

Redemption 304: The Days of Noah



biblestudying.net

Brian K. McPherson and Scott McPherson

Copyright 2012

The Days of Noah

In 1 Peter 3, Peter makes mention of Jesus visiting the spirits imprisoned (in Sheol). While it is clear from Peter's words that Christ descended into Sheol and preached to those held there, what is less clear is why Peter mentions these events in the first place in the middle of his epistle. One clue that helps us to grasp the relevance is that Peter is here interested in those Jesus preached to who lived before the flood of Noah.

A second clue behind Peter's inclusion of Jesus' preaching to these pre-flood persons comes from the context of Peter's words to the church throughout his letter. At the very beginning of his epistle, Peter clearly identifies that the purpose of the letter is to provide encouragement to the church in its present suffering as it was tried and tempted through a season of persecution awaiting Christ's return, their promised salvation, and judgment upon the wicked.

1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, **to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,**...4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, **though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:** 7 **That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire,** might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see *him* not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 **Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.** 10 Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace *that should come* unto you: 11 Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. 12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us **they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost** sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into... 14 **As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former (4386) lusts** in your ignorance:

In his opening comments, Peter speaks of how the church had the gospel preached unto them. And he likewise mentions their remaining in obedience having turned from formerly following the lusts of the flesh. Peter continues with this same theme throughout the letter.

1 Peter 1:20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times **for you, 21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead**, and gave him glory; **that your faith and hope might be in God. 22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit** unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:* **23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible**, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. **24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:** **25** But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. **And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.**

Notice that as Peter discusses the present suffering of the church, he mentions Christ's death (and resurrection) and the frailty of mortal men. By his comments here we know that Peter is encouraging the church that though their faith may cost them their lives under the persecution of Rome, the gospel they received nevertheless promised resurrection from the dead through Christ. With this in mind, Peter exhorts the church to present themselves as spiritual sacrifices to God.

1 Peter 2:5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, **to offer up spiritual sacrifices**, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

In verse 22 of chapter 2, Peter points to Jesus as our example in this regard.

1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: **because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps:**

Continuing in chapter 3, we see Peter still encouraging the church to suffer for righteousness sake in the face of those that would harm them and still pointing to Christ's death as our example in persecution.

1 Peter 3:12 For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: **but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. 13 And who is he that will harm you**, if ye be followers of that which is good? **14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye:** and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled;... **17 For it is better**, if the will of God be so, **that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. 18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins**, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, **being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:**

Up to this point in his letter, Peter's message to the church has been straightforward and easy to understand: follow Christ's example and suffer persecution for righteousness even if it costs you your lives because, as the gospel

proclaims, God will resurrect you unto immortal life with Him. It is at this point that Peter first mentions Noah and those who died before the flood to whom Christ preached in Sheol.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, **being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:** **19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;** **20 Which sometime (4218) were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing**, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. **21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us** (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: **22 Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. 4:1 Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;**

The question that emerges from verses 19-20 is why would Peter reference pre-flood people as he encourages the church to endure suffering even if unto death. The typical view of this pre-flood period is that only Noah and his family were righteous and that no one believed his message.

In the text we can see that just two verses later (1 Peter 4:1), Peter concludes his comments by again referring to Christ's suffering and death (and resurrection, 1 Peter 3:22). So, we know that Peter is still speaking on the same subject. But what may be hard to understand is what pre-flood persons have to do with the subject at hand.

Let's start with what we do know. First, from verses 18-21 of chapter 3, we see that Peter has in mind some comparison that is shared between the pre-flood persons to whom Christ preached, the church to whom Peter is writing, and Christ himself.

Second, if we leave out the pre-flood persons it is easy to identify the comparison that Peter is making. It is quite clear. Altogether, Peter is comparing the similarities between 3 groups regarding the issue of enduring persecution unto death for the hope of resurrection. These 3 groups are: 1. Jesus Christ, 2. the church, and 3. some pre-flood persons who'd repented of their former sinful behavior. The fact that this comparison is Peter's intention regarding the first two in the above list is generally understood. It is the implications regarding the third group of pre-flood persons that are often overlooked. More indications will emerge from the text that this third group is clearly being included by Peter in his comparison. But before we cover these it is first helpful to recount the comparisons that create this connection as laid out by Peter so far. We can do so by simply following Peter's remarks about Christ and the church.

First, Peter states that the church had formerly been in sin.

1 Peter 1:14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former (4386) lusts in your ignorance:

1 Peter 4:3 For the time past (3928) of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

Second, Peter states that the church had the gospel preached unto them by the power of the Holy Spirit.

1 Peter 1:12 Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us **they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost** sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into...

And third, Peter indicates that though Christ was put to death in the flesh, he was resurrected by the Holy Spirit. Thus, through Jesus' resurrection the gospel provides the hope of resurrection from the dead (for which the church purges itself of former sinful behavior).

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

1 Peter 1:20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times **for you, 21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God...24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: 25** But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. **And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.**

By outlining Peter's message in this way it becomes much easier to see that Peter is intending to include these pre-flood persons in the very same comparison that he is making between Christ and the church. The picture becomes clear as we compare the points we've listed above to the points Peter makes regarding the pre-flood persons to whom Jesus preached.

First, the pre-flood persons to whom Christ preached had, like the church, also formerly been disobedient to God (but had repented).

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: **19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; 20 Which sometime were disobedient,** when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

If we study Peter's usage of the phrase "which sometime were disobedient" it becomes clear that, contrary to conventional thinking, Peter intends to convey the repentance of some pre-flood individuals. Thus, Peter overturns a common misconception that all of pre-flood humanity remained in unrepentant disobedience and rebellion against God.

The first evidence of this is Peter's nearby statements that the church to whom he was writing had formerly been in sin.

1 Peter 1:14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former (4386) lusts in your ignorance:

1 Peter 4:3 For the time past (3928) of *our* life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:

When we read these verses, we do not conclude that the church remained in such sin. Rather, we know from the context that Peter says they were repentant and were now obedient to God in Christ. They had formerly sinned, but had now turned from sin.

The fact that it is Peter's intention to convey that the pre-flood individuals to whom Christ preached (between his death and resurrection) had also repented of their sin is clear from a vocabulary comparison. A comparison of Peter's language in 1 Peter 3:18 to 1 Peter 2:10 supports this conclusion. The word Peter uses for "sometime" in verse 20 of chapter 3 is the same word he uses in chapter 2, verse 10.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: **19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; 20 Which sometime (4218) were disobedient**, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

1 Peter 2:10 Which in time past (4218) *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

In chapter 2:10, Peter uses this Greek word "pote" (Strong's Number 4218) to contrast between the church's former state of not being God's people with their current state of being part of God's people. This being the case, Peter's usage of the same word in chapter 3:20 regarding some pre-flood persons strongly indicates a contrast between two states: 1) their previous sinful disobedience and 2) their later repentance to obedience. This conclusion is substantiated further by Peter's remarks that the church to whom he wrote had also previously been in sin.

First, the word for "former" in 1 Peter 1:14 indicates sinful lusts from a prior time period.

4386 proteron *proteron prot'-er-on*

neuter of 4387 as adverb (with or without the art.); ; adj

AV-before + 3588 3, first 2, former 2, before 2, at the first + 3588 1; 10

1) before, prior

1a) of time, former

Likewise, in 1 Peter 4:3, Peter states that in “the time past,” Christians had sinned just like the other Gentiles. The words for “time past” also indicate a prior time period.

4386 proteron *proteron prot'-er-on*

neuter of 4387 as adverb (with or without the art.); ; adj

AV-before + 3588 3, first 2, former 2, before 2, at the first + 3588 1; 10

1) **before, prior**

1a) of time, former

3928 parerchomai

from 3844 and 2064; TDNT-2:681,257; v

AV-pass away 12, pass 10, pass by 3, pass over 1, transgress 1, past 1, go 1, come forth 1, come 1; 31

1) **to go past, pass by**

1a) of persons moving forward

1a1) to pass by

1b) of time

1b1) an act continuing for a time

1c) metaph.

1c1) to pass away, perish

1c2) to pass by (pass over), that is, to neglect, omit, (transgress)

1c3) to be led by, to be carried past, be averted

2) to come near, come forward, arrive

Similarly, notice that Peter states that God was longsuffering and waited in the days before the flood as Noah built the ark.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: 19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; 20 Which sometime (4218) were disobedient, when once the longsuffering (3115) of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

What was God waiting for? Peter tells us in his second epistle as he again discusses the issues of God’s promises to us and coming judgment.

2 Peter 3:6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: 7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition

of ungodly men. 8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day *is* with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 **The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering (3114) to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.** 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. 11 *Seeing* then *that* all these things shall be dissolved, what manner *of persons* ought ye to be in *all* holy conversation and godliness, 12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. 14 Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. 15 **And account *that* the longsuffering (3115) of our Lord is salvation;** even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;

Notice that here in 2 Peter 2, Peter is comparing the destruction of the world by the flood of Noah's time to the destruction that will come by fire when Jesus returns. He explains to his readers that God is not slack concerning his promise to us, but that He is longsuffering. The word for longsuffering that appears in 1 Peter 3:20 is the same as occurs in 2 Peter 3:15. The word that is used in 2 Peter 3:9 is a related word. All three indicate God's patience.

And to whom is God longsuffering? To us. Why? Because God is not willing that any should perish (in the coming destruction), but God wants all to come to repentance. God's longsuffering is to give more time for men to repent before judgment.

Thus, we can see by comparing Peter's writings on these same subjects that just as God waits patiently for men who repent during this age before He will bring judgment and destruction of the world through fire, God also waited patiently for them that repented in the former age before He judged the world by water. So, from these comparisons we can see that Peter is indicating that the pre-flood persons to whom Christ preached the gospel (between his death and resurrection) were in fact repentant of their former sins.

Second, like the church, these pre-flood persons were preached the gospel by Christ (between his death and resurrection) through the power of the Holy Spirit so that, like Christ, though put to death in the flesh, they would live again by the power of the Spirit.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: 19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

1 Peter 4:6 For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

The parallels in Peter's comments here are unmistakable. And they are an essential component of Peter's encouragement to the persecuted church. In summary, Peter is encouraging the church to remain faithfully obedient to God even through persecution which might cost them their lives. His encouragement is based on the certainty of the hope for which they are willing to suffer, that is, resurrection from the dead. Peter provides two tokens of our assurance of this hope: 1) Christ's resurrection, and 2) the resurrection of these pre-flood individuals to whom Christ preached the gospel in Sheol (between his death and resurrection). For, the Gospel of Matthew declares that after Christ's resurrection, the bodies of the righteous were raised from the grave.

Matthew 27:52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, 53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

Thus, we see that from Peter's comments that Peter is comparing the repentant church enduring suffering and dying as they await Christ's coming and resurrection with pre-flood persons who'd repented of their sin and to whom Christ came (after his crucifixion), bringing them back to life at the time of his own resurrection (along with other post-flood saints from the Old Testament period). The reason for Peter's comparison is also obvious. Peter wishes to assure the suffering church that like these repentant pre-flood persons who died at the hands of wicked men and were resurrected, they too would be resurrected although they must first endure persecution and perhaps even death.

But why did these pre-flood persons repent? Did they have someone preach repentance to them as the church did? Peter is equally clear in his second epistle that they did. In fact, it was Noah.

2 Peter 2:5 And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher (2783) of righteousness (1343), bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Here Peter describes Noah as a preacher of righteousness using the noun form of the same word he uses to describe Jesus preaching to the repentant pre-flood persons who were imprisoned within the earth (in Sheol) until Jesus' death and resurrection.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: 19 By which also he went and preached (2784) unto the spirits in prison;

2783 khruX kerux kay'-roox

from 2784; TDNT-3:683,430; n m

AV-preacher 3; 3

1) a herald or messenger vested with public authority, who conveyed the official messages of kings, magistrates, princes, military commanders, or who gave a public summons or demand, and performed various other duties. In the NT God's ambassador, and the herald or proclaimer of the divine word.

2784 khrussw **kerusso** *kay-roos '-so*

of uncertain affinity; TDNT-3:697,430; v

AV-preach 51, publish 5, proclaim 2, preached + 2258 2, preacher 1; 61

1) to be a herald, to officiate as a herald

1a) to proclaim after the manner of a herald

1b) always with the suggestion of formality, gravity and an authority which must be listened to and obeyed

2) to publish, proclaim openly: something which has been done

3) used of the public proclamation of the gospel and matters pertaining to it, made by John the Baptist, by Jesus, by the apostles and other Christian teachers

The clear indication is that Peter understood Noah to have preached to the people of his day before the flood in the same way that Jesus preached to them between his death and resurrection. And we can see from Peter's first epistle that these people did put away their former sinful disobedience and repent when Noah preached to them.

The next question that emerges is how it is that these persons were allowed by God to die if they had repented. Why, if they had repented at Noah's preaching of coming judgment were they not spared death? The answer to this question is simple. It is the same reason that the early church suffered and died though they had received the gospel and repented. Likewise, the New Testament is clear that this pattern of righteous and repentant persons suffering persecution and death at the hands of the ungodly is a pattern that will also recur prior to Jesus' return to judge the earth at the end of the age. Jesus himself describes these events in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:1-44.

In this passage, Jesus outlines for his disciples what will occur prior to his return. In verse 9, he states that the righteous will be delivered up and put to death. In verse 10, he states that brother will betray brother. In verse 14, Jesus says that the gospel will be preached in all the world. (Again it is the same Greek word, Strong's Number 2784, "kerusso," that Peter uses to describe Jesus and Noah's preaching). And then, as his presentation of the events draws to a close, Jesus concludes that the time prior to his coming will be as it was the days of Noah before the flood. Therefore, we can see that Peter gets his comparison from Jesus' comparison during the Olivet Discourse. Peter's comments indicate that Jesus' teaching to his apostles concerning the comparison to the days of Noah were more detailed than what we see recorded in the Olivet Discourse, although perhaps on another occasion.

Another note that must be made is Jesus statement in this passage that prior to his coming the tribulation will be so bad that if God did not intervene no flesh would be saved.

Matthew 24:22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

What's interesting to note about this comment is that Jesus is clearly referencing a similar statement made in Genesis 6.

Genesis 6:13 And God said unto Noah, **The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them;** and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

The similarity of Jesus' statement in Matthew 24:22 and God's statement in Genesis 6:1 is obvious. In both periods of time, the violence of man against his fellow man would be so great that if God did not intervene to judge the wicked and save the righteous all mortal men would die.

Indeed, the proclamation and prophesy of the two witness to the whole earth prior to Jesus' coming and the judgment at the end of this age may, in fact, be a reference to Noah's proclamation to the people of his day (Revelation 10:11-11:10.)

It is clear from this study from both Peter and Jesus' teaching that in the days before the flood Noah proclaimed God's coming judgment and preached repentance and that some of his contemporaries repented of their sin, but were put to death by the wicked. Between his death and resurrection, Christ went and preached to these pre-flood persons who until that time had been held in Sheol. And after his death, they (along with other Old Testament saints) were resurrected from the dead and freed from imprisonment in Sheol as Jesus took the authority of the angels of death and hell.

Likewise, this same pattern will recur at the end of the age as the gospel is preached again (by the two witnesses and perhaps those working with them) first, to all the nations of the earth that the fullness of the Gentile harvest may come in and then to the people of Israel in fulfillment of both Jesus' teaching that the first will be last and the last first (and of Romans 11). And as is indicated in Jesus' teaching in the Olivet discourse, throughout the New Testament epistles, and the Book of Revelation, this persecution of the repentant at the end of this age will parallel that which occurred at the end of the last age as those who had repented prior to the flood in Noah's day were put to death by the wicked of their time.