

# 1 Peter 3:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison;

## Analysis

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Peter describes Christ's post-death activity. "By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison" (en hō kai tois en phylakē pneumasin poreutheis ekēryxen). This difficult verse spawned many interpretations. "Spirits in prison" likely refers to fallen angels or disobedient humans. "Preached" (ekēryxen) could mean proclamation of judgment or salvation. Most Reformed interpreters see Christ proclaiming victory over Satan and fallen angels after death, before resurrection. Alternative view: Christ through Noah preached to people now imprisoned in hell for rejecting Noah's message. Either way, Christ's work extended beyond earthly ministry.

## Historical Context

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This enigmatic verse generated centuries of interpretation. Some saw it supporting prayers for the dead or second chances after death (neither Reformed doctrine). Reformed interpretation emphasizes Christ's triumph over spiritual powers (Colossians 2:15). Between death and resurrection, Christ proclaimed victory to imprisoned evil spirits, demonstrating His conquest over death and Satan. This assured believers that Christ's work accomplished complete redemption, extending even to supernatural realms. Early church celebrated Christ's 'harrowing of hell'—descending to proclaim victory. Whatever exact meaning, verse affirms Christ's comprehensive redemptive work.

## Related Passages

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**Psalm 19:1** — Heavens declare God's glory

**Genesis 1:1** — Creation of heavens and earth

## Study Questions

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1. How does Christ's proclamation to 'spirits in prison' demonstrate His complete victory over death and evil?
2. Why is it important that Christ's redemptive work extended beyond earthly visible ministry?

## Interlinear Text

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ἐν	ῳ	καὶ	τοῖς	ἐν	φυλακῇ	πνεύμασιν	πορευθεὶς
By	which	also	G3588	By	prison	unto the spirits	he went
G1722	G3739	G2532		G1722	G5438	G4151	G4198

ἐκήρυξεν  
and preached  
G2784

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Peter 4:6** (Spirit): For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

**Isaiah 61:1** (Spirit): The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

**Isaiah 42:7** (Parallel theme): To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.

**Isaiah 49:9** (Parallel theme): That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

**Nehemiah 9:30** (Spirit): Yet many years didst thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by thy spirit in thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest thou them into the hand of the people of the lands.

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