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## THE SILENT SUFFERER.

In His great passion our Savior endured unspeakable agony, but rarely spoke. When He did open His mouth, it was to pray to His Heavenly Father, to warn and comfort His friends, to bear testimony to the truth, or to make intercession for His enemies. He began His suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane on Thursday evening, and ended it on the cross in the late afternoon of the next day. During these long hours He submitted to cruel and inhuman treatment without one word of resentment or complaint. He heard the taunts and jeers, and the false accusations of His enemies, and said nothing. "Neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not." 1 Pet. 2, 22. 23. It even happened that He positively refused to speak. Although Christ spoke on certain occasions, still He appears throughout His great passion as the Silent Sufferer.

The silence of Jesus is most remarkable. It is very unusual. Why did He suffer in silence? How shall we be benefited by it? Let us study this aspect of Christ's suffering.

*Christ was silent because His silence was foretold by the prophets.* "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," John 1, 29, must by His silence resemble the lamb of the Mosaic sacrifice, which was dumb when it was brought to the slaughter. The Messiah must not only be "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," but also a man of silence. He must bear His intense torture without complaint. He must not cry, nor bewail His hard lot. He must not revile those that revile

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## THE IDEA OF A PROBATION AFTER DEATH, IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.\*

Our problem is to ascertain what the New Testament writers teach with regard to the possibility of there being an extension into the period after death of that probation for life eternal which they plainly consider this life to be. It is not,

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then, a question of what manner of teaching we may be able to deduce from Scripture by an ever-broadening series of logical syllogisms, resting like an inverted pyramid on the slender basis of isolated words and texts, but simply of what these writers themselves believed and taught, in so far as we are able to learn that at the present time.

We find that the belief that the Scriptures did teach a probation of some kind or other after death has been quite general down through practically all ages of Church History. Many have hoped that such probation would be given as would result in the final salvation of all men. Origen, the early Anabaptists, and the present-day Universalists have taught that all created beings, even Satan and his host of evil spirits, would in the end turn in willing obedience to serve the Lord of all. They base this doctrine on such passages as Acts 3, 21, which speaks of a "restoration of all things"; Matt. 19, 28, which suggests that the universe will at the Lord's coming undergo a "regeneration"; 1 Cor. 15, 22—28, which speaks of the subjection of all things unto God; Phil. 2, 10, 11, which indicates God's purpose to cause every knee to bow in adoration before Christ, both "of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth"; and the many passages which emphasize the universal efficacy of Christ's atoning death on the cross, as, *e. g.*, John 12, 32; Eph. 1, 10; Col. 1, 20; 1 Tim. 4, 10; 2, 4; Titus 2, 11. Besides, they say, it would not be just of an omnipotent, omniscient God to create men in such a way that He knew they would fall into sins, whose result would be eternal torment. Nor can the eternal damnation of any created thing be reconciled with the idea of God as a loving Father.

But thus they leave out of account the many passages in Scripture which speak of the exclusion from God's kingdom of the wicked, their destruction in an eternal fire, and their self-inflicted separation from a God who would have saved them, — "but *they* would not." They emphasize, too, God's love at the expense of His justice, His willingness to forgive at the expense of His hatred of sin. And they ignore the fact that

free will, God's highest gift to men, would no longer be their possession were we to suppose that God by His omnipotence should literally "compel them to come in" to His kingdom (Luke 14, 23), as some believe He will. The will that once has resisted God can resist again. And so, as long as man retains his free will, we must admit the possibility of there being those who will persist even to an endless eternity in opposing the gracious will of the God of Love. Neither reason nor Scripture, then, give, in the last analysis, any real support to such Universalist doctrines. We must, at best, be content to let the problems offered by such passages and arguments as those referred to remain unsolved as a part of the complex of "antinomies" that men find themselves in when they seek to solve the great riddle of the presence of evil in the universe of a perfect God.

A more detailed examination of the passages referred to is not necessary here, since they all speak of the results of a supposed continued probation after death rather than such a probation itself.

But there are many that do not find Universalist teachings in the New Testament, who yet think to find there some warrant for believing that this life does not end the period of probation, but that there will be another opportunity in the time between death and the final judgment for all men to repent and come to a saving knowledge of the truth, or at least for such as have had no adequate opportunity in this life. They think this life too short a period of probation for an endless eternity. Such countless millions die without ever having heard of the Savior of the World. So many that have heard the Gospel have had little opportunity to hear aright. And it seems unthinkable, then, that such men, through no fault of their own, should be condemned even to a comparatively mild form of punishment, without any further opportunity to gain the better life of communion with God. "For how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10, 14.) The wish begets the interpretation; and so those who accept the Bible

as their authority find in it several statements which they can use as the basis for their teaching. But the majority do not hesitate to explore the dimly lit realm of the life beyond the grave far beyond the point to which the Scriptures can lead them. They seek by all manner of speculation to search out its secrets. Consequently, no field has been made the sporting-ground of a greater variety of fanciful and extravagant theories. From the allegorizings and dreams of Origen to those of Swedenborg, from the apocryphal Apocalypses of late Judaism and early Christianity to the Millenarianism and "Russellism" of to-day, the fertile imagination of man has busily sought, by the aid of philosophical, theological, and mystical speculations, to fill the aching void in our knowledge of the future and set our hearts and curious minds at rest.

Much as the multitude of theories as to the character of the future life that thus have been produced may claim to be based on Scripture, it is all too evident that Bible-texts, as a rule, have but served as spring-boards from which the would-be seer has leaped into a bottomless sea of arbitrary speculation, into which others follow at their peril. And so, many of the more honest advocates of the theory of a probation after death confess that they find only too little support for their beliefs in the New Testament, and that they must base their teaching rather on general philosophical grounds or their own subjective feeling as to what the truth of the matter must be. Thus, the great English preacher Farrar, in his eloquent sermons on "Eternal Hope," appeals in reality more to the Holy Spirit within his own heart than to the inspired Scriptures, and believes that his own divinely trained "Christian consciousness," and feeling as to what is good and right, is to be relied upon fully as much as the written Word.

But whatever view one may have of Farrar as an authority, it is plain that we cannot read his views of the life hereafter back into the New Testament writings and claim that this is what they also teach, without due warrant from those writings themselves, such as a sound exegesis alone can give. We have,

then, to consider the New Testament passages adduced in support of the doctrine of a probation after death, in their connection, seeking only to learn what the writers themselves apparently meant by their statements.

The advocates of the theory of a "second probation" devote most of their energy to confuting the supposed popular and orthodox notions of the state after death, according to which men immediately after death proceed either to a dreamy heaven of idle bliss or a fiery hell of terrible suffering. They seek to show, especially from the use of the word "Sheol" in the Old Testament and "Hades" in the New Testament, that the state between death and the final Judgment Day is a neutral one, with no essential differences in the condition of the good and the evil other than such as existed in this life. They seek also to show that the word used for eternal (*aionios*) denotes an "age-long" or indefinite period only, at the end of which another age of another character may begin, and hence that "eternal punishment" means punishment not for an infinite time, but for a certain period only. Thus they make room for their positive teaching of the intermediate state as one of temporary, disciplinary suffering, by which the repentant are purified and the unrepentant gradually brought to a recognition of their sins and the need of faith and trust in God. This positive doctrine they support by such passages as Matt. 12, 32; 10, 15; 11, 22; Luke 12, 48. The first of these says that "whosoever shall speak a word against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come," which they interpret to mean that there are some sins which *will* find forgiveness in the world to come. But this passage must be interpreted in the light of the parallel passage in the older document, Mark 3, 29: "Whosoever shall blaspheme against the Holy Spirit hath *never* forgiveness, but is guilty of an *eternal* sin." That is, it is simply an emphatic way of stating the fact that the sin against the Holy Ghost is one which by its very nature precludes the possibility of any forgiveness. Besides, "the world to come" does not refer

to the period between death and Judgment Day, but to the period following the Judgment Day: the new age, when Christ's kingdom enters upon its final stage. The period between death and the judgment is uniformly included in "the world" (*houtos ho aion*) by New Testament writers. That there should be any probation after the final judgment is excluded by the very idea of such a judgment and the whole tone of the many passages dealing with this judgment.

The passages in Matt. 10 and 11 speak of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, and Gomorrah as destined to find it more tolerable in the Judgment than the cities of Judah that now had rejected the Messiah and refused to repent. This is interpreted to mean that these cities will have an opportunity before Judgment Day to atone for their sins and to repent, since it is inconceivable that the Lord should let those who would repent when given the best opportunity (11, 22) be condemned without having had such an opportunity. But it is evident that this and the other parallel passages do not speak of the question of the salvation of the wicked cities mentioned, but of their guilt as compared with the unbelieving Jewish cities, and simply emphasize strongly the tremendous guilt which the latter cities incurred when they rejected Jesus. To the question why the notoriously wicked cities of Tyre, Sidon, etc., were not granted such preaching as Capernaum and others were, if they would have repented at it, these passages do not even suggest an answer; and so it is at best but a precarious conclusion that they draw from an obscure turn of expression who would make these passages teach the dogma of a probation after death.

The other passage, Luke 12, 48, speaks of the greater punishment that he who has been given much shall receive as contrasted with the one who has been given little. This is but the principle of which the passages quoted above are the concrete examples, and it is not possible by a legitimate exegesis to infer from it that the writer intended to teach that some should be punished only for a short period of time, after

which they might be taken again into grace. It speaks of degrees of punishment "in intension" rather than "in extension." At any rate, it cannot be referred to the usual doctrine of a probation after death, since the passing of the various sentences of punishment is represented as taking place at the time of the Lord's return, *i. e.*, on the final Judgment Day.

Important commentators deny the validity of the "probationist" interpretation of the above-quoted passages. There are, however, two more passages, 1 Pet. 3, 19 and 4, 6, which do seem to afford some basis for the doctrine of a probation after death. And many commentators think that the writer of these verses really intended to teach that Christ, and possibly others, preached His Gospel to the spirits of the departed with the purpose of giving them yet another opportunity to believe the good news. Although they admit this is a new doctrine, and one which has no other basis in Scripture, they point to other doctrines, such as that of the Eucharist, which likewise rest on a very few passages, and claim that the authority of Peter is sufficient to establish this doctrine as the accepted teaching of the primitive Christian Church.

Unfortunately for their position, these two passages are among the most obscure and difficult in the whole Bible. Delitzsch, indeed, calls them "sonnenklar," but he finds few who agree with him in that. The great variety of interpretations of these passages, the fact that men of the same general dogmatic trend and prepossessions explain them in quite different ways, the difficulty of harmonizing some of the most attractive interpretations with the context and the general teachings of the writer of 1 Peter, all go to belie Delitzsch's judgment of their perspicuity, and to indicate that they form but a very precarious foundation for the far-reaching and revolutionary doctrine of a probation after death. It is not like the New Testament writers and especially Peter with their sober common sense, and their insistence on the duty of serving God in this life, and their belief in the final judgment as one close at hand, to come thus in passing with such a speculative



doctrine as that of the prospect of a probation, after the end of this life, in the shadowy realm of the dead.

We shall not attempt to determine in all particulars the correct interpretation of 1 Pet. 3, 19 and 4, 6, but shall take into account only so much as is necessary to establish whether or not these passages teach a probation after death.

1 Pet. 3, 19 is the *sedes doctrinae* of Christ's descent into hell. As this doctrine is closely connected with the idea of a probation after death, it will be necessary first to review briefly the various ways in which this doctrine is understood.

The Greek Catholic Church teaches that Christ's human soul descended to hell, preached the Gospel to those there held bound by Satan, and set free all believers, especially the Old Testament saints. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Christ in His entire human-divine person went to the *limbus Patrum*, where the Old Testament saints were awaiting redemption by Him, and took them with Him to heaven. The Reformed churches, as a rule, think of Christ's descent into hell as merely a figurative expression for the pains of hell which He suffered in Gethsemane and on the cross, and find thus in 1 Pet. 3, 19 no reference to a real descent to hell. A few of them, however, and also the Lutheran theologian Aepinus, have taught that Christ suffered torment in hell during the period between His death and resurrection. The Lutheran Church teaches that Christ's glorified resurrection body descended according to His human nature to hell and preached there to the spirits, in that He both in word (*verbaliter*) and by His self-manifestation in glory (*realiter*) showed that He had triumphed over all evil powers and sealed their judgment forever.

The majority of modern theologians, both Lutheran and Reformed, teach that Christ descended either to hell or to the kingdom of the dead, considered as an intermediate state, and preached there the Gospel in order to save those who now were ready to repent and believe in Him. Some, however, look upon the article in the Creed, "He descended into hell," merely

as the expression of Christ's remaining in the state of death for three days.

In order to understand the passage on which these doctrines are principally based, we must first see in what context it is placed. There are some commentators, indeed, *e. g.*, Knopf, among the newer ones, who claim that this passage and its connected clauses, vv. 17—22, have no real relation to the rest of the epistle, but form merely a sort of doctrinal digression, occasioned by the use of certain words concerning Christ. But if any sort of connection can be established, evidently we should not be too ready to accuse the writer of making aimless digressions. Peter is writing to Christians who because of the persecutions they had to endure were often on the point of losing courage and falling away from the faith. He seeks to comfort them by showing how brief their time of trial will be, and how glorious the reward of those who stand fast till the end. After an introduction, in which he presents the glory and joy of being a Christian (1, 1—12), he exhorts them to grow in faith and holiness, in obedience to God, and in love to the brethren, so that they may become "a royal priesthood, an holy nation" (1, 13—2, 10). Then in 2, 11—4, 6 he gives his readers directions for conduct in their relations with the heathen world. First (2, 11—3, 7) he shows how the Christians should conduct themselves in the various social relations of life, so that their enemies, the heathen, might find no cause for complaint against them. Then (3, 8—14) he exhorts them to do all in their power to keep on good terms with their heathen neighbors, to repay evil with good and reviling with blessing, and to remember that the Lord will punish all those that do evil. This does not mean that they shall cringe before their enemies in servile fear, or be afraid to defend the truth as they have learned it (3, 14—16), but that they must not let themselves be driven by persecution into doing evil deeds, but rather strive to conquer their enemies by showing themselves blameless, thus keeping a good conscience in all things, and putting their persecutors to shame. Then, in the rest of this

section (3, 17—4, 6), Peter shows why it is better to suffer, even while doing only good and seeking to win others for the faith, than to suffer as the result of their own evil-doing in the attempt to defend themselves against their persecutors, thus but giving their enemies added reason for reviling them; or than to suffer the condemnation of God by seeking to gain the favor of their enemies by joining in their sinful excesses (cf. 4, 3—5). For when they suffer for well-doing, they are following in the footsteps of Christ, who also suffered, "the Righteous for the unrighteous," in order that He might bring such sinners as they are to God. But Christ's suffering did not last long. For immediately after being put to death in the flesh, He was quickened again in the spirit, and then began His triumphal reign in His Kingdom of Glory (vv. 17. 18). First, He descended to the place where the wicked generation destroyed in the Flood was confined, and announced to them His victory over sin and death and the establishment of His glorious kingdom (v. 19). Then He showed Himself as the resurrected Lord to His disciples, ascended to heaven, and took His place on the right hand of God, where "angels and authorities and powers" were made subject unto Him (v. 22). But now, when Christ, their King, thus had conquered all His enemies, and after a brief period of suffering had gained such great honor and power, those who followed His example could also be certain of gaining the victory through Him, saved out of the present evil world by the miraculous grace of God working through Baptism, even as Noah and his family were by the grace of God saved out of the ruin of the world in the days of the Flood. The enemies of God and His Church, on the other hand, would now, as in the days of Noah, meet with due punishment and be forever made powerless to harm the Christians (vv. 20. 21).

But the Christians must also beware lest they fall away from the faith, or in any way yield to the temptations of their own flesh and their heathen surroundings, thus becoming subject to the condemnation of the heathen (4, 1—6). For

Christ shall judge all men and call to account all those who have sinned, at the same time as He justifies those who have believed the Gospel, whether those that have already died, or those who live at the time of His coming (vv. 5 b. 6; cf. 4, 17—19). In the rest of the epistle (4, 7—5, 14), Peter emphasizes again in various ways the necessity of leading a holy life and standing fast in faith against the wiles of the devil and the blandishments of the wicked world, if they are to escape the condemnation that is destined to overtake the unbelievers. (Cf. also 2 Peter.)

In this connection, then, it is hard to think that Peter really intended to teach that "the spirits in prison" had through the preaching of Christ or any of His prophets and disciples been offered another opportunity to accept the salvation they had so determinedly refused in this life. But it will be necessary to take up the more detailed exegesis of vv. 18 b—20 and 4, 6, in order to establish what their true meaning is, or the most likely of the many interpretations put upon them.

Christ was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit." The Greek *sarki* must be the dative of reference, put to death with respect to, or in the sphere, of His fleshly life. Most of the older translators and commentators make *pneumati*, however into the dative of instrument, "quickened *by* the Spirit," *i. e.*, the Spirit of God, or Christ's own divine nature. But the close parallelism between the two clauses, "put to death in the flesh" and "quickened in the spirit," makes it more natural to explain the second dative also as the dative of reference, *i. e.*, "quickened *in* the spirit," living again, no longer in the sphere of the fleshly life, but, instead, in that of a new spiritual life, the glorified, transcendent life of the resurrection body. Thus the majority of modern interpreters. But whichever way this clause is translated, it expresses Christ's quickening again after His death, and is to be distinguished from the resurrection proper, the *anastasis*, only by that it lacks the external manifestations of quickening, characteristic of the latter.

The next clause, "in which also He went," is referred

best to the whole preceding clause, "quickened in the spirit"; i. e., "in this new quickened life of the spirit He went," etc. Gueder and others have translated *en ho* as "wherefore" or "on account of which," making it into a conjunctive phrase instead of referring the relative to its antecedent. But this is not good Greek, and is also contrary to Peter's usage. Still the connection between the relative and its antecedent *pneumati* is somewhat loose, so that the following actions should not be conceived of as taking place in "the spirit" alone. For "the spirit" is so closely connected with its governing participle "quickened" that it in reality makes one idea with it. That is, in this state, which was the result of His being quickened in the spirit, Christ went, etc. The "also," *kai*, is to be connected with "in which," and emphasizes that it was as quickened in the spirit that Christ did what is related in the following.

But Augustine and, following him, Beza and the majority of Reformed theologians, together with some Lutherans, like Gerhard, and Wohlenberg among the modern theologians, have sought to make out that the activities mentioned in the following clauses were carried on "in the spirit" alone, so that it was as pure spirit, before His incarnation, that the Christ is conceived as preaching to the spirits, either through Noah or through other men of God. "The spirits in prison" is taken as a figurative expression for the enslavement of the souls of men under sin, or else is interpreted as a reference to the present state of those to whom Noah preached, and who at the time he preached to them were free, but now are in hell. By this interpretation neither the doctrine of probation after death nor that of Christ's descent into hell finds any support in this passage. But it is not a natural interpretation, and seems to have been adopted by many as a last resort only for the sake of escaping from the dogmatic difficulties that other interpretations brought them into. For this whole section is evidently speaking of the God-man, Jesus Christ, and not of the Word before incarnation, the *logos asarkos*. To make the clause "in which," etc., refer to an activity carried on two thousand years

before is straining grammar and language too much. Besides, the word "went," *poreutheis*, expresses local motion from one place, here the grave, to another, the "prison," where the spirits were held captive; but such a word could not have been used if the writer's purpose was to intimate that Christ had spoken through Noah or some other witness of his at the time of the Flood. And then we read that Christ preached to those "who aforetime were disobedient," not that He "aforetime preached to those who were disobedient." If the latter were the intended meaning, the "aforetime," *pote*, would have had to stand after "went" or "preached." And so even some interpreters, like Knopf, who refer the *en ho* to *pneumata* alone, and limit the activity spoken of to Christ's spirit as contrasted with the earthly or the resurrection body, admit that the time referred to must be that between Christ's death and resurrection. If we admit the close connection between "quickened" and "in the spirit" postulated above, it becomes still more evident that the time referred to is that between Christ's death and resurrection, with the difference from Knopf's view that the preaching is conceived of as taking place *after* Christ's assumption of the resurrection body instead of before. It is evident, then, that Peter here is speaking of some kind or other of preaching to certain "spirits in prison." And the great majority of modern commentators agree that this is the most likely interpretation.

But then, who are these "spirits in prison," *tois en phylake pneumasin*? Some commentators, as Baur, Spitta, Hart, Knopf, etc., think that they are the angels referred to in the Book of Enoch, 6—16, 18 f. 21; the Book of Jubilees, 5; cf. Jude 6, 2 Pet. 2, 4, Gen. 6. The word *pneumata* is widely used of angels, while *psychai* is the word generally used to denote the souls of the departed. But we cannot prove that Peter made such great use of the Book of Enoch, or presupposed such general knowledge of it, as this theory would imply. The fact that it was extant at his time does not prove his dependence on it, any more than the fact that the speculations of Russell and his ilk have been published in this generation

prove that the ordinary orthodox or modern theologians to-day go to them for ideas, or are even particularly acquainted with them. For our purpose indeed, it makes little difference whether the "spirits" are thought of as ordinary human beings or as the descendants of the angels of the apocryphal legends, since in either case they are considered as having been disobedient to God and as receiving their punishment at the time of the Flood. It is possible, however, to use the word *pneuma* of the souls of deceased men, as Heb. 12, 23, "the spirits of just men made perfect," for example, shows. Peter uses the word here perhaps influenced by the use of *pneuma* in connection with the definition of the character of Christ's being at the time of the preaching, and also to distinguish these spirits from the "souls," *psychai*, that he mentions below (v. 20) as having been saved from the Flood, and who were living human beings.

These spirits are "in prison." *en phylake*. This cannot be a place where the Old Testament saints await the coming of the Savior, as the Catholics teach; nor the kingdom of the dead, considered as an intermediate state in which there is neither pain nor happiness, as many later dogmaticians teach. For it is those "who were disobedient" that are held captive there, not the pious men of pre-Christian days, as also Calvin, *e. g.*, held, nor such as died without having had any adequate opportunity to learn to know God, and who thus might be held undeserving of any punishment. The word *phylake* is used in Rev. 20, 7 and 18, 2 of the place where the devil and his angels are held till the Judgment, a place which according to Rev. 20, 3 is to be found in "the abyss," *abyssos*. It is used to denote a place of punishment also in Matt. 5, 25; Luke 22, 23, etc. Cf. 2 Pet. 2, 4 and Jude 6, where it is written that the evil angels are "committed to pits of darkness" and "kept in everlasting bonds under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." We cannot, then, take this "prison" to be such a place as the Catholics and many modern theologians would make it out to be, but rather a place of punishment

and perhaps—when we think of what imprisonment meant in ancient times—extreme torture. This interpretation is supported by the reference in 2 Pet. 2, 5 to the contemporaries of Noah as examples of the judgment that awaits the ungodly.

To such ungodly, disobedient, rebellious spirits, reserved in a place of torment for the Judgment, was it, then, according to Peter, that the quickened Christ went and preached. What was the character and purpose of this preaching? So strange is this idea of Christ's making a single journey to the prison where the men who brought on the greatest catastrophe in the history of the world were confined, just to "preach" to them once and then ascend to heaven, that many commentators would fain find some other way of interpreting the statement. But it is evident from the foregoing that this was Peter's meaning. And it is manifest that such an idea may not have been so strange to him as it is to us.

It may be that we have a key to the correct interpretation of this difficult passage in the reference of Christ (Matt. 24, 36—40) to the days of Noah as a type of the days preceding the Last Judgment; *i. e.*, that 1 Peter mentions especially the spirits that were disobedient in the days of Noah, because they are taken as a type of the wicked world which is to be judged at the Last Day. Then, the character of the preaching here predicated of Christ must be determined, for lack of other data, by the demands of this parallelism.

But most commentators, from Clement of Alexandria to Meyer and a host of scholars since his day, have ignored this and claim that Christ must have preached the *Gospel* to these spirits, giving those that now were ready to repent another opportunity to obtain salvation. That only these most wicked spirits are mentioned is explained as a case of synecdoche, these being especially named to show that even such depraved creatures were not debarred from the proffer of grace made to all the dead, according to 4, 6.

The great difficulty in the way of this interpretation, one which all admit as weakening their argument greatly, is the



fact that it does not fit in at all with the context, unless this is twisted and turned in ways which involve the interpreter in still greater difficulties. For why should the Gospel be preached at this particular point of time to just those disobedient angels or spirits who had caused the first great exhibition of God's hatred of sin, and His power to punish it? How could the mention of such preaching, without any indication as to whether it was favorably received or not, serve to prove Christ's power or glory and honor, or to comfort the Christians who now were undergoing persecution at the hands of just such men as had been condemned in the Flood? How can the offer of salvation to such disobedient spirits be reconciled with the threat of judgment made against the disobedient men of that day (4, 5), and the suggestion that only "a few" (v. 20) were to be saved out of the coming destruction? Why should another chance be given those who already long before had worn out the patience of God, whose "long-suffering waited" in vain? How could Peter speak of Baptism as that which saved his readers, and at the same time imply that others were saved without this Baptism? That would but defeat his purpose with coming with this "doctrinal digression." It cannot be said that these spirits are representatives of the many who have never heard the Gospel, and that it is the purpose of the writer to show that the Gospel of Christ had reached all men, those of ages long past as well as those of his own time, as Knopf, *e. g.*, says. For these spirits had been given as much opportunity as the righteous Noah to learn the will of God. According to 2 Pet. 2, 5, Noah was a "preacher of righteousness"; and we can, then, suppose that he did all he could, while preparing for the Flood, to warn his unbelieving neighbors. But they had despised his message and mocked at his warnings (cf. Gen. 6), and thereby also God Himself, and the Christ whom Peter believes to have been at the right hand of God. Some commentators, *e. g.*, Luther, have thought that there perhaps were those among the men destroyed in the Flood who repented at the last moment, as the waters swept over

them, and that it was these Christ preached to. But if they had really repented, there is no reason why, according to the usual New Testament doctrine, they should not have been accepted into the place of the believing dead immediately, instead of two thousand years afterwards. Other commentators, *e. g.*, Bengel, try to establish that it was to all spirits in general that Christ preached, by making "in the days of Noah," *en hemerais Noe*, limit only "the long-suffering of God," so that this clause gives simply a striking example of God's long-suffering. But to read this meaning into the passage would necessitate understanding a *hoion*, "just as," before "in the days," so that the sentence would read: "when the long-suffering of God waited, just as in the days of Noah." But if that had been the writer's meaning, it is difficult to understand why he should not have expressed himself in that way rather than as he does.

It is not really possible, then, to evade in these ways the difficulties presented by the statement that it was to the disobedient ones in Noah's time that Christ preached. And those who would limit the preaching of the Gospel in the after-life, and the offer of a second opportunity for salvation to those who had had no fair chance in this life, cannot appeal to this passage for Scriptural support for their doctrine. So far as this passage is concerned, the preaching in "the prison" was limited to those who, according to Christ's words in Luke 16, 29 ("They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them"), had already been given sufficiently clear instruction regarding the way of salvation. For Noah is uniformly, where he is mentioned in Scripture, put in line with the great prophets as a representative of the true God. Cf. Heb. 11, 7; 2 Pet. 2, 5, etc.

But in spite of these difficulties, which most commentators, *e. g.*, Alford, frankly acknowledge, they still insist on interpreting our passage so as to make it teach the doctrine of a second probation. Their main support is the word *ekeryzen*. This *must* mean the same here as elsewhere in Scripture, they say, *i. e.*, "to preach the Gospel," and so, in short, they rest

their whole case on this word. But this word literally means simply to announce or proclaim as a herald, *keryx*, without indicating the character of the message proclaimed, as the word *euaggelizein* does. Thus in Matt. 10, 27, Luke 12, 3, and Rev. 5, 2 it means to proclaim publicly and with a loud voice. In this general meaning the word is also used by the Greek writers and in the Septuagint. The content and character of the proclamation has, then, always to be determined by the context. Cf. also in the New Testament Matt. 3, 1, Acts 15, 21, Rom. 2, 21, and Gal. 5, 11, where there is reference to a proclamation of the *Law*.

It is true that the word, as generally used in the New Testament, is practically synonymous with *euaggelizein*, or the preaching of the Gospel. Zetzschwitz has examined all the passages in which the word occurs, and puts it as the result of his investigation that the distinctive connotation of the word is: the "preaching" or announcement of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom of forgiving grace. Not all the New Testament writers use the word in this way. And if any weight is to be attached to the matter of the individual writer's vocabulary as we have it in the limited literature before us, *ekeryxen* cannot be said necessarily to connote such preaching with Peter, since he always uses *euaggelizein* otherwise. But ordinarily this heraldic announcement of the establishment of Christ's Kingdom of Grace is taken as synonymous with *euaggelizein*, the "preaching of the good news," since it is conceived as a welcome message to all. But as a matter of fact, this announcement was not a welcome one to all, *e.g.*, the Pharisees, since it did not measure up to their ideas of what this announcement should be. Furthermore, when Christ's redeeming work on earth was finished, His kingdom is conceived as entering upon a new phase, upon what is called the Kingdom of Glory. He is now the triumphant Christ, no longer the suffering Savior, who is despised and rejected of men. His enemies are virtually overcome, although their resistance continues until the Last Judgment, when Sin and Death are destroyed and

all things are summed up in Christ. The announcement of the establishment of such a Kingdom of Glory would also be "good news" to all of Christ's followers. But just as the announcement of the establishment of His Kingdom of Grace meets only with the ridicule and unbelief and careless disregard of those who do not repent of their sins, so we must conceive of the announcement of the Kingdom of Glory, of Christ's victory over all His enemies and the gradual destruction of them all, as being met with anything but joy by His enemies. The opposite conception would imply such Universalistic doctrines as already have been seen to be out of accord with the general tenor of New Testament teachings, as they certainly are of Peter's teaching.

The meaning of the word in our passage must, then, be determined by the connection. If the "preaching," the announcement here made, can be conceived of as a welcome one to those who heard it, the advocates of the theory of a probation after death have won their case in so far. If not, we must seek for some other interpretation of this passage. But we cannot take up the psychological question of how the announcement of Christ's victory over sin would affect those who formerly had been disobedient, in the opinion of modern philosophers and psychologists, but must limit ourselves to what Peter's opinion of the reception of Christ's preaching apparently was. Since the passage itself says nothing directly about this, we must either confess entire ignorance as to what the conceived object of the preaching was, or else be satisfied to glean what we can from the context of the passage and the teaching of Peter and the early Christians in general. And so the "probationist" interpretation of the passage meets all the difficulties mentioned above (p. 219).

Much as it may grate on modern theological nerves, there is another interpretation that would seem to fit in much better with the context. That is, that Christ here, according to Peter, begins His activities as the revived Messiah by announcing to the generation which had been conspicuous for its insulting

rebellion against God (cf. Gen. 6, 1—8) the establishment of that kingdom of power and glory which they had doubted God would be able to found. Even as the judgment on a wicked world began with them, a judgment which shall be consummated at the Last Day, when Sin and Death at last are destroyed, so the announcement of the establishment of Christ's Kingdom of Glory was first made to them, an announcement which on the Last Day shall be made to the whole universe of men and angels and resurrected dead. Now we know from the rest of the earliest Christian literature that the coming of Christ at the Last Day was conceived as meaning terror and horror to all who had not come to faith in Him, and that the announcement of the consummation of His victory brings them only despair and rage. And so we cannot but think that Peter conceived the preaching to the spirits in prison as having had a similar effect on them. If they had hoped for release through the downfall of Him who had condemned them by the judgment of the Flood, they were now disillusioned, even as those who in the Last Days defy God and say: "Where is the promise of His coming?" shall confess themselves lost, and pray that the mountains would fall over them to destroy them.

This interpretation is supported by the parallelism of the following verses. There the salvation of the readers of the epistle by the water of Baptism is compared with the salvation of Noah and his family through the waters of the Flood. The enemies of the Christians are, then, evidently to be compared with the wicked men that perished in the Flood. These were punished because they despised the word which Noah preached to them, and disobeyed God. So, too, those who now despise the Word of God and the disciples of the risen Christ will meet with their due reward when He comes who is "ready to judge the quick and the dead." The corruption, and the hatred of the true Gospel, which the Christians see all about them, are but signs of the fact that "the end of all things is at hand" (4, 7), even as the degenerate state of all mankind, apart from "the eight souls" that were saved, was in the days of Noah

the immediate cause of the destruction of the world by the Flood. And so, when mention is made in this connection of Christ's going to announce to the spirits of such disobedient creatures the establishment of His Kingdom of Glory, we must think that Peter had in mind Christ's coming again to judge the world on the Last Day rather than the extension of His preaching of the message of forgiveness to the underworld; and that he thought of this "preaching" to the spirits in prison rather as the first stage of the Judgment than as the beginning of a new preaching of grace, otherwise entirely unknown to him and other New Testament writers.

The main objection to this interpretation is that it leaves no apparent room for the Last Judgment. If all men, the living and the dead, are to be judged at the Last Day, how can it be said that they are judged, or that their judgment is announced and sealed at any time previously? This argument is also advanced against the common notion of man's final fate being fixed at the time of the death of his body. That, too, seems to leave no place for such a judgment as that of Judgment Day.

But in this as in other things we must conceive of different stages of development. In life there is growth from lower to higher forms, from the humble seed to the full-blown flower. In death there is likewise progression from growing weakness to final dissolution and destruction. The Scriptures plainly teach that there are stages in the Christian's life of blessedness—this world of mingled joy and sorrow, the life beyond the grave in the Paradise of God, the far more glorious life of the resurrection body in the completed kingdom of the returned Messiah. And so, too, it is evident that there are stages in the execution of judgment on those who refuse the offers of salvation made them, and who persist in sin. In this life, sin punishes itself in many ways in the body. At death all men "are judged in the flesh,"—some, indeed, "in order that they might live in the spirit," others, the unrighteous ones, "kept under punishment unto the Day of Judgment," as a

prisoner convicted of crime is held under guard till his sentence may be executed. These are but the inevitable stages in the way that leads to eternal death. And so we find Christ's sentence of judgment on evil-doers, passed not only at the Last Day, but at various stages of their career, culminating at the final judgment on the Last Day. This is the common New Testament conception and must be taken into account in the interpretation of our passage, however little we may be able to reconcile ourselves to it. Meyer and others accuse those who interpret our passage somewhat as above of being swayed by dogmatic prejudices. But such an accusation is rather a dangerous boomerang, which often hits the one who makes it hardest of all. And it is to be remembered that we are not seeking to build up a dogmatic system of our own, but to learn what the New Testament writers' ideas on the subjects concerned were.

And so we must decide that this passage does not give any real support for the doctrine of a probation after death, but that it rather, if it is to be interpreted as referring at all to a preaching to the dead, supports the old Lutheran view of Christ's preaching in Hades as an announcement of judgment, a type of the judgment of the Last Day. Some of the latest interpreters also recognize this. Thus Loofs, *e.g.*, says (*Third Congress for the History of Religions*, II, 291): "The Lutheran conception of the Creed, which *more than others does justice to its present text* (1 Pet. 3, 19), is, in fact, in no way derived from the New Testament." That is, he finds in this passage no reference to a descent to hell and a preaching of any kind to departed dead, although he recognizes that the interpretation outlined above is more true to the text than the general "probationist" interpretation. In his article in Hastings's *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, on "The Descent to Hades," he also denies that this passage gives support to the usual doctrine of a probation after death, although he believes that this doctrine must on other grounds be conceded to be correct. In fact, it is just as easy to apply this passage

to Marcion's form of the doctrine of a second probation as to any other; according to him the "Gentiles," including the Antediluvians, Cain, the Sodomites, etc., were given deliverance through Christ's preaching, while Noah and the rest of the Jewish patriarchs were left behind, still waiting for "another Messiah." And this certainly must be taken merely as the *reductio ad absurdum* of the usual modern interpretation. A further indication that this passage cannot rightly be referred to the doctrine of a probation after death is the fact that it was never used by the early Fathers in defense of their doctrine of Christ's descent to hell and His preaching there, which, according to them, was confined to the Old Testament saints. They based this doctrine on other passages, such as Matt. 27, 51 ff., etc. —

But then, how about 1 Pet. 4, 6? There it is expressly stated that "the Gospel was preached even to the dead." But this passage gives even less support to the doctrine of a probation after death than 3, 19. Many interpreters who find such a teaching in the latter passage do not find it in the former. It is, in fact, one of the most obscure passages to be found in the Bible, as is sufficiently attested by the circumstance that there are some twenty different interpretations of it. Consequently some commentators, *e. g.*, Cremer, have suggested that it ought to be deleted, together with 3, 19, 'as a gloss that has crept into the text. Where so many commentators have failed to find a satisfactory interpretation, it is safest not to dogmatize. If we, then, can but establish whether or no it teaches the doctrine of a probation after death, it will not be necessary to decide in all details just what the correct interpretation is. It will be the part of wisdom for us not to presume to do that which other (?) great commentators have failed to do.

The circumstance that this statement: "The Gospel was preached to the dead" comes so close after the statement of 3, 19 has done them both harm exegetically. When it is asked if Christ did not preach to others than to the disobedient of Noah's day, this statement is made to come to the rescue and



prove that He preached to all. When it is asked, regarding 4, 6, who it was that preached to the dead, we are referred to 3, 19 and told that it was Christ. Whether it is possible to justify this connection between the two will depend on the exegesis of the passage in its immediate context.

In 4, 1—6 the writer is warning his readers against living again in their old sins and yielding to the ridicule and abuse of their heathen neighbors so as to follow their licentious example. He comforts them in their trials by reminding them that those who speak evil against them shall give account to the righteous Judge, who now is ready to judge all men, and who will see to it that those who have suffered in the flesh, and have been condemned as reprobate in the judgment of men, shall be justified and live forever with their God.

Those who teach a probation after death from this passage suppose the train of thought to be as follows: If Christ is to judge the living and the dead righteously, the Gospel must first have been preached to all men, both living and dead, *i. e.*, also, then, to those who died without having heard the Gospel of Christ. They appeal in support of this interpretation to the word "the dead," *nekrois*, which evidently is a repetition of the *nekrous* in v. 5. In v. 5 it is the physically dead that are referred to, not the spiritually dead. Therefore *nekrois* in v. 6 must also mean the bodily dead. Meyer and others claim that "the dead" in v. 6 must refer to *all* the dead, as in v. 5. But it is a fact that the Gospel has not been preached to all men before their death. Consequently, this passage teaches that the Gospel was preached at least to such of the dead as had not heard it in this life. Such is the reasoning that would establish the doctrine of a second probation out of this passage.

But then it becomes quite impossible to get any sense out of the following clause: "that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." For men that are already dead cannot very well be judged according to men in the flesh, since they no longer have any flesh, or *sarx*. Gueder, indeed, has ventured to say that the

dead do have some sort of *sarx*; but that is in itself quite an unprovable assertion, and one which finds no basis whatever in the New Testament writings, where *sarx* is uniformly used to denote the earthly body as distinct from the *psyche* and *pneuma*. Meyer and others seek to escape this difficulty by making "judged according to men in the flesh" into a subordinate clause equivalent to an aorist participle clause, *kritheutes*—*sarkē*, and translating: "The Gospel was preached to the dead, in order that, after they had been judged according to men in the flesh, they might live according to God in the spirit." The judgment according to the flesh is, then, conceived as having taken place before the Gospel was preached, and as having effected such a change in the attitude of the subjects concerned as to make the preaching of the Gospel acceptable to them. Such a change of an aorist indicative into an aorist participle is perhaps to be allowed. Still, there is only one passage in the New Testament which can be interpreted in a similar way and so referred to as parallel—John 9, 39: "For judgment came I into this world, that they which see not may see, and that they which see may become blind." Some assume that Christ's judgment is contained only in the second object clause, and that the first object clause is to be looked upon rather as an adverbial clause: "while they which see not may see," etc. But it is more correct, with the great majority of commentators on this passage, to take both clauses as object clauses, expressing the purpose of Christ's judgment. The judgment is, then, conceived of as a separation between two classes, not as the condemnation of one particular class.

And so this construction is doubtfully to be allowed in 1 Pet. 4, 6, and, in view of other difficulties with the proposed interpretation, had best be rejected. For if "the dead" to whom the Gospel is preached includes all men, as *nekrous* does in v. 5, this passage would, in effect, state that *all* men were to live according to God in the spirit after they had been judged in the flesh. But this is Universalism, not the doctrine of a probation after death. It is the judgment, the punishment

inflicted by God, that, according to this, really effects the salvation of all those who had not before believed the Gospel, rather than the preaching of the Gospel alone,—the manifestation of His power rather than of His grace.

It is better, then, to take the words as they stand, and find the purpose and object of this preaching of the Gospel in both the following clauses, *viz.*, first, that those who heard the Gospel might indeed be judged according to men in the flesh, but then, secondly, live according to God in the spirit. That both are included in the purpose is indicated also by the *eis touto* in the preceding. This is used to denote a purpose which by the following distributives *men* and *de* is later distinguished as a twofold one. "That they might be judged according to men in the flesh" expresses, then, a thought similar to that in v. 1: "He that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin," as explained by the following: "that ye no longer should live the rest of your time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God." The sinful flesh shall be judged, its sway broken, and its lusts more and more sloughed off, until it is given its final judgment in death, permitting the soul to live "according to God in the spirit." The sufferings that come upon them, though men indeed may look upon them as punishment, in reality in God's hands to serve but as means whereby they may be cleansed from sin and preserved in the faith. The aorist *krithosin* is used to indicate the temporary character of this judgment of the flesh, while the present in *zosi* points out that the living to God in the spirit is a continued, permanent state.

According to this interpretation, then, it must have been while they were still on earth that the Gospel was preached to these "dead," with the twofold purpose indicated. And so the *nekrois* in v. 6 cannot refer to the *nekrous* in v. 5, but must be limited to those who had heard the Gospel in this life. We have, perhaps, here a word addressed to such as were doubtful about the fate of such Christians as had died without seeing Christ come again, similar to the words of comfort Paul

to note how men like Farrar, *e. g.*, are led by their interpretation of the passages concerned to the very verge of Universalism, only to draw back with a "God forbid" from the bottomless abyss of dangerous conclusions which they find in that doctrine. And yet Scripture gives far more support to that doctrine than to any theory of probation after death. Once grant that Christ's victory, His subjecting of all things unto Himself, His triumph over the powers of evil, means that these powers will be forced to yield him obedience, and we have a real solution of the problem of the salvation of those that have rebelled in this life, or who through the fault of preceding generations have been left without any messengers of the glad tidings. For then we assume that Christ subjects men and spirits also by the manifestation of His power and might, that what His love, drawing all men unto Him, could not accomplish, He completes by the power of His omnipotence. There is not, then, a question of any further probation in the after life, but of a different method there of bringing souls to God.

If, however, we wish to believe that men and spirits and demons retain forever, or till "the second death" comes upon them, — whatever that is taken to mean, — their power of self-determination, their free-will, we cannot conceive of their yielding *willing* obedience to God, except through the drawing of His love. And then we must understand the passages referring to the subjection of all things to God, the Judgment at the Last Day, and the summing up of all things in Christ, as well as the passage referring to the preaching to disobedient spirits, as dealing with the manifestations of the Lord's power, whereby His enemies are not saved, but defeated, broken, and excluded from His eternal kingdom in such a way that God can in very truth be said to be all in all, since Evil no more exists in His universe.

And so we are brought back again to the point from which we started: the "antinomies" of God's omnipotence opposed by created Will, of a perfect God creating an eventually imperfect world, of life that but ends in death, and death that gives birth

to life. Then he who is wise will not speculate overmuch about the character of the life beyond the grave, or about the probable destiny of the millions that have dwelt in deepest darkness, and on whom the Light of the world has not shined, but will seek day by day to use the life and light *he* has in such a way that good may come to himself and those he loves. He that lives by the light of reason cannot do better than take the agnostic attitude over towards the things of the future life, while he who guides his course by the star of divine revelation should find in that the means to lead him, and those with whom he comes in contact, to the goal of life, even now in the daytime of this life, so that he will not need to peer anxiously into the darkness of "the night when no man can work" to learn what the end of his journey will mean to him and the world of men for whom the Son of God gave up His life.

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