

Title: 1 Peter 3:13-22 – A Trifecta of Hope in Christ

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DECLARATION

I certify that this ASSIGNMENT is my own work. I have acknowledged all material and sources used in it, and that I have not plagiarised in part or whole the work of others without stating the references.

Introduction

In the middle of the first epistle of Peter is a short section of Scripture that has had quite an impact on Christian beliefs. The passage in question:

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. – 1 Peter 3:13-22 (ESV)

Portions of it have been used as prooftexts for various views and doctrines. However, when the passage is taken in its entirety, there is a single overarching message which seamlessly encompasses all the verses. To start off, I will first describe the general theme of 1 Peter – followed by each of the aforementioned different usages of prooftexts.

Strangers in a Strange Land

The general thrust of Peter's letter is that followers of Christ are different from the surrounding culture, and for this they will face persecution¹. Yet this should not surprise us, nor should we respond by conforming to the world². After all, we belong to Christ – who Himself was persecuted. In Him is our certain hope of a future life with God.

It is within this overarching theme that 1 Peter 3:13-22 exhorts the reader to remember the *reason why* we continue to put our confidence in Christ.

A Defense of the Christian Faith

1 Peter 3:15 is often cited in Christian apologetics (defined as: “defending the faith”³) – the term coming from the Greek *apologia*⁴. It is used by ministries such as Ken Ham's *Answers in*

¹ Elwell and Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament*, 345-347.

² BibleProject, “Overview: 1 Peter”, BibleProject (accessed 12-Oct-2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2n-RYzSzSe0>

³ Matt Stefon, “Apologetics: defending the faith”, *Encyclopedia Britannica* (accessed 12-Oct-2021): <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/Apologetics-defending-the-faith>

⁴ Bible Hub, “Interlinear 1 Peter 3:15,” *Bible Hub* (accessed 12-Oct-2021): https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_peter/3-15.htm

*Genesis*⁵, Frank Turek's *CrossExamined.org*⁶, William Lane Craig's *Reasonable Faith*⁷, and Greg Koukl's *Stand to Reason*⁸. The verse has been called "The Great Commission for Apologetics"⁹.

The passage encourages us to defend the tenets of the faith against criticism and skepticism; to explain the sound reasons we have for believing the Bible; and to do it all with an exemplary attitude that wins hearts (even if minds remain unconvinced).

However, vv13-17 are about *suffering* for the faith – v15 being part of Peter's exhortation to remain loyal to Christ despite persecution. Hence, while every responsible Christian should be ready to competently defend their beliefs¹⁰, the context of *why* we do so is wider than mere intellectual exercise.

Storming the Gates of Hades

1 Peter 3:19 is part of a smattering of passages (e.g. 1 Peter 4:16, Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 4:8 and Revelation 1:18) used to support the belief known as 'The Harrowing of Hell'.

In this view, during the period between the Crucifixion and Resurrection, Christ brought the Gospel of salvation to the righteous people who died before the time of His coming: "Heaven did not yet have any human denizens. ... So the souls of all the just from our first parents through the patriarchs ... had to wait in the Limbo of the Fathers until our divine Trailblazer beat the path and opened the gates."¹¹ These languishing dead are what '*the spirits in prison*' in v19 is taken to refer to.

This interpretation introduced a fundamental shift in how the afterlife was viewed among followers of YHWH: "...instead of Sheol/Hades before the NT times. Jewish and Christian writings after the time of Jesus begin to speak of the OT saints in heaven ... the souls of the righteous go to the third heaven"¹². In fact, the belief forms part of the Apostle's creed: "He descended into Hell"¹³.

Nevertheless, 1 Peter 3:20 makes it clear that the spirits of v19 '*did not obey ... in the days of Noah*'. The subjects in question are disobedient, not righteous. Also, humans have died throughout the centuries before and after the time of Genesis 6 – the specific reference to Noah's period is therefore puzzling, if Christ came to rescue the righteous from *all* pre-Crucifixion eras. As I shall explain later, there is a more fitting reference for vv19-20 that is specific to only a few periods – including immediately preceding the Flood.

⁵ Simon Turpin, "Honoring Christ as Lord: 1 Peter 3:15," *Answers in Genesis* (accessed 12-Oct-2021): <https://answersingenesis.org/apologetics/honoring-christ-as-lord-1-peter-3-15/>

⁶ Ted Wright, "How 1 Peter 3:15 Teaches The Deity of Christ," *CrossExamined.org* (accessed 12-Oct-2021): <https://crossexamined.org/1-peter-315-teaches-deity-christ/>

⁷ William Lane Craig, "Introduction to Christian Doctrine," *Reasonable Faith* (accessed 12-Oct-2021): <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-1/s1-introduction/introduction-to-christian-doctrine>

⁸ Tim Barnett, "Why Apologetics?" *Stand to Reason* (accessed 12-Oct-2021): <https://www.str.org/w/why-apologetics->

⁹ Paul Rezkalla, "The Great Commission for Apologetics," *Answers in Genesis* (accessed 12-Oct-2021): <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-great-commission-for-apologetics/>

¹⁰ J. Warner Wallace, "The Apostle Peter Called Us to Be "Responsive" Christians," *Cold Case Christianity* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/the-apostle-peter-called-us-to-be-responsive-christians/>

¹¹ André Marie, "He Descended into Hell," *Catholicism.org* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://catholicism.org/adrem-no-313.html>

¹² Michael S. Heiser, "Naked Bible 363: Revelation 3 Part 2," *The Naked Bible Podcast* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-363-revelation-3-part-2/> [pp.8-9 of transcript]

¹³ Jesuit Resource, "Catholic Prayers," *Xavier University* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/catholic-prayers>

Baptism Saves

Baptism is a well-known rite of Christianity undertaken by new converts as a display of their formally joining the body of believers¹⁴. However, to certain groups it is more than merely symbolic – the very act itself holds salvific power. To Lutherans¹⁵ and Roman Catholics¹⁶ for example, 1 Peter 3:21 is clear cut – *baptism saves*.

In contrast are interpretations that view baptism as a signifier that: “...marks its recipients as members of the visible covenant community”¹⁷. In this sense, baptism is similar to good works in a believer, which are: “...evidential of having received grace through faith, not instrumental”¹⁸.

Baptism and good works *demonstrate* that we are saved, they do not *cause* salvation. To wit: “Baptism is not what produces salvation. It “saves” us in that it first involves or reflects a heart decision: a pledge of loyalty to the risen Savior.”¹⁹ This symbolic view of baptism is more in line with the overarching interpretation which I shall now describe.

A Full Exegetical Tapestry

A holistic approach to interpreting 1 Peter 3:13-22 is possible, one that reveals Peter’s deep knowledge of contemporary Jewish beliefs.

To recap the passage, Peter encourages readers to persevere despite the persecution that may result (vv13-17). But why maintain the faith if it brings suffering? A believer needs to be firmly sure of the *reason why* they hold on to Christ (v15), and hence bear in mind that their loyalty to Him is worth any earthly price.

Peter next reiterates what the readers already know: That Christ was crucified for our sake, to cleanse us from our sins and reconcile us back to God (v18). He overcame death (v18) and all spiritual forces that seek to hinder us (vv19-20, 22).

Finally, Peter reminds us that we are saved through faith in Christ, having pledged our loyalty through the process of baptism (v21) – just as Noah was saved from the deluge by his trust in God, as a type of baptism (v20).

But what to make of all these seemingly disparate points Peter makes – reason for hope, spirits in prison, Noah, baptism, angels subjected to Christ? Peter surely did not mean them to be understood piecemeal. Instead, by comprehending Peter’s First Century Jewish context, all these threads can be seamlessly weaved into a whole cloth.

¹⁴ Holman Bible Editorial, *Holman Concise Bible Dictionary*, (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2011) Perlego Edition, Baptism.

¹⁵ Brad Willis, “Willis: The Big Bad Baptism Verse, 1 Peter 3:21,” *The Lutheran Column* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://thelutherancolumn.com/2018/05/25/willis-the-big-bad-baptism-verse-1-peter-321/>

¹⁶ Karlo Broussard, “Is Baptism Just a Symbol of Our Salvation?” *Catholic Answers* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/is-baptism-just-a-symbol-of-our-salvation>

¹⁷ Ligonier Ministries, “Baptism and Salvation,” *Ligonier Ministries* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/baptism-and-salvation-2>

¹⁸ William Lane Craig, “Doctrine of Salvation Part 14: The New Perspective on Paul,” *ReasonableFaithOrg* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cM0pjZrNL-Y> [5:57 to 7:33]

¹⁹ Michael S. Heiser, “Baptism as Spiritual Warfare,” *DR. MICHAEL S. HEISER* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://drmsh.com/baptism-spiritual-warfare/> [Choosing Sides]

Three Rebellions, One Solution

It is no coincidence that in this short passage about the victorious accomplishments of Christ, **all three of the ‘divine rebellions’ are referenced.**

If asked about the source of human evil and corruption, modern Christians will usually point to the Fall²⁰ where Adam & Eve first sinned at the instigation of the serpent. However, to a Second Temple Jew, there were no less than *three* historic interferences by spiritual forces that negatively impacted humanity²¹ – firstly the Fall (Genesis 3); secondly the precursor event to the Flood (Genesis 6:1-4); and thirdly the dividing of the nations at Babel (Genesis 11:1-9, Deuteronomy 32:8 and Psalm 82).

Firstly, the Fall was fomented by *‘that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world’* (Revelation 12:9) – causing the introduction of Adam’s Original Sin which led to separation from God and physical death (Romans 5:10-14; note that Adam as our forerunner brought us sin and death – not imputed guilt²² that makes us “doomed from the womb”²³). 1 Peter 3:18 tells us that Christ took the penalty of sin and died on our behalf, reconciling us to God – then returned to life, that we too may overcome death.

Secondly, the catalyst for the Flood – to the Israelite mind – was the cohabitation of angelic Sons of God (*bene elohim*) with human women. This is the interpretation communicated via the pseudepigraphical book of 1 Enoch, which preserves the polemics of Genesis 6:1-4 against the Babylonian *apkallu* mythology²⁴. Not only did this mixing of ‘strange flesh’ (Jude 7)²⁵ result in forbidden offspring, mankind was also taught forbidden knowledge (1 Enoch chs 6-9, 10:6-10)²⁶. The earth had to be deluged clean of corruption (1 Enoch 10:1-9)²⁷.

Clearly, 1 Peter 3:19-20 references these transgressing Sons of God (which 1 Enoch terms ‘Watchers’ or ‘angels’) by mentioning *‘the spirits in prison’* which *‘did not obey’* back *‘in the days of Noah’*. Peter’s familiarity with 1 Enoch is undeniable, as he also references the account in 2 Peter 2:4 where *‘angels when they sinned’* were bound with *‘chains of gloomy darkness’* (see also Jude 6) – a clear parallel of 1 Enoch 10:1-7²⁸. Not only does Peter again immediately link this to the Flood (2 Peter 2:5), he also uses the verb *tartarōō*²⁹ – referencing Tartarus of Greek mythology, where Zeus the son imprisoned his cruel father Cronus³⁰ (an inversion of 1 Enoch, where God the Father imprisons the transgressing Sons of God).

²⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, (Zondervan, 2015) Perlego Edition, 24, B. The Origin of Sin.

²¹ Frank Turek and Michael S. Heiser, “EP33: The Unseen Realm w/ Dr. Michael Heiser,” *Cross Examined* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifNdJPgJATA> [09:50 to 17:53]

²² Michael S. Heiser, “Romans 5:12 and Universalism: Applying My Take on Romans 5:12 to the Problem,” *DR. MICHAEL S. HEISER* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://drms.com/romans-512-and-universalism-applying-my-take-on-romans-512-to-the-problem/>

²³ John Calvin, “Institutes of the Christian Religion,” *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.v.xxiv.html> [p. 2231]

²⁴ Amar Annus, “On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions,” *Journal for the study of the Pseudepigrapha* (2010): 283. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/4570714/On_the_Origin_of_Watchers_A_Comparative_Study_of_the_Antediluvian_Wisdom_in_Mesopotamian_and_Jewish_Traditions

²⁵ Bible Hub, “Interlinear Jude 1:7,” *Bible Hub* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/jude/1-7.htm>

²⁶ H.R. Charles, “Book of Enoch Section I.,” *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): https://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/enoch/ENOCH_1.HTM

²⁷ Charles, *Book of Enoch Section I.*

²⁸ Charles, *Book of Enoch Section I.*

²⁹ Bible Hub, “Interlinear 2 Peter 2:4,” *Bible Hub* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): https://biblehub.com/interlinear/2_peter/2-4.htm

³⁰ Borut Šimon, “Cronus (Kronos, Chronos, Saturn),” *GreekGods.org* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://www.greek-gods.org/titans/cronus.php> [Titanomachy and punishment]

While in 1 Enoch 13:1 – 14:8³¹ it is the titular Enoch who delivers the bad news to the captive Watchers, Peter views it as a typology of Christ: “...just as Jesus was the second Adam for Paul, Jesus is the second Enoch for Peter. Enoch descended to the imprisoned fallen angels to announce their doom. 1 Peter 3:14-22 has Jesus descending to these same spirits in prison—the fallen angels—to tell them they were still defeated, despite his crucifixion.”³².

This idea of transgression by heavenly beings is specific to only a few periods, including immediately preceding The Flood. Hence, this view makes more sense of the fact that the spirits in prison ‘formerly did not obey ... in the days of Noah’ compared to the Harrowing of Hell.

Note that Peter’s citation of 1 Enoch does not establish the book as part of the inspired canon of Scripture (which even its staunchest defenders eventually conceded³³). Peter could have accepted parts of the narrative as accurate while dismissing the rest (such as Enoch being the Danielic Son of Man in 1 Enoch 71:14³⁴). He could also have been using the widely known story as a sermon illustration: “It’s better quote something or use something that you know your readers are familiar with”³⁵ – similar to how modern Christians might reference pop culture³⁶ to convey a theological point. Or put in a more tongue-in-cheek way: “...the Biblical writers quote lots of stuff that we would not even for a moment consider canonical. When the Psalmists quote the Baal Cycle, I’m not thinking I wonder if the Baal Cycle should be in the canon.”³⁷

Thirdly, the division of humanity at Babel (Genesis 11) is tied to the allotment of nations to Sons of God (Deuteronomy 32:8, ESV). Only Israel through the calling of Abraham (Genesis 12) remained YHWH’s portion (Deuteronomy 32:9). However, the misrule of these heavenly powers led to judgment and sentencing by YHWH (Psalm 82:1-7) and the promise that God Himself would take back all the earth (Psalm 82:8)³⁸. This misrule is what led to the polytheism and idolatry plaguing the post-Babel world³⁹.

Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of Psalm 82:8, as God in the flesh “Bringing the nations home”⁴⁰ for The Kingdom of God. The spiritual forces who formerly controlled the world – ‘angels, authorities, and powers’ as 1 Peter 3:22 calls them – have been made subject to Christ who is now seated above them all⁴¹.

³¹ Charles, *Book of Enoch Section I*.

³² Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible 008: Baptism & Problem Passages: 1 Peter 3:14-22,” *The Naked Bible Podcast* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-008-baptism-problem-passages-1-peter-314-22/> [p.3 of transcript]

³³ Michael S. Heiser, “Naked Bible 93: The Book of Enoch in the Early Church,” *The Naked Bible Podcast* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-93-the-book-of-enoch-in-the-early-church/> [p.13 of transcript]

³⁴ H.R. Charles, “Book of Enoch Section II.,” *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): https://www.ccel.org/c/charles/otpseudepig/enoch/ENOCH_2.HTM

³⁵ Michael S. Heiser, *Twitter* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://twitter.com/DRMSHPhD/status/1379879148022345728>

³⁶ Tim Stratton, “Avengers: Endgame, Middle Knowledge, & the Destruction of the Problem of Evil,” *Free Thinking Ministries* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://freethinkingministries.com/avengers-endgame-middle-knowledge-the-destruction-of-the-problem-of-evil/>

³⁷ Heiser, *Naked Bible 93* [p.16 of transcript]

³⁸ I provide a thorough argument that the *bene elyon* of Psalm 82 refers to supernatural beings in my 2021 essay submitted to Dr. Chong Siaw Fung: “Psalm 82 – Gods or Frauds?”

³⁹ L. Daniel Hawk and Michael S. Heiser, “Dr. Heiser Discusses “Gods of the Nations” | Dr. Hawk Explores Joshua | Faithlife Today Episode 72,” *Faithlife* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UT8kb51sSS0> [2:46 to 4:52]

⁴⁰ Michael S. Heiser, “The Tower of Babel Story: What Really Happened?” *Logos* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): <https://blog.logos.com/really-happened-tower-babel/>

⁴¹ I provide a brief overview of Christ’s victory over territorial gods in my 2021 essay submitted to Rev. Dr. Tan Jin Huat: “Discuss the significance of a high Christology in Paul’s letter to the Colossians in the light of its purpose.” For a thorough treatment, see the major influential work: Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*.

Taken all together, Jews of the day expected Messiah to solve the Adamic problems of sin and death⁴² – but also looked forward to the promised Son of David reversing the corruption of the Watchers⁴³ and restoring the Edenic plan to the estranged nations⁴⁴. **Peter reminds the reader that Jesus Christ has fulfilled this trifecta of Messianic expectations.**

Baptism therefore saves us (1 Peter 3:21) not because of any inherent mechanism, but because it flows out from our ‘pledge (*eperotema*) of loyalty (*suneidesis*)’⁴⁵ to the one who *can* save – Jesus Christ, who is YHWH: “The heart of salvation in biblical theology—across both testaments—is *believing loyalty* to Yahweh.”⁴⁶

Baptism is: “...a pledge of loyalty to the risen Savior. In effect, baptism in New Testament theology is a loyalty oath, a public avowal of who is on the Lord’s side in the cosmic war between good and evil.”⁴⁷ This viewpoint is why early baptismal creeds included phrases such as “...we have renounced the devil, his pomp, and his angels”⁴⁸ and “I renounce you, devil, and your works and your empires”⁴⁹.

And *that* is the reason for the hope which is in us – Jesus Christ has overcome every one of these seemingly intractable problems that afflicted humanity across untold ages. What then is there to fear when earthly opposition arises?

Conclusion

The Bible is a timeless book, with God-given truth for all ages. That said, God used writers from their respective times and cultures to convey those truths. Hence, it is important to understand their perspectives: “But you must remember that, while the Bible was written for us, it wasn’t written to us. What they wrote is still vital for our lives today, but we can only accurately discern the message if we let them speak as they spoke.”⁵⁰ It is when we approach the Bible with such a mindset – “to be able to see it like ancient Israelites or first-century Jews saw it”⁵¹ – that we can carry out faithful exegesis.

And so it is when 1 Peter 3:13-22 is approached with an understanding of Peter’s Jewish context, that we can comprehend his message – one of all-encompassing hope in Christ, who overcame even the great trifecta of historic ills impairing the human condition.

⁴² The Sefaria Library, “Targum Jonathan on Genesis,” *The Sefaria Library* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jonathan_on_Genesis.3.15?lang=bi [Chapter 3 Verse 15]

⁴³ Michael S. Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (N.p: Defender, 2018), 54-55.

⁴⁴ Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham/USA: Lexham Press, 2015), 254-255

⁴⁵ Heiser, *Baptism as Spiritual Warfare* [Choosing Sides]

⁴⁶ Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 164.

⁴⁷ Heiser, *Reversing Hermon*, 144-145.

⁴⁸ Tertullian, “Of Public Shows (IV)”, *The Tertullian Project* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): https://www.tertullian.org/lfc/LFC10-13_de_spectaculis.htm

⁴⁹ Henry Ansgar Kelly, *The Devil at Baptism: Ritual, Theology, and Drama* (NY/USA: Cornell University Press, 1985), 100.

⁵⁰ Michael S. Heiser, *The Bible Unfiltered: Approaching Scripture on Its Own Terms* (Bellingham/USA: Faithlife Corporation, 2017), 19.

⁵¹ Michael S. Heiser, *Facebook* (accessed 13-Oct-2021): https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=3305250636203787&id=378543178874562

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