

The Life and Letters of Peter

Lesson Nine: Salvation of the Righteous

<p>Review</p> <p>Peter has just taught the believers how to behave in suffering. This is his summary statement explaining why.</p> <p>How were they to behave in suffering?</p> <p>Why?</p>	<p>15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,</p> <p>16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.</p> <p>17 It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.</p>
--	---

Righteous Substitution

<p>The passage we are going to study is full of word pictures. Before we look at them in depth, underline all of the things about Jesus in this section.</p> <p>If this was the only fragment of scripture we had, what would we know about Christ in these 5 verses?</p>	<p>18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,</p> <p>19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison</p> <p>20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,</p> <p>21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,</p> <p>22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.</p>
---	---

The next page contains a chart of this passage in several translations. We will refer to it throughout the lesson.

New International	New American Standard	King James	New Revised Standard	New Living Translation	Amplified
18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,	18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, <i>the</i> just for <i>the</i> unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;	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:	18 For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit,	18 Christ also suffered when he died for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners that he might bring us safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit.	18 For Christ [the Messiah Himself] died for sins once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous (the Just for the unjust, the Innocent for the guilty), that He might bring us to God. In His human body He was put to death, but He was made alive in the spirit,
19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison	19 in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits <i>now</i> in prison,	¹⁹ By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;	19 in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,	19 So he went and preached to the spirits in prison –	19 In which He went and preached to the spirits in prison,
20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,	20 who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through <i>the</i> water	²⁰ Which some-time 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.	20 who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.	20 those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood.	20 [The souls of those] who long before in the days of Noah had been disobedient, when God's patience waited during the building of the ark in which a few [people], actually eight in number, were saved through water. [Gen. 6–8].

<p>21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,</p>	<p>21Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,</p>	<p>²¹The like figure whereunto <i>even</i> 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:</p>	<p>21 And baptism, which this prefigured, 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,</p>	<p>21 And this is a picture of baptism, which now saves you by the power of Jesus Christ's resurrection. Baptism is not a removal of dirt from your body; it is an appeal to God from a clean conscience.</p>	<p>21 And baptism, which is a figure [of their deliverance], does now also save you [from inward questionings and fears], not by the removing of outward body filth [bathing], but by [providing you with] the answer of a good and clear conscience (inward cleanness and peace) before God [because you are demonstrating what you believe to be yours] through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.</p>
<p>22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand--with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.</p>	<p>22 who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.1</p>	<p>²²Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him. 2</p>	<p>22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.</p>	<p>22 Now Christ has gone to heaven. He is seated in the place of honor next to God, and all the angels and authorities and powers are bowing before him.</p>	<p>22 [And He] has now entered into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with [all] angels and authorities and powers made subservient to Him.3</p>

1*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

2*The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

3*The Amplified New Testament*, (La Habra CA: The Lockman Foundation) 1999.

For Christ died for sins

once for all,
the righteous for the unrighteous,
to bring you to God.

He was put to death

in the body
but made alive

by the Spirit,
through whom also he went and preached

to the spirits

in prison
who disobeyed

long ago

when God waited patiently

in the days of Noah

while the ark was being built.

In it only a few people,

eight in all,

were saved

through water,

and this water symbolizes baptism

that now saves you also

--not the removal of dirt from the body

but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.

It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

who has gone into heaven

and is at God's right hand

--with angels,

authorities

and powers in submission to him.

Verse by verse

Verses 18 and 22 are fairly straightforward. Let's look at them, then look at the challenging passages in context. Let's answer what we know about these verses based on the text.

V 18

How often did Christ die?

Who did He die for?

"the righteous for the unrighteous"

Righteous	Unrighteous
Jesus	Sinners

Why did He die?

(Look at the varied translations)

He died in _____ but was made alive _____

V 22

Where is Jesus now?

Who is with Him?

Who is under submission to Him?

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit...

22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand -with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Look at Ephesians 1: 19b-22a →
How does this support Peter's teaching?

Ephesians 19b-22a That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet ...

Verses 19-21 give us a bit more of a challenge. Interestingly enough, most Bible reference material refers to this as a "difficult passage", one of the hardest in the New Testament. Let's see what we can discover, then look at the views around it.

Look back to page 4, where it is broken down by phrases to help answer these questions

<p>What is that antecedent of the pronoun whom? (Who's the "whom" stand for?)</p> <p>He is Jesus. Who did He preach to?</p> <p>What do we know about those spirits in 19 and 20?</p>	<p>19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison</p>
<p>The reference to God's patience refers to the story of Noah. Read through Genesis 6-8 and underline all of the phrases that demonstrate his patience.</p> <p>Who are the eight who were saved?</p> <p>What were they saved from?</p>	<p>20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water,</p>

Genesis 6-9:13

6 When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. ³Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal ; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."

⁴The Nephilim were on the earth in those days--and also afterward--when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. ⁵The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

⁶The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. ⁷So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth--men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air--for I am grieved that I have made them." ⁸But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

⁹This is the account of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God. ¹⁰Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. ¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. ¹²God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways. ¹³So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. ¹⁴So

make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. ¹⁵This is how you are to build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high. ¹⁶Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. ¹⁷I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish. ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark--you and your sons and your wife and your sons' wives with you. ¹⁹You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. ²⁰Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come to you to be kept alive. ²¹You are to take every kind of food that is to be eaten and store it away as food for you and for them."

²²Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

7 The LORD then said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. ²Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, ³and also seven of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. ⁴Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made."

⁵And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.

⁶Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. ⁷And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. ⁸Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, ⁹male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. ¹⁰And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

¹¹In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month--on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heav-

ens were opened. ¹²And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. ¹³On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. ¹⁴They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. ¹⁵Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. ¹⁶The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. ¹⁸The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. ¹⁹They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. ²⁰The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. ²¹Every living thing that moved on the earth perished--birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind.

²²Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. ²³Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. ²⁴The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. ²Now the springs of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky. ³The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and fifty days the water had gone down, ⁴and on the seventeenth day of the seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. ⁵The waters continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth month the tops of the mountains became visible.

⁶After forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark ⁷and sent out a ra-

ven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. ⁸Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. ⁹But the dove could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark.

¹⁰He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. ¹¹When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth.

¹²He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him. ¹³By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. ¹⁴By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

¹⁵Then God said to Noah, ¹⁶"Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. ¹⁷Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you--the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground--so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it."

¹⁸So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. ¹⁹All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds--everything that moves on the earth--came out of the ark, one kind after another. ²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it.

²¹The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. ²²"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease."

...

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: ⁹"I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you ¹⁰and with every living creature that was with you--the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you--every living creature on earth. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." ¹²And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: ¹³I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

¹⁷So God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth."

Let's return to 1 Peter now.

<p>"This water" refers back to v 20. What is it?</p> <p>Baptism is a "pledge" of good conscience. What are the other words used in the other translations for this concept (p. 3)?</p>	<p>21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ,</p>
--	--

Symbol	Did what?	Who is saved	by what?
Water	Saved Noah in the flood	Noah and family	In the ark
Baptism	Saves you	You (believers in Peter's letter)	Resurrection of Jesus
	Not removal of dirt		
	Pledge of a good conscience		

Look at this chart. Peter is making a parallel between the ark saving Noah and the resurrection of Jesus. He says "Baptism saves you" but in light of the context, it is part of the word picture. We must always interpret scripture by scripture. Ephesians 2:8-9 says "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that no one can boast." If baptism provided salvation, it would be a "work"; something we could do. We are saved by the grace of God.

Paul's Comments on baptism

Examine the chart about Paul's definition of baptism			<p>Romans 6:3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?</p> <p>4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.</p> <p>5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.</p> <p>6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin--</p> <p>7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.</p> <p>8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.</p> <p>9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him.</p>
<i>Concept</i>	<i>In Jesus</i>	<i>In Us</i>	
buried	In the tomb	Through baptism	
raised	From the dead	From the water	
crucified	His body	Our old self	
<p>How does this support what Peter has taught?</p>			

Other interpretations of the passage

"This is not only one of the most difficult passages in Peter's letter, it is one of the most difficult in the whole New Testament; and it is also the basis of one of the most difficult articles in the creed, 'He descended into Hell.'" William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, [rev. ed], 1976.) *The Daily Study Bible Series*, p. 232. "The following verses have caused more controversy than anything in the Epistle." A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), VI, p. 116.

The following summary is quoted from Deffinbaugh, Robert: "The Glory of Suffering--Studies in 1 Peter", Lesson 19-20, <http://www.netbible.com/docs/nt/books/1pe/deffin/1pet-19.htm>

First, let's take a look at a process for interpreting difficult passages.

Handling the Tough Texts

(1) Recognize that we are in good company when we find some texts or truths hard to handle. The prophets had difficulty understanding the things revealed to them (see 1 Peter 1:10-12). During our Lord's earthly ministry, the disciples failed to grasp the meaning of our Lord's words (Mark 9:32; Luke 18:34). Peter finds Paul's writings difficult to grasp at times (2 Peter 4:14-16). Why should we expect to understand all things pertaining to an infinite God, especially in this life (see 1 Corinthians 13:9-13; 1 John 3:2).

(2) Do not feel compelled to have a satisfactory explanation for every text in the Bible or a solution to every biblical problem. Tough texts humble us, reminding us that God is infinite and beyond our ability to understand or put in a box (see 1 Corinthians 13:9-12). It is good for us to be mystified by Scripture so that we realize we do not have it all under control.

(3) Problem passages should not be the basis for new and novel doctrines or interpretations. Never accept a doctrine based solely on a problem text. Any truth vital to our understanding will be taught clearly, emphatically, and repeatedly. The cults often use difficult texts to establish bizarre doctrines which have no support elsewhere in Scripture.

(4) Be suspect of interpretations of difficult texts which do not have broad acceptance throughout the history of the church (2 Peter 1:20-21).

(5) We should not be overly dogmatic about the conclusions we reach concerning a problem passage. We should hold these interpretations and applications more tentatively and not make them a test of spirituality or orthodoxy.

(6) Avoid becoming obsessed with the gnats of the text and thus miss the camels. The mysterious elements of Scripture can sometimes become an obsession to the neglect of the main teaching of the text. Often the main thrust or message of a problem text is clear, even if some of the particulars are uncertain. We should not lose sight of the message, even if we do not understand the minute details of the text. Seek to determine the main flow of argument and to discern the main point. In our text, the message is clear, even if the minutia is not.

(7) In seeking to interpret difficult texts, determine if there are any parallel texts similar in teaching, and interpret the more obscure text in light of those which are clearer.

(8) Determine the issues, the interpretive options, and then choose the interpretation that best fits the context, the argument of the entire book, and biblical theology.

Probing the Problems in our Passage

The major thrust of Peter's teaching can be traced in verses 17-18 and verse 22. The problems arise in verses 19-21. The following views sum up the more popular interpretations of this problem passage.

(1) Christ preached through Noah to the people of his day. This view was held by Augustine. Christ has always been actively involved in the world, even from ancient times (see Colossians 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 10:4). He is also vitally involved with the world and His church until He comes again (Matthew 28:20; Acts 9:1-9; 16:7). This view's main problem is the expression "spirits now¹³⁰ in prison" which does not seem to be one that most naturally would be used and understood in reference to men. It is true, however, that "spirits" is used in Hebrews 12:23 in reference to those believers who have died.

(2) Between the time of our Lord's death and His resurrection, He descended into the abode of the dead and preached to those who had formerly lived in Noah's day but were now dead and in prison, spiritually.¹³¹ Matthew 27:52-53 and Ephesians 4:9 are sometimes cited as support. There are several problems with this view. First, why is only this group of unbelieving dead selected and preached to and not all unbelievers? Second, why would the gospel be preached to a group of people who were warned of the coming judgment of God for 120 years and who rejected this warning (see Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 2:4-5)? It wasn't as though these people were not warned. Peter tells us they were disobedient (3:20). Third, at least some of those who hold this view also believe these folks are given a "second chance," but this seems contrary to other biblical teaching (see, for example, Hebrews 9:27).

(3) Between Christ's death and resurrection, Christ descended into hell and proclaimed His victory to the demonic spirits, who cohabited with women in Noah's day (see Genesis 6:1-8; 2 Peter 2:4-5, Jude 6; see also 1 Corinthians 15:28; Ephesians 1:18-23; Philippians 2:8-11; Colossians 2:8-15; 1 Peter 4:22). This view seems to square best with Genesis chapter 6, 2 Peter 2 and Jude 6. It appears most consistent with the terms "spirits in prison." But what does this have to do with Peter's theme of suffering?

(4) Enoch (not Christ) preached to those living in Noah's day. This is the view of J. Cramer and J. Rendel Harris. It has no textual support, but only a textual emendation (a change of the text, without the existence of any such text) based upon certain presuppositions. It can hardly be taken seriously.

(5) "I don't know what Peter means here." Luther held this view. We can at least respect his honesty.

Footnotes:

¹³⁰ The "now" is supplied by the editors of the NASB; the KJV has "spirits in prison."

¹³¹ "Bigg argues strongly that Christ during the time between his death and resurrection preached to those who once heard Noah (but are now in prison) and offered them another chance and not mere condemnation." *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, A. T. Robertson, VI, p. 117.

Lesson for Life

We've wrestled with the meanings of the verses. So what? Peter's key point is "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." What difference does it make that he died for you?

Who do you know is still "unrighteous" and needs to be brought to God? Perhaps you will be the "ark" God uses. Pray for those individuals, and for the boldness to take a stand for your faith, even as Peter's readers would need to do.