

# Wings

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*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”  
Isaiah 40:31*



August 28, 2011

## The Spirits in Prison

An odd passage in Peter's first epistle has spawned much speculation, but a careful sifting of the evidence reveals a simple, yet profound, message of encouragement.

“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 Pet. 3:18-20).

The reference to Christ preaching to the spirits in prison is mentioned in this context in passing, almost as a footnote. No details are provided, so we are left to piece together the meaning from whatever evidence we can gather elsewhere.

Some point to this verse as evidence that the dead get a second chance at redemption. But nothing is said in this passage about these spirits responding to the preaching and being saved. It is wishful thinking that contradicts everything the Bible says about the finality of death and judgment (Heb. 9:27).

The most common interpretation among brethren is that Jesus preached to the antediluvian world through the per-

son of Noah. But this passage has to be stretched beyond recognition to get that thought out of it. The preaching of Jesus was administered to spirits who were *formerly* disobedient—now imprisoned, no longer in rebellion. That description doesn't fit, if Jesus was somehow preaching to people (not spirits) still alive and kicking.

There are two clues in this context that point us in the right direction. First, note that the audience is described as “spirits in prison.” The Bible frequently describes angels as spirits (Heb. 1:7, 13-14). The demons who were cast out of people in Jesus' day were “unclean spirits” (Mk. 1:23-27). There is nothing in the context that demands these are *human* spirits, rather than spirit beings.

The second clue is the historical connection to Noah's Flood. In Genesis, the Flood narrative is introduced by an account of “the sons of God” interbreeding with the daughters of men, producing a race of “mighty men” (Gen. 6:1-4). The expression “sons of God” is used elsewhere in the O.T. to describe angelic beings (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7). The details

are sketchy, but clearly there was something highly unusual about these illicit relationships and their offspring that led to the punishment that followed.

Both of these clues are found again in Peter's second epistle, in wording that is eerily similar to our text: “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; and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly” (2 Pet. 2:4-5). These “angels who sinned” are the “spirits in prison,” punished for overstepping their bounds in the days of Noah. Note also that the Greek word for hell used here is *tartarus*, “the place of punishment of the Titans” (Moulton & Milligan).

While there is much we don't know, the evidence suggests that following His resurrection (“in the spirit”; see Rom. 1:3-4; 1 Tim. 3:16), Jesus went to the fallen angels awaiting their final punishment and declared His victory over their master, Satan. His triumph is complete!

– David King