprehend. It even goes on to point out that the cleansing of baptism is not "a removal of dirt from the flesh." If it is not an outer cleansing of the body, there is only one other possibility, viz., an inner cleansing of the soul. There are many other passages that teach baptismal regeneration. Two of the clearest are:

- Acts 2:38-39  
And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him."
- Acts 22:16  
And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

Yet, the Reformed persist in their error and see nothing but an empty ordinance. With regard to 1 Peter 3:21, the usual line of reasoning is to say that baptism saves in the sense of giving a "good conscience." They do not go on to explain what a "good conscience" is, but they cover the salvific nature of baptism by cluttering it up with many words. If only they would unpack the term "good conscience," perhaps they would see the light.

In Scripture, much is said about the unregenerate and regenerate conscience. Unbelievers are said to have an "evil conscience" and a conscience that is defiled. They are never said to have a good, clean, or blameless conscience.

Contrariwise, believers are described as having a "good conscience," or a "clean conscience," or a "blameless conscience." The inference is that if anyone is described as having a good, clean, or blameless conscience in the New Testament, that person is a believer.

## Soli Deo Gloria!

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### References

1. All translations, except where indicated, are the author's. [\[Return\]](#)
2. Calvin and his followers taught that the *descensus ad inferos* was the climax to Christ's suffering in his state of humiliation. [\[Return\]](#)
3. R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Epistles of St. Peter, St. John, and St. Jude* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1966), p. 161. [\[Return\]](#)
4. In the other instances, φυλακὴ is translated as a "watch." For example, in Matthew 14:25, we read, "And in the fourth watch [φυλακὴ] of the night He came to them, walking on the sea." [\[Return\]](#)
5. See websites <http://www.ldolphin.org/popul.html> and <http://www.genesisfiles.com/the2.htm>. [\[Return\]](#)
6. A. Andrew Das, *Baptized into God's Family: The Doctrine of Infant Baptism for Today*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991), p. 20. [\[Return\]](#)

**Note:** If you cannot view the Greek characters and would like to download the font to your computer, click [HERE](#). Save font file in C:\Windows\Fonts.