

CHAD T. PIERCE

Spirits and the Proclamation of Christ

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

305

Mohr Siebeck

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Chad T. Pierce

Spirits and the Proclamation of Christ

1 Peter 3:18–22 in Light of Sin
and Punishment Traditions in Early Jewish
and Christian Literature

Mohr Siebeck

CHAD T. PIERCE, born 1974; 2001 M.A. in New Testament Backgrounds from Jerusalem University College in Jerusalem; 2002 M.Div. from Western Theological Seminary; 2009 PhD in Early Judaism from the University of Durham, UK; Assistant Professor of Religion at Central College in Pella, IA, USA.

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To Jodi

Νυνὶ δὲ μένει πίστις, ἐλπίς, ἀγάπη, τὰ τρία ταῦτα·
μείζων δὲ τούτων ἡ ἀγάπη.

Preface

This monograph is a revision of my doctoral thesis, “Christ’s Proclamation to the Imprisoned Spirits: 1 Peter 3:18–22 in its Tradition Historical and Literary Contexts.” The thesis was presented to the Faculty of Theology at the University of Durham (UK) and defended in October of 2009. I am most grateful to Dr. Loren Stuckenbruck, who supervised this work. Before this project began, I was familiar with his scholarly reputation. I was not prepared for the humility, thoroughness, and friendliness with which he mentored me through this process. I am also grateful to other members of the department, Dr. Robert Hayward and Dr. William Telford, for their encouragement and advice. Additionally, I am thankful for both of my examiners, Dr. Lutz Doering and Dr. Philip Alexander, whose recommendations have made this work better.

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February, 2011

Chad T. Pierce

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Abbreviations

<i>AA</i>	<i>Animal Apocalypse</i>
<i>AB</i>	<i>Anchor Bible</i>
<i>ACR</i>	<i>Australasian Record</i>
ATLAMS	American Theological Library Association Manuscript Series
<i>Anbib</i>	<i>Analecta biblica</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Josephus, Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>Ap. Ab.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i>
<i>APOT</i>	<i>The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament</i> . Edited by R. H. Charles. 2 Vols. Oxford, 1913
<i>ASNU</i>	<i>Acta seminarii neotestamentici upsaliensis</i>
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>b.</i>	Babylonian Talmud
<i>2, 3 Bar</i>	<i>2, 3 Baruch</i>
<i>B. Bat</i>	<i>Tractate Baba Bathra</i>
B.C.E.	Before Common Era
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium
<i>BG</i>	<i>Book of Giants</i>
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
<i>BJ</i>	<i>Josephus, Jewish War</i>
BJS	Brown Judaica Studies
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Biblical Research</i>
<i>BW</i>	<i>Book of Watchers</i>
ca.	circa, about
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Bible Quarterly</i>
CD	Cairo Genizah Damascus Document
C.E.	Common Era
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish and Christian Literature
cf.	compare
chap(s).	chapter(s)
<i>1 Clem</i>	<i>1 Clement</i>
col(s).	column(s)
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament
1, 2 Cor	1, 2 Corinthians
CRINT	Compendia rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum
CSCO	Corpus scriptorium Christianorum orientalium
CSHB	Corpus scriptorum historiae byzantinae
CSS	Cursus Sacrae Scripturae
Dan	Daniel

Deut	Deuteronomy
diss.	dissertation
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
ECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ed(s).	editor(s), edition
<i>1, 2, 3 En</i>	<i>1, 2, 3 Enoch</i>
Eph	Ephesians
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios Biblicos</i>
<i>EtB</i>	<i>Études Bibliques</i>
Eth.	Ethiopic
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>4 Ez</i>	<i>4 Ezra</i>
Ezek	Ezekiel
f.	following
fasc.	fascicle
FB	Forschung zur Bibel
frag(s)	fragment(s)
FTS	Freiburger Theologische Studien
Gal	Galatians
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten [drei] Jahrhunderte
Gen	Genesis
<i>Greg</i>	<i>Gregorianum</i>
Gr.	Greek
G ^{Pan}	Codex Panopolitanus
G ^{Sync}	Codex Syncellus
HB	Hebrew Bible
Heb	Hebrews
<i>Hen</i>	<i>Enoch</i>
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
Hos	Hosea
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Manuscripts
<i>HTKNT</i>	<i>Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
ibid.	in the same place as the previous citation(s)
idem	the same author
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
Isa	Isaiah
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBW</i>	<i>Jahrbücher der biblischen Wissenschaft</i>
Jdt	Judith
Jer	Jeremiah
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
Jn	John
1 Jn	1 John
Josh	Joshua
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit

JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements
JSP	<i>Journal of the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
JSPSup	Journal of the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplemental Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
Jub	<i>Jubilees</i>
Judg	Judges
JZWL	<i>Jüdische Zeitschrift für Wissenschaft und Leben</i>
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
Lam	Lamentations
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
Lev	Leviticus
<i>Liv. Pro.</i>	<i>Lives of the Prophets</i>
Lk	Luke
LXX	Septuagint (Greek O.T.)
<i>m.</i>	Mishnah
2, 3 Macc	2, 3 Maccabees
<i>Mart. Is.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Isaiah</i>
Matt	Matthew
Mk	Mark
MSS.	Manuscripts
n.	note
NCB	New Century Bible
NIBCNT	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NovTSup</i>	<i>Supplement to Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NRTh</i>	<i>La nouvelle revue théologique</i>
NT	New Testament
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen
<i>NTD</i>	<i>Das Neue Testament Deutsch</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
Num	Numbers
OT	Old Testament
<i>OTP</i>	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> , Charlesworth Edition
<i>OtSt</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
<i>PAAJR</i>	<i>Proceedings from the American Academy of Jewish Research</i>
PC	Proclamation Commentaries
1, 2 Pet	1, 2 Peter
PG	Patrologia Graeca
Phil	Philippians
Philo of Alexandria	
<i>Gig.</i>	<i>De Gigantibus</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Quaestiones et Solutiones in Genesin</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini</i>
PL	Patrologia Latina
Ps(s)	Psalm(s)
PTSDSSP	Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
repr.	reprinted

<i>Rev</i>	<i>Revelation</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>Rom</i>	<i>Romans</i>
<i>Sanh.</i>	<i>Sanhedrin</i>
<i>SBLDS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</i>
<i>SBLMS</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series</i>
<i>SBLSP</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers</i>
<i>SBLTT</i>	<i>Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations</i>
<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
<i>SNT</i>	<i>Studien zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>STDJ</i>	<i>Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah</i>
<i>STPB</i>	<i>Studia post-biblica</i>
<i>SVTP</i>	<i>Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigraphica</i>
<i>T. Job</i>	<i>Testament of job</i>
<i>1, 2 Thess</i>	<i>1, 2 Thessalonians</i>
<i>1, 2 Tim</i>	<i>1, 2 Timothy</i>
<i>T12P</i>	<i>Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs</i>
<i>T. Asher</i>	<i>Testament of Asher</i>
<i>T. Benj.</i>	<i>Testament of Benjamin</i>
<i>T. Judah</i>	<i>Testament of Judah</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>T. Napht.</i>	<i>Testament of Naphtali</i>
<i>T. Reub.</i>	<i>Testament of Rueben</i>
<i>TBN</i>	<i>Themes in Biblical Narrative</i>
<i>TBT</i>	<i>The Bible Today</i>
<i>TD</i>	<i>Theology Digest</i>
<i>THNTC</i>	<i>Two Horizons New Testament Commentary</i>
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>Tg(s).</i>	<i>Targum(s)</i>
<i>1, 2 Thess</i>	<i>1, 2 Thessalonians</i>
<i>Tob</i>	<i>Tobit</i>
<i>TNTC</i>	<i>Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TSAJ</i>	<i>Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum</i>
<i>VC</i>	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
<i>vol(s).</i>	<i>volume(s)</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTSup</i>	<i>Supplements to Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>WBC</i>	<i>Word Biblical Commentaries</i>
<i>Wis</i>	<i>Wisdom of Solomon</i>
<i>WTS</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>WW</i>	<i>Words and Worlds</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>Zeph</i>	<i>Zephaniah</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction and History of Research

1.1 Introduction

1 Pet 3:18–22 contains numerous intriguing yet beguiling statements that have generated interest and questions from scholars from the second century C.E. to the present. Debate has arisen as to the recipients of Christ's message, what he said, when he said it, what impact it had, its relationship to Christian baptism, and how this passage coheres with the letter as a whole. The answers to these and other questions arising from the text have often been based on theological principles rather than from the text itself. Whether this passage describes Christ's harrowing of hell, the work of the pre-existent Christ, or Jesus' announcement of victory, theologians have looked to 1 Peter to lend support to their own particular views.

This passage, though small, provides insight into early Christian thoughts, or at least a branch of early Christian thoughts, on Christology, angelology, demonology, ouranology, cosmology, and eschatology. Thus, it reflects an important development in the history of Christian tradition. Varying exegetes of these verses expound very different images of Christ, the activities upon his death and resurrection, the role of evil in the world, theophany, and the eschatological hope for the righteous. Therefore, it is beneficial to interpret this passage with much care.

The past fifty years have witnessed a resurgence in the study of early Jewish literature including the "Dead Sea Scrolls" and Jewish pseudepigraphal literature. The themes, theology, and development of literary traditions in these works have been carefully studied for their own right as well as for illuminating later Jewish and Christian ideas. The study of 1 Peter has not escaped this trend. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, but more so in the last five decades, most scholars have interpreted 1 Pet 3:18–22 in light of earlier Jewish and Christian works. Yet, while many acknowledge the importance of these works in the tradition history of 1 Peter, there has not been an in-depth look into the sin and punishment traditions and their potential impact on the epistle. While a discussion of the history of research, provided below, illustrates how various scholarship has or has not used the fallen angel myths in their exegesis, it also demonstrates that no work to date has yet wrestled with either the complexity of the relevant traditions or the nature of conflation

that appears to be taking place in the use of these stories. The aim of this work is to catalogue and discuss the development of early Jewish and Christian literature regarding cosmic and human sin and punishment traditions to determine how they may illuminate the understanding of 1 Pet 3:18–22.

1.2 The History of Research

1.2.1 Introduction

The difficulty in presenting a detailed yet coherent history of interpretation of 1 Pet 3:18–22 derives from the argumentative nature of its historical exegesis. Since the first explanations of 1 Pet 3:18–22 were documented in the second century C.E., others have primarily written to counteract the various theological claims which resulted from a specific exegesis of these verses rather than being concerned with an independent, focused study of the particular passage itself. John Elliott¹, William Dalton², and Bo Reicke³ have presented the most recent and thorough critiques of the history of the interpretation of 1 Pet 3:18–22.⁴ Dalton's work divides the many interpretations of 3:19 into three main categories. Elliott, who summarizes and expands on Dalton's work, divides the history of research of 1 Pet 3:18–22 into four primary divisions. Other scholars have suggested that five or six different understandings exist and even these contain sub-groupings. This work, while containing a number of sub-categories, divides the history of interpretation into three broad lines of thought: 1) Christ's proclamation to human souls between his death and resurrection, 2) the proclamation of the pre-existent Christ through the person of Noah, and 3) Christ's proclamation to fallen angels or giants.

1.2.2 Three Influential Lines of Interpretation

1.2.2.1 Christ's Proclamation to Human Souls between his Death and Resurrection

A portion of scholarship from the late second through the mid-twentieth century C.E. has maintained that 1 Pet 3:18–22 records the actions of Christ during the *triduum mortis*, the time between his death and resurrection. Using

¹ John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37b; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 648–51.

² William J. Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits: A Study of 1 Peter 3:18–4:6* (2nd ed. AnBib 23; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), 17–66.

³ Bo Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism: A Study of 1 Peter III.19 and Its Context* (ASNU 13; Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1946), 7–51.

⁴ See also Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 203–39. For earlier overviews see Urbanus Holzmeister, *Commentarius in Epistulas SS. Petri and Iudae. Epistula Prima S. Petri* (CSS 3/13; Paris: Lethiellux, 1937), 306–51.

this passage as evidence of the *descensus*, many of the early church fathers proposed that upon his death, Christ's spirit descended to Hades and proclaimed a message to humans imprisoned in the underworld.⁵ Within this interpretation, three main views have emerged.⁶

First, some have claimed that in 1 Pet 3:19, Christ's spirit traveled to the underworld and offered salvation to the sinners of Noah's generation who had perished in the flood. This interpretation was first postulated by the Alexandrian school already ca. 200 C.E. Clement of Alexandria was one of the earliest to exegete 1 Pet 3:19 in such a manner. Linking 1 Pet 3:19 to the descent of Christ, Clement proposed that while some form of virtuous preparation in the earthly life was needed, true salvation could only occur through Christ. For those who lived before the incarnation, whether gentile or faithful Jew, Christ went and offered them salvation during the *triduum mortis*.⁷ Clement also described the punishment of the flood, referenced in 1 Pet 3:19–20, as a therapeutic tool used by God to prepare sinners for salvation. Arguing that evil flesh impairs humanity's ability to accept Christ, Clement claimed that by releasing the souls of humans from their bodies through the flood, God actually made their potential conversion easier.⁸

Writing concurrent to Clement, Origen interpreted 1 Pet 3:18–22 in a similar manner. In his *De Principiis*, Origen argued against Gnostics who had claimed that the Old Testament (OT) God and the New Testament (NT) Jesus were, in fact, not the same God. These Gnostics had contrasted the OT God of the law, who was primarily just, with the NT Christ, who was primarily good. In an attempt to portray the OT God of the law and the NT Jesus as one God who is both just and good, Origen quoted 1 Pet 3:19, proposing, like Clement, that the flood was sent as a therapeutic punishment for the purpose of human improvement. Therefore, within this understanding, 1 Pet 3:18–22 describes

⁵ The term *descensus* is used to describe Christ's descent to the underworld between his death and resurrection.

⁶ While 1 Pet 3:19 has been linked with the *descensus* since the second century C.E., it should be noted that this was not the case prior to Clement of Alexandria. Early exegetes, such as Irenaeus, a strong supporter of the *descensus* never references 1 Pet 3:19 in his discussions on the doctrine, see Irenaeus, *Adversus Omnes Haereses* 4.22.1; 4.27.2; and 5.33.1. 7 (PG 1046C; 1058B, C; 1208C–1209A). Therefore, it is not certain that 1 Pet 3:18–22 was originally linked with the *descensus* in its earliest interpretations.

⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.6:38–53 (GCS 15:453–55). Another example of Clement interpreting this passage as referring to the descent can be found in his *Adumbrationes* on 1 Peter (GCS 17:205). Holzmeister, *Commentarius in Epistulas*, 337–38 has argued that the Clement was really not a supporter of this understanding. However, it is generally accepted that Clement viewed 1 Pet 3:19 as Jesus preaching to the human spirits in the underworld with the goal of conversion.

⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 6.6:42–43 (GCS 15:453–54). Clement also argued that Jesus' disciples, following their teacher, also went and offered salvation to the human souls imprisoned in the underworld. See *Stromateis* 6.6:37–38 (GCS 15:453–54).

the salvation offered by Christ during the *triduum mortis* even to those wicked individuals who perished in the flood.⁹

Cyril of Alexandria was another supporter of the *descensus* as the setting for Christ's heralding.¹⁰ In his *Commentarium in Joannem* from the early fifth century C.E., Cyril cites 1 Pet 3:19 to describe Christ's proclamation of liberation both to those on earth and to those who were already dead.¹¹ While examining the writings of Clement, Origen, and Cyril, it appears that a majority of the Alexandrian view of 1 Pet 3:19 was that Christ, during the *triduum mortis*, proclaimed a message of salvation to human souls imprisoned in the underworld.

However, the Alexandrian school of thought was not the only group which interpreted these verses in this manner. Some other early Greek fathers also cited 1 Pet 3:18–22 when describing Christ's offering of salvation to human souls in the underworld. John Damascene alluded to 1 Pet 3:19 in reference to the *descensus*, contending that Christ's proclamation to the spirits in Hades reflected his earthly proclamation of liberation. Jesus' heralding in Hades would give an opportunity for salvation to those beings imprisoned there as well as bring all things there under his subjugation.¹² However, in John Damascene's work, there is no reference made as to whether this proclamation was made to the OT faithful, others who had repented prior to their death, or if all who had lived before Christ were given the opportunity to repent in the next life. Therefore, while the earliest church leaders might not have linked these verses with the *descensus*, this view of Christ's proclamation to the spirits was widely held from the time of Clement until Augustine.

Despite Augustinian and later influences against this interpretation of 1 Pet 3:18–22, which will be discussed below, some scholars from the past century

⁹ Origen, *De Principiis* 2.5 (GCS 22:136). Origen appears to reference this passage again in his debate with Celsus. Responding to Celsus' claim that Christ preached to those in Hades because he had no success on earth, Origen argued that it was in fact due to the triumph of Christ's earthly proclamation that he was crucified, after which he went as a soul and preached to the other bodiless souls. Therefore, Christ's preaching in Hades mirrored his proclamation while alive on earth. See Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2:43 (GCS 23:166). For other examples of Origen's understanding of this passage see: *Commentaria in Evangelium secundum Mattaeum* 132 (PG 13:1780D) and *Commentaria in Evangelium Joannis* (PG 14:260B).

¹⁰ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Homilia Paschalis* 8 (PG, 77:552A). In this message, he describes Jesus, after his death, traveling to the underworld, opening the gates of Hades, and completely emptying it.

¹¹ *Commentarium in Joannem* 16:16 74 (PG 456A). In his *Commentarius in Lucam* 4:18, Cyril also references 1 Peter while implying the salvation of those sinners in the underworld, see (PG 72:537D).

¹² St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3.29 (PG 94:1101A). Reicke notes that his ideas parallel that of Clement of Alexandria, Reicke, *Disobedient Spirits*, 33. While not discussing Christ's role in the underworld, St. Athanasius, citing 1 Peter, claims that while Christ's body was in the tomb, the Word proclaimed to the spirits who were in prison, *Epistola ad Epictetum* 5–6 (PG 26: 1060A, B).

have continued to understand Christ's proclamation to the spirits in prison as referring to the activity of Christ during the *triduum mortis* to the human souls in the underworld with the hope of conversion.¹³ In his commentary from 1947, F. W. Beare claimed that despite alternative interpretations, both ancient and modern, that have been proposed concerning Christ's proclamation to the spirits in prison, "it is more natural to take it as referring to His activity in the underworld in the interval between His death and His resurrection."¹⁴ In 1982, A. Hanson still maintained that these verses refer to the activity of Christ during his *descensus*. He proposed that, between his death and resurrection, Christ offered salvation to those imprisoned in the underworld. It must be noted, however, that Hanson claims it is not clear whether the spirits in prison refers to humans, angels, or possibly both.¹⁵

Many scholars since 1900 who maintain this interpretation of 1 Pet 3:18–22 connect these verses with 1 Pet 4:6. In his 1978 commentary on 1 Peter published posthumously, L. Goppelt linked Christ's preaching to the dead in 1 Peter 4:6 with the πνεύματα in 3:19. While acknowledging that the term πνεύματα in verse 19 could potentially be taken as a reference to fallen angels, Goppelt claimed that humans, and not fallen angels, are more likely the recipients of the "saving proclamation of Christ." Goppelt utilized 1 Pet 4:6 in order to interpret the proclamation recorded in 3:19 as one of salvation; a method which will be debated below.¹⁶ Furthermore, Goppelt claimed that by maintaining that Christ preached to the most evil generation of humans, the author of 1 Peter encouraged his readers to follow Christ's example by proclaiming the Gospel, even to their oppressors.¹⁷ However, as will be demonstrated later, this reading regarding the fallen angels in verse 20 ignores the link between the myth recorded in Gen. 6:1–4 and the flood tradition in many early Jewish and Christian works.

Charles E. B. Cranfield also fused together 1 Pet 3:18–22 and 4:6 to claim that Christ's proclamation was directed to the souls of humans who perished in the flood. He contended that Christ offered salvation to those human spirits

¹³ Despite Augustinian influence, there were a number of scholars in the Middle Ages who continued to support the idea of 1 Pet 3:19–4:6 referring to the *descensus*, see Maximus Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thaliassium* 7 (PG 90:284C) and Joannes Zonaras, *Epistolarum* 10 (PG 76:1124A–C).

¹⁴ Francis W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1947), 144–45.

¹⁵ Anthony T. Hanson, "Salvation Proclaimed, 1 Peter 3:18–22," *ExpTim* 93 (1981–1982): 100–12. For other scholars since 1900 who maintain this interpretation, see: Sherman E. Johnson, "The Preaching to the Dead," *JBL* 79 (1960): 48–51; Johannes Schneider, *Die Briefe des Jakobus, Petrus, und Johannes* (NTD 10 9th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961); Karl H. Schelkle, *Die Petrusbriefe, Der Judasbrief* (HTKNT 13/2 3rd ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1976); Jean Galot, "le descende du Christ aux enfers (1 P 3:18–20)," *NRT* 83 (1961): 471–91 and "Christ's Descent into Hell," *TD* 13 (1965): 89–94.

¹⁶ Leonhard Goppelt, *1 Peter* (ed. F. Halon; trans. J. Alsup; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 257–59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 258–59.

and that this proclamation occurred during the *triduum mortis*.¹⁸ It is evident, therefore, that some have interpreted 1 Pet 3:18–22 as referring to Christ’s offer of salvation to human spirits imprisoned in the underworld, to varying degrees, from the second century C.E. through the present.

A second understanding of 1 Pet 3:18–22 within this broad line of thought of Christ’s proclamation of salvation to humans between his death and resurrection is that this offer was only available to those of Noah’s contemporaries who had repented of their sins prior to their demise. This interpretation is often then extended to include the potential salvation to all of the OT faithful imprisoned in the underworld.

One of the earliest works that locates Christ’s proclamation to faithful OT souls within the time between his death and resurrection is the Jeremiah logion. While the logion’s disputed origins are not relevant to this study, its use by Justin Martyr dates the saying to the mid-second century C.E. The pertinent passage reads: ἐμνήσθη δὲ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἀπὸ Ἰσραὴλ τῶν νεκρῶν τῶν κεκοιμημένων εἰς γῆν χώματος καὶ κατέβη πρὸς αὐτοὺς ἀναγγελίσσασθαι αὐτοῖς τὸ σωτήριον αὐτοῦ (*The Lord God remembered the dead from Israel who lay in the graves, and he went down to them to preach to them his salvation*).¹⁹ The logion reflects an early theology of the *descensus*, and specific mention is made as to the recipients and the content of Christ’s heralding. Christ went to the place of the dead to proclaim his salvation to his people Israel. Those who support this reading of 1 Pet 3:18–22 contend that the logion demonstrates that Christ’s offer of salvation to the OT faithful was an idea accepted in the mid-second century. However, the similarities between the 1 Peter and the logion are dependent upon this particular exegesis of 1 Pet 3:19 rather than independently supporting one another.

Linguistically there are notable differences between 1 Peter and the Jeremiah logion. The recipients of Christ’s proclamation in the logion are specifically referred to as τῶν νεκρῶν τῶν κεκοιμημένων εἰς γῆν χώματος rather than the more vague description of ἐν φυλακῇ πνευμασίν in 1 Peter. Second, the Lord’s descent is made certain by the use of the word κατέβη in the logion, whereas the use of the word πορευθεῖς in 1 Peter merely records the fact that Christ actually “went somewhere.” Furthermore, whereas the logion uses ἀναγγελίσσασθαι to describe Christ’s proclamation, the writer of 1 Peter records Jesus as having “proclaimed” (ἐκηρύξεν) to the spirits. Thus, while the content of Christ’s proclamation in 1 Peter is left to be assumed, the Jeremiah

¹⁸ Charles E. B. Cranfield, “The Interpretation of 1 Peter III.19 and IV.6” *ExpTim* 69 (1957/58): 369–72.

¹⁹ See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 72 (PG 6:645AB). While the translation in PG is often cited, it should be noted that the individuals referenced here are not in graves but merely described as in the “ground.” Irenaeus quotes the logion six times in his works, inconsistently claiming its origins in Jeremiah and Isaiah; see: *Adversus Omnes Haereses* 3.20.4; 4.22.1; 4.33.1; 4.33.12; and 5.31.1.

logion specifically describes the purpose of Christ's preaching as offering salvation (ἀναγγελίσασθαι αὐτοῖς τὸ σωτήριον αὐτοῦ). Therefore, if a connection between the logion and 1 Peter is assumed, one does elucidate the other. However, there does not appear to be a strong linguistic connection between the texts. The recipients, the location, and the message of Christ's proclamation are portrayed differently in the two works.

Similar to the Jeremiah logion, the *Gospel of Peter*, which focuses on the death and resurrection of Jesus and is often dated to the mid-second century C.E., is cited by those who contend that it lends support to the theory that Christ's proclamation in 1 Peter was given to converted or faithful souls imprisoned in the underworld.²⁰ In this gospel, the soldiers who were guarding Jesus' tomb witness two angels descending and the stone of the sepulcher being rolled away. The gospel writer continues the story:

And while they were relating what they had seen, they saw again three men come out from the sepulcher, and two of them sustaining the other, and a cross following them, and the heads of the two reaching to heaven, but that of him whom they led by the hand overpassing the heavens. And they heard a voice out of heaven crying, 'Have you preached to those who had fallen asleep?,' and from the cross there was heard the answer: 'Yes.'²¹

Both Dalton and Elliott acknowledge the similarities of the gospel's phrase ἐκπύξας τοῖς κοιμωμένοις with events of 1 Pet 3:19. However, they also maintain that the agreements end there, as no tangible connection between the two works has been made.²² In addition, unlike the Jeremiah logion which describes Christ's proclamation as one of salvation, the *Gospel of Peter* gives no indication about either the content of his preaching or the identification of the spirits. Christ's heralding could be one of destruction or salvation, and the recipients could be all those who were imprisoned in the underworld or only the righteous. Therefore, while the *Gospel of Peter* does clearly have the *descensus* in view, it contains little or no support for Christ's proclamation of salvation to converted or faithful souls during the *triduum mortis*.

A final piece of early literature which some have used to support this interpretation of 1 Pet 3:18–22 comes from the *Easter Homily* of Hippolytus. In that homily, Hippolytus appears to allude to 1 Pet 3:19 when describing the

²⁰ This proposed date for the composition of the *Gospel of Peter* is due to its dependence upon traditional gospel material and its first citation by Serapion of Antioch in Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.12.1–6 in the late second century C.E., in which the Bishop declares that parts of the work are Docetic. This discovery of POxy 2949 confirms the work was composed towards the end of the second century at the latest, see: Hans-Josef Klauck, *Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (trans. B. McNeil; New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 82–83. Léon Vaganay has dated the work between 120 and 130 C.E.; see *L'Evangile de Pierre* (Paris: Gabalda, 1930), 147–63.

²¹ *Gospel of Peter* 10:1–4; for the English translation, see Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. W. Schneemelcher; trans. R. Wilson; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 179–87.

²² Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation*, 35–36; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 661–62.

“harrowing of hell” by Jesus as a soul among souls.²³ Dalton correctly notes that this passage weaves together the harrowing of hell and the announcement of salvation to the holy souls. Though, admittedly, he also points out the difficulty in interpreting this passage in light of it being a homily that strings together a number of verses concerning the *descensus*.

Origen, who spent time in Rome as a disciple of Hippolytus, also used the phrase “a soul among souls” to describe Jesus’ experience in the underworld with regard to 1 Pet 3:19. Dalton argues that Hippolytus’ understanding of 1 Pet 3:19 would probably have been similar to that of Origen, described above, and not a different understanding of the text in which the souls are converted before death. Therefore, Dalton argues that Hippolytus should not be seen as advocating an interpretation that requires human conversion before death to be the recipients of Jesus’ preaching.²⁴ However, Reicke noted that Hippolytus must have believed that the souls to whom Christ preached had already converted before they met Christ during his descent because he refers to these souls as “holy souls.”²⁵ Thus, it appears, despite Dalton’s claims contrary, there is at least a possibility that Hippolytus interpreted 1 Pet 3:19 as referring to humans who had converted either before their deaths or at least before they encountered Christ in the underworld.

The Assyrian church also followed this interpretation. J. N. D. Kelly has demonstrated that the doctrine of the *descensus* was widely accepted within this church.²⁶ As opposed to previous church fathers like Irenaeus, it appears that 1 Pet 3:19 was cited to support the theology of the *descensus* within Syriac speaking regions. The *Peshitta* translation of verses 19–20a (“And he preached to the souls who were shut up in Sheol, those who had before been disobedient in the days of Noah”) includes a number of illuminating details. The writer translates “prison” as “Sheol” indicating that the prison was in fact the place of the dead. Reicke notes that that the translator’s rendering of *ᾠνέ* emphasizes that past sinfulness of the human souls gives the impression that they had already been converted prior to Christ’s proclamation to them.²⁷

²³ The “harrowing of hell” is a term used to describe the activity of Christ during the period between his death and resurrection. Since certain Christian theologians, as will be described below, understood salvation as possible only through belief in Christ, the faithful Jews of the OT still were imprisoned in Sheol/Hades. Upon his death, Christ traveled to the underworld and freed these individuals and escorted them to heaven.

²⁴ Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation*, 37.

²⁵ Reicke, *Disobedient Spirits*, 27. For a detailed commentary on Hippolytus’ work, see Reicke, *Disobedient Spirits*, 23–27. The Syriac fragment of Hippolytus’ *Easter Homily* can be found in Joannes Baptista Cardinal Pitra, *Analecta sacra* (Spicilegio Solesmensi parata iv Patres antenicaeni; Paris, 1883), 55.

²⁶ John Kelly, *The Early Christian Creeds* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), 378–83.

²⁷ Reicke, *Disobedient Spirits*, 34–35.

This interpretation, albeit not very popular, persisted during the Middle Ages and the Reformation through the mid-nineteenth century.²⁸ John Calvin, in the sixteenth century, adopted a similar exegesis of 1 Pet 3:18–22. In his commentary on 1 Peter, Calvin linked 3:19 with 4:6 and agreed that the πνεύματα referred to in verse 19 pertain to the spirits of the physically dead. Yet, because of theological considerations, he dismissed the possibility for release from sin after death. Calvin was not comfortable theologically with the notion that 1 Peter referenced humans who had repented shortly before they perished in the flood. Rather, he proposed that the spirits to whom Christ preached were the faithful characters of the Hebrew Bible. Thus, in Calvin's estimation, the unbelieving spirits in verse 20 and the spirits to whom God preached in verse 19 were not the same. Consequently, while imprisoned with unbelievers, the OT faithful still needed Christ's proclamation in order to be saved. For this interpretation Calvin draws upon φυλακή in 3:19. While acknowledging that this could refer to the faithful spirits being imprisoned with the sinners, he also proposed an alternate reading where the faithful spirits are watching or waiting for the coming of Jesus. Therefore, God did proclaim salvation to the righteous, but these souls were the OT righteous and not last-minute converts before the flood.²⁹

In the late-sixteenth century Robert Bellarmine, one of the first Roman Catholics to challenge Augustine's understanding of Christ's proclamation to the spirits, sought to link 1 Pet 3:19–20 with the *descensus* without allowing for the possibility of conversion after death. This was an attempt to promote the doctrine of Christ's descent against mounting criticism from Protestants, such as Calvin, while still acknowledging Augustine's theory that salvation could not occur in the realm of the dead. Therefore, he maintained that the souls to whom Christ preached during the descent had converted prior to, not as a result of, the proclamation of Christ. It appears that Bellarmine interpreted the prison of the spirits as purgatory and not Hades or Sheol. This would allow for a reading of 1 Peter as a reference to the descent without challenging traditional soteriological theology.³⁰

Within the past fifty years, S. Johnson is one scholar who has continued to support this reading of 1 Pet 3:18–22. Again, linking this passage with 4:6,

²⁸ For other early Church and Middle Age church fathers who hold this interpretation, see, Theophylactus, *Expositio in Epistolas catholicas: Jacobi* (PG 125:1232) and Nicephorus Callistus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.31 (PG 145:724f).

²⁹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Letter of Peter* (Calvin's Commentaries 22; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 113–15. However, Calvin goes on to allegorize his interpretation, arguing that the author is encouraging his readers to stand firm and remain faithful even though they may be surrounded by unbelievers. Many of the early reformers dealt with the difficulty of this passage by allegorizing it.

³⁰ Robertus Bellarminus, *Disputationes Roberti Bellarmini de controversiis christianae fidei, adversus huius temporis haereticos* (6 vols.; Naples: Josephum Giuliano, 1856–62), 280–84.

Johnson contends that the writer of 1 Peter is using a chiasmic structure from 3:18–4:6 in order to describe both the judgment and salvation offered by the proclamation of Christ. Sinners are judged, but the OT faithful are recipients of Christ's redemptive work. According to Johnson, this "deals with comprehensive work of Christ in saving all who will respond to the proclaimed word. This embraces all who died under the old covenant."³¹ There remain few who continue to maintain this understanding of the passage.³²

The final interpretation within this first broad line of thought regards Christ's proclamation as one of condemnation to the unrepentant sinners of Noah's generation. During the *triduum mortis* Christ proclaimed victory over human spirits who had sinned in the days of Noah. This interpretation was pioneered by seventeenth-century Lutheran orthodoxy. Again, those who originally presented such a view did so based upon theological considerations rather than upon a strict interpretation of the text. First, this understanding of the text would undermine Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory presented by Bellarmine described above. Christ went to Hades, not purgatory, to make his proclamation. Additionally, these Lutherans were also reacting against what they deemed to be an over-allegorical approach to 1 Peter taken by the early reformers. This proposed view would allow for a *descensus*, as described in the Apostles' Creed, without the possibility for a post-death conversion.³³ Overshadowed by strong support for Bellarmine's understanding, this interpretation of 1 Pet 3:18–22 was not able to post a serious challenge to the dominant views, nor is it currently held in contemporary scholarship.³⁴

1.2.2.2 The Proclamation of the Pre-existent Christ through Noah

A portion of previous scholarship has viewed 1 Pet 3:18–22 without any mention of the *triduum mortis* or other cosmic journey of Christ. The predominant interpretation of the Western Church from Augustine up to the Reformation understood verse 19 as a projection of Christ back to the days of Noah. Christ's spirit, at work in the person of Noah, preached to the sinners of Noah's generation. The pre-existent Christ heralded a message of repentance to humans who were metaphorically bound by sin. Thus, the spirits to whom

³¹ Johnson, "Preaching to the Dead," 48–51.

³² Heinrich J. Vogels, *Christi Abstieg ins Totenreich und das Läuterungsgericht an den Toten* (FTS 102; Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 88–141.

³³ For proponents of this view see Daniel Cramer, *De descensu Jesu Christi ad inferos exegema* (Stettin: Typis Samuelis Kelneri, sumptibus Davidis Reichardi, 1615); and Henricus Eckhard, *Tractatus de descensu Christi ad inferos, Et aliis nonnullis maximè controversis quaestionibus* (Leipzig: Henningus Grobiius iunior Haeredes, 1623) as cited by Reicke, *Disobedient Spirits*, 44–45. See also Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation*, 41.

³⁴ For a more detailed description of the history of this interpretation see Reicke, *Disobedient Spirits*, 44–46.

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