

Who Are the Spirits in Prison?

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

The first letter of Peter contains a unique verse indicating that Christ once preached during the days of Noah to spirit beings that are in prison. The apostle wrote:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water (1 Peter 3:18-20).

After His crucifixion, Christ was raised from the dead and “made alive by the Spirit.” However, before His birth as a man, Christ was a Divine spirit being and a member of the God family (John 1:1). It was during this time when He spoke as the Word of God to “the spirits in prison... while *the* ark was being prepared.”

The above verses have caused some to wonder who the spirits in prison are. The answer can be understood when we consider that the only spirits that are incarcerated in the Scriptures are angels who sinned. Other verses indicate that Peter was referring to those wicked angels who joined Lucifer in his rebellion against God. One such verse is found in the letter written by Jude who also wrote about these wicked spirit beings:

And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day (Jude 6).

This verse reveals that the angels who sinned had been assigned a “proper domain.” This expression refers to a suitable habitation and positions of responsibility. At some point during pre-Adamic history, these angels forsook God and followed Lucifer in an attempt to set up a kingdom of their own. As Isaiah revealed:

How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!.. For you have said in your heart: “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:12-14).

Lucifer was once a cherub exercising authority over the angels who eventually sinned. The book of Ezekiel indicates that Satan was once “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” until iniquity was found in him (Eze. 28:12-15). His lawless attitude led Lucifer to turn other angels against God. After the insurrection failed, Lucifer became known as Satan the devil and was expelled from God’s government. As God said, “Therefore I cast you as a profane thing out of the mountain of God” (Eze. 28:16). Christ gave an eyewitness account of this expulsion stating, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). The book of Revelation also mentions those angels who

sinned stating, “the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Rev. 12:9).

Satan was not the only angel who rejected God’s government. There were a large number of angels who joined him in his failed revolt. In fact, another verse in the book of Revelation seems to indicate that Lucifer convinced a third of the angels to join his insurrection (Rev. 12:4). These fallen angels became known as demons.

The Scriptures also indicate that there are a number of demons free to roam the earth and cause havoc. However, not all of the angels that sinned are free. Some are bound. There are a large number of demons currently restrained in a spiritual prison. The apostle Peter understood this truth and wrote:

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast *them* down to hell and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment (2 Peter 2:4).

The expression “chains of darkness” is likely a reference to the bottomless pit. However, this expression may include other areas of restraint such as the Euphrates where four angels are bound at the great river and will be released to kill a third of mankind at the end of the age (Rev. 9:13-14). As a part of the end-time plagues, God will apparently release many demons from the bottomless pit as punishment upon the lawless people of the earth:

Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. **And he opened the bottomless pit**, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given *authority* to kill them, but to torment them *for* five months. Their torment *was* like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man (Revelation 9:1-5).

The Apostle John went on to describe horrifying supernatural beings that looked as though they had faces of men, hair like women, and teeth as lions. They wore crowns and breastplates, flew with wings, and had tails like scorpions (Rev. 9:7-10). John depicted demons ascending from a supernatural prison called the bottomless pit. A key to understanding that these are wicked angels is found in this same passage where the apostle wrote:

And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon (Revelation 9:11).

The king of these wicked angels is not God or Christ. Their king is known as Abaddon and Apollyon. These words mean “destruction” and “destroyer.” Interestingly, the angel God appointed to kill the firstborn of Egypt was also called “the destroyer” (Exo. 12:23). Therefore, the king of these demons is either Satan or a high-ranking demon that is under the devil’s authority.

These Scriptures explain that there are a number of demons currently bound in a spiritual prison called the bottomless pit. This is the same prison that will constrain Satan after Christ returns (Rev. 20:1-3). What Jesus preached to these spirits is not known. It may have been a message of repentance. When we consider that repentance goes hand-in-hand with baptism, and the earth was

about to be immersed in water, it is possible that these spirits were encouraged to repent and be cleansed. But this is only speculation.

What is not theoretical is that “the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient,” to whom Christ preached, could only be angels that were incarcerated.