

# Discussion on 1 Peter 3:18-22

Sunday School – March 17, 2018  
Sleater Kinney Road Baptist Church, Olympia, WA

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### 1. TEXT (1 Peter 3:18-22):<sup>1</sup>

Because even Christ suffered for sins once for all, a righteous man for unrighteous people, in order to bring you [believers] to God; although He was put to death in the body, He was given life by the Spirit. After that, He then went and made proclamation to the spirits [now] in prison, who did not obey in the past when God kept waiting patiently during Noah's days, when the boat was being built in which a few souls (that is, eight) were saved by means of water, which also corresponds to the baptism that has now saved you.

[This baptism] isn't a removal of filth from the body, but an appeal to God for a good conscience, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He's at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, with angels, authorities and powers subject to Him.

### 2. THINKING THROUGH THE TEXT:

- a. **Because even Christ suffered for sins once for all, a righteous man for unrighteous people, in order to bring you [believers] to God;**

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<sup>1</sup> This is my own original translation from the UBS-5 Greek text. I've put all my translation and exegetical notes at the end of this document. I actually produced two translations; one more literal (closer to the KJV and NASB), and the other a bit more colloquial. I've decided to use the colloquial translation in the body of these notes, but you can find the literal version at the end of this document.

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**Q1:** Peter just finished the last passage by telling us why we should always be ready to explain to unbelievers about the hope inside each of us with gentleness and reverence. He wrote, “because it’s better to suffer because you’re doing what’s good (if that’s God’s will), than because you’re doing what’s evil,” (1 Pet 3:17).

Here’s the question – **why** is it better to suffer because you’re doing what’s right, if that’s God’s will? What’s the goal? What’s the point of it all? Why would God want you to suffer while trying to live holy lives, while always being ready to tell people about the Gospel?

- Because that’s what Christ did – He suffered on behalf of some very unrighteous people, even though they couldn’t have cared less
  - o Peter is telling us we **can** and **should** be willing to do the same
- When we think about our own boring lives, this seems a bit abstract and unreal – **what on earth can we do in our own, small orbits of influence that’ll add up to anything, in the end?**
  - o Many times, things seem insignificant “in the moment,” but have an impact much wider than we can possibly imagine
  - o The Apostle Paul was the man whose enemies said had “turned the world upside down,” (Acts 17:6)!
  - o Those efforts to share the Gospel and be a light for Christ, that you **think** are small and insignificant, have a cumulative impact far greater anything we can imagine
    - **(a)** God is in charge of salvation, and He’s the One who sends the Spirit to convict people of sin, righteousness and judgment
    - **(b)** God has chosen to reach and save people through middlemen like you and me
    - **(c)** If God has decided to save somebody, they’ll be saved
    - **(d)** Our job is to be faithful Christians, live holy lives because we love Him, and to tell people the Good News of Jesus Christ
  - o We’re like soldier ants, working together to build Christ’s future kingdom
    - **(a)** Our individual efforts don’t seem like they mean very much

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- (b) But, the cumulative effect of all our efforts, directed and overseen by God, will be a full and complete spiritual household - a family of God,
- (c) full of people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation,
- (d) who came to faith because of our patient, diligent, and *seemingly insignificant* personal faithfulness

**Q2: What does it mean that Christ has “suffered for sins once for all?” Why does this matter?**

- It means He’s already made a *full and complete atonement* for sins; nothing left needs to be done (see entire Book of Hebrews; contra. Roman Catholic doctrine)
  - The entire OT system (ceremonial and sacrificial laws) has been building towards this crescendo in Jesus Christ, who made atonement for all our sins, and made us each ritualistically “clean” forever
  - To deny this is to deny everything, and it also shows you don’t understand the Book of Hebrews

**Q3: What does it mean that Christ was righteous, and He suffered for unrighteous people? What does “righteous” even mean?**

- Righteous = just and upright; in this context it means Jesus is just and upright in God’s eyes
  - Nobody is born inherently righteous, upright and just in God’s eyes
  - This is the problem Jesus came to solve
  - He, the one righteous man, voluntarily came to suffer on behalf of unrighteous people

**Q4: Why did Christ do this? Why should you follow His example?**

- He did this so that, by His suffering, He might bring us to God
- This is also why Christians should do right while suffering, if that’s God’s will
- It’s the reason why Peter commanded us to be holy in our whole way of lives; everything comes back to who we represent

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- God is our King, Lord and Master
- Everything we do reflects on Him; we're wearing His uniform and insignia (cf. 1 Pet 2:9-10)
- We live to do His bidding, not our own
- As we go to work tomorrow morning, realize that God (hopefully ☹️) gave you a job you like and enjoy, and how you perform your job reflects on who your Savior is – *but always remember that your workplace is your personal mission field!*
  - (a) These are the unbelievers you'll come into contact with
  - (b) These are the people who'll see your faith, or lack thereof
  - (c) These are the folks who'll be asking you for the reason for the hope that's within you
  - (d) These are the unbelievers you'll need to give an answer to, with gentleness and reverence
  - (e) These are the people God has put you there to influence and reach
  - (f) These are the people who you can respond to praying for their salvation, and being nice to!

**b. although He was put to death in the body, He was given life by the Spirit.**

**Q5: What is this referring to?**

- This is the resurrection; no matter what happens to you, this is your future, too
  - You'll die one day, but you have a guarantee that Jesus will come back, and reunite your body and soul forever, so you'll be a complete person in the new creation to come!
  - No matter what happens, this is guaranteed

**c. After that, He then went and made proclamation to the spirits [now] in prison, who did not obey in the past when God kept waiting patiently during Noah's days, when the boat was being built in which a few souls (that is, eight) were saved by means of water,**

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When people come to this little passage, they usually have four questions. These questions aren't really very difficult to answer **if you read the text**, but they've *become* difficult because so much silliness clouds the issue. We'll just consider the text, and use normal logic to answer them:

### **Q6: When did Christ preach this to the spirits?**

- It was after His resurrection

### **Q7: Who are these spirits?**

- These "spirits" are either fallen angels or people. From what Peter wrote, we know a bunch of things about them:
  - o (1) They're in prison now, but they didn't used to be
    - These can't be fallen angels, because they're not in prison right now (see Jesus' exorcisms, and 1 Pet 5:8)
  - o (2) They were around in Noah's day, when he was building the boat
  - o (3) They could have repented during that time, but they didn't
    - These can't be fallen angels, because we have nothing in Scripture which tells us angels can repent or be redeemed (consider the implications of 1 Pet 1:12; Eph 3:10)
  - o (4) God was patient and long-suffering with them, and waited for them to repent, but they didn't
- The evidence tells us these are the wicked people during Noah's day

### **Q8: Where is the prison; that is, where did this preaching take place?**

- It took place in *Sheol*; that is, hell's waiting room<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For an excellent discussion of the intermediate state, see Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, 3 vols. (Detroit, MI: DBTS, 2009), 3:313 - 335. I am less dogmatic on the "two-compartment" theory than McCune, because it's built on assumptions, rather than didactic teaching. Moreover, the parable of the rich man and Lazarus wasn't really intended to teach about the "two-compartment" theory; it was about something else entirely. So, I'm uncomfortable appropriating it for that use. Charles Ryrie (*Basic Theology* [Chicago, IL: Moody, 1999], 605 – 607) takes a more middle of the road position and believes OT saints went immediately into the Lord's presence.

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- Unbelievers won't be cast into hell until Christ's judgment *after* the millennium is over (see Rev 20:11-15)
- Until then, both believers and unbelievers are in an intermediate holding pattern (i.e. heaven or hell's waiting rooms), pondering their eventual fate, while being conscious of everything in their past life, and experiencing previews of their final destination (see, for example, Luke 16:19-31)

### **Q9: What did He preach to them?**

- He likely proclaimed His victory over Satan to them
  - (a) He's the One Noah preached about,
  - (b) the One they rejected,
  - (c) the One they weren't interested in,
  - (d) the One they couldn't care less about
  - (e) the One who was promised to Adam and Eve
  - (f) the One for whose sake God had already "re-booted" things *twice* by Noah's day (e.g. immediately post-Fall, the gift of Seth after Abel's murder, and now Noah's family)
- This "sermon" was not redemptive; nobody can repent after death
  - It was a sermon which said, in effect:
    - "You rejected me, you rejected my Father, and here I am!"
    - "How do you like that choice you made, so long ago?"
    - "Who's right and who's wrong now!?"
    - "How do you like them apples!?"
      - Example from one of my investigations, where the subject lied to me during the investigation, and now wants to settle before the administrative hearing = too late, pal!
  - These unbelievers from Noah's day are representative of all unbelievers; Jesus could have chosen any group of people, from any time period, to preach to
- The point is this:

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I'm agnostic on this one; but I do know unbelievers won't be in hell until after the final judgment (Rev 20:11-15).

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- Jesus, the righteous man, suffered for unrighteous people in order to bring them to God - that means you and I can do the same!
  - (a) We try our best to live holy lives, because we love God
  - (b) We look for, seek out, and watch out for opportunities to tell people the Gospel, to be-friend unbelievers, to be a shining light for the Gospel
  - (c) If you suffer consequences because of your Christian faith, you respond with more grace, more kindness, more Christ-like character
  - (d) And, when unbelievers ask you about the hope you have within you, you make sure to explain the Gospel to them with gentleness and reverence
  - (e) You do this so you can have a good conscience, so that even if they keep slandering you or insulting you, that person (or any honest person watching all this) will feel ashamed for what they're saying – because what they're saying about you doesn't match up with your character and actions
  - (f) You need to do this because it's better to suffer for doing what's right (if that's God's will), than to suffer for doing what's wrong
    - Because that's exactly what Jesus did; **“even Christ suffered for sins once for all, a righteous man for unrighteous people, in order to bring you [believers] to God.”**
- He was put to death in the body, but given life by the Spirit
  - (a) Just like you will be one day, too!
  - (b) Jesus is the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:20f)
  - (c) You might be put to death in the flesh, but you'll be given life by the Spirit, too; just like Him – there's no reason for any Christian to fear death, anymore (cf. Heb 2:14-15)
- He's the One who's claimed victory over Satan, and He even went and preached this to the spirits now in prison, too
  - You're on the winning side!

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- Peter now takes a very quick (and confusing 😊) rabbit-trail, and talks about our salvation:

**d. which also corresponds to the baptism that has now saved you. [This baptism] isn't a removal of filth from the body, but an appeal to God for a good conscience, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ,**

**Q10: Peter says that, if you're a Christian, baptism has now saved you. What on earth is this "baptism?" You have two options; it can be believer's baptism, or it can be the baptism of the Holy Spirit – which do you think it is?**

- It must be the baptism of the Holy Spirit, because believer's baptism doesn't save anybody. There's nowhere in Scripture where baptism actually "does anything" objective to a person's soul or to their status before God
  - o Note – *this is a Baptist distinctive* (contra. Roman Catholicism, Church of Christ, Reformed churches, etc.)<sup>3</sup>
- On the contrary, the Holy Spirit is pictured as the agent Who (like water) cleanses sinners and makes them clean in God's sight (cf. Mk 1:8; Eze 36:24f; Titus 3:5-7, etc.)
  - o Baptists have believed, *for centuries*, that one thing believer's baptism pictures (besides identification with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ), is that the Spirit has washed us clean from all our sins!

**Q11: Peter's just mentioned water was the means by which Noah and his family were saved from the wicked world. How does this picture correspond to believer's baptism?**

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<sup>3</sup> There is considerable difference of opinion between Roman Catholicism, Church of Christ, and Reformed churches about baptism, and I don't intend to imply they're on the same page. Briefly, I believe the first two's teaching on baptism to be heretical, and the third to be quite dangerous if it's actually preached and practiced consistently. For example, see the 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith on baptism:

"Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his Church until the end of the world," (Ch. 28, Article 1).

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- This is how:
  - o (1) Just as the floodwaters were how Noah and his family were saved from the wickedness of the world,
  - o (2) the baptism of the Spirit is how God rescues us, washes us clean, **“and deliver[s] us from this present, evil world,”** (Gal 1:4, KJV)
- This baptism isn't an external thing, like washing dirt from your body; it's a spiritual, internal thing:
  - o (a) an appeal to God to be free of the guilt and consciousness of our own sin,
  - o (b) an appeal to finally have a good conscience before God,
  - o (c) an appeal for salvation which results in the new birth, where our sins are washed away
- And, don't forget, this salvation is only possible **“because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ,”** (see Acts 2:22-36; esp. v.33; see also 1 Pet 1:3 [“through the resurrection ...”]).

**e. He's at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, with angels, authorities and powers subject to Him.**

- Jesus has *already won the victory*, and He's sent the Spirit to wash and cleanse any from their sins who trusts in Him and the work He's done:
  - o (a) This is who our Savior is
  - o (b) This is who's on our side
  - o (c) This is the One who was put to death in the body, but given life by the Spirit
  - o (d) This is the One who went and preached to the spirits in prison
  - o (e) This is the One who then left here, and went back to where He belonged, where He's waiting to come back for us!
- This is:
  - o (a) why we can suffer for doing what's right (if it's God's will);
  - o (b) why we can ask for God's favor on unbelievers, instead of returning evil for evil, or insult for insult;
  - o (c) why we can tell people the Gospel with gentleness and reverence
    - – because Jesus is on our side, and He's already won the victory!

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### **3. THOUGHT-FLOW DIAGRAM & GREEK TRANSLATION NOTES:**

I can hardly think of anybody who'd be interested in these notes. I made them for myself as I studied the passage, and I need somewhere to store them so I find them later. This is as good a place as any. Please feel free to ignore all this, if you wish! These are not preaching notes, and are not intended to be. Nobody in his right mind should mistake them for teaching notes. They're simply translation notes about particular points of grammar and syntax.

#### **a. Translation (1 Peter 3:18-22):**

Because even Christ suffered for sins once for all, a righteous man for unrighteous people, in order to bring you [believers] to God; although He was put to death in the body, He was given life by the Spirit. After that, He then went and made proclamation to the spirits [now] in prison, who did not obey in the past when God kept waiting patiently during Noah's days, when the boat was being built in which a few souls (that is, eight) were saved by means of water, which also corresponds to the baptism that has now saved you.

[This baptism] isn't a removal of filth from the body, but an appeal to God for a good conscience, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He's at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, with angels, authorities and powers subject to Him.

#### **b. Thought-flow Diagram:<sup>4</sup>**

This passage is about why Christian should suffer for doing good. The answer is that Jesus has already won the victory, and He's won it for everyone who belongs to Him! What follows are three reasons, and some elaborations on the implications:

<b>REASON #1 – CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION</b>	- <a href="#">Because even Christ suffered for sins once for all,</a>
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<sup>4</sup> This format is based off Richard Young's discussion on thought-flow diagrams (*Intermediate Greek* [Nashville, TN: B&H, 1994], 268-271) and the format in the ZECNT commentary series. It blends both versions, and I'm not entirely sure it gets the point across well, but I'm using it for now.

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PARENTHETICAL ASIDE ABOUT CHRIST		○ <a href="#">a righteous man for unrighteous people,</a>
WHY DID CHRIST SUFFER?		○ <a href="#">in order to bring you [believers] to God;</a>
	<b>Christ's victory over darkness</b>	▪ <a href="#">although He was put to death in the body, He was given life by the Spirit.</a>
<b>REASON #2 – ALL REBELS PROVEN WRONG</b>		- <a href="#">After that, He then went and made proclamation to the spirits [now] in prison,</a>
WHO ARE THESE REBELS?		○ <a href="#">who did not obey in the past when God kept waiting patiently during Noah's days,</a>
		○ <a href="#">when the boat was being built in which a few souls (that is, eight) were saved by means of water,</a>
	<b>aside about salvation</b>	▪ <a href="#">which also corresponds to the baptism that has now saved you.</a>
	not an external thing	• <a href="#">[This baptism] isn't a removal of filth from the body,</a>
	but an internal thing	• <a href="#">but an appeal to God for a good conscience,</a>
	what makes the Holy Spirit's baptism possible?	• <a href="#">because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.</a>
<b>REASON #3 – CHRIST REIGNS VICTORIOUS!</b>		- <a href="#">He's at the right hand of God,</a>
		○ <a href="#">having gone into heaven, with angels, authorities and powers subject to Him.</a>

### c. Translation Notes:

- **Row #1:** Greek text (UBS-5);
- **Row #2:** parsing;
- **Row #3:** gloss;
- **Row #4:** brief syntax notes;
- **Row #5:** cardboard, but more “literal” translation;
- **Row #6:** smoother, slightly more colloquial translation

ὅτι	καὶ	Χριστός	ἀπαξ	περὶ	ἁμαρτιῶν	ἔπαθεν
conj	conj	nsm	adv	prep	gsm	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,s,aor,a,i
because	also,even	Messiah, Christ	once for all	reference	sins	He suffered
reason	ascensive	subj.nom.	time/degree	benefaction	obj.prep	constative, simple active
Because even Christ suffered for sins once for all,						

ὅτι. Peter is explaining the reason for the previous statement; why is it better to suffer because you're doing what's right, then because you're doing what's evil?

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Well, because that's what Christ did! He suffered on behalf of unrighteous people, so they might be brought to God. Peter's remarks after this passage ("since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought ..." 1 Pet 4:1) show this is the correct train of thought.

δικαιος	ὑπὲρ	ἀδίκων
nsm	prep	gpm
righteous	for	unrighteous
<i>apposition to Χριστός</i>	<i>benefaction</i>	<i>obj.prep</i>
a righteous man for unrighteous people,		

ἵνα	ὑμᾶς	προσαγάγη	τῷ	θεῷ
conj	2 <sup>nd</sup> ,pl,acc	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,s,aor,a,subj	dsm	dsm
in order to	you	He brought forward	to	God
<i>purpose clause w/subjunctive</i>	<i>d.o.</i> <i>προσαγάγη</i>	<i>constative, simple active</i>	<i>indirect obj.</i>	
in order to bring you [believers] to God;				

θανατωθεῖς	μὲν	σαρκί	ζωοποιηθεῖς	δὲ
appnsm		dsm	appnsm	conj
he was put to death		flesh,body	He was given life	but
<i>adverbial (concessive) mod. προσαγάγη, constative, divine passive, implied subj is Christ</i>		<i>dative of sphere (metaphorical)</i>	<i>adverbial (concessive) mod. προσαγάγη, constative, divine passive, implied subj is Christ</i>	<i>contrast</i>
although He was put to death in the body, He was given life by the Spirit.				

θανατωθεῖς μὲν σαρκί, ζωοποιηθεῖς δὲ πνεύματι. There are two main questions here, and they're intertwined together.

- (1) What is the "flesh" and what is the "spirit?"
- (2) How are the datives functioning?

A translator could go blind considering all the possibilities. I won't outline all these possibilities, but I will focus on the most likely ones.

**Option #1 – different spheres of existence** (e.g. Tyndale, RSV, ESV, NASB, NLT). The modern consensus is that "flesh" is the earthly sphere, and "spirit" is a

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shorthand for the resurrection life.<sup>5</sup> In this case, the datives would **both** be metaphorical references to a sphere of existence. I am uncomfortable with this reasoning because, no matter how many caveats its advocates deploy, this position *implies* Christ does not own a resurrected body. Is Christ now a spirit? Didn't He invite the disciples to touch His hands and side? Didn't He eat before them to prove He *wasn't* a spirit? Didn't the Apostle John argue the very idea that Jesus didn't *really* come "in the flesh?"

Proponents of this theory are always quick to assure readers they aren't suggesting some kind of dualism, but that's exactly what you get. I would like to hear a proponent of this position explain to, say, high school students what, **exactly**, he means by "sphere of the body" and "sphere of the spirit." I doubt we'll get much substance. The concept is too abstract to actually explain coherently, which is precisely why it's open to charges of dualism and/or docetism. Another commentator tried to explain it thus; "To put it another way, after his resurrection, Jesus Christ is no longer physical, and what he is, is defined by the term 'spiritual.'"<sup>6</sup>

Spare me! This is little more than white noise that tells us nothing.

J.N.D. Kelly took a go at it and wrote, "By flesh is meant Christ in His human sphere of existence, considered as a man among men. By spirit is meant Christ in His heavenly, spiritual sphere of existence, considered as divine spirit (see on 1:11); and this does not exclude His bodily nature, since as risen from the dead it is glorified."<sup>7</sup>

This doesn't help much. What does "human sphere of existence" mean? Is it a synonym for "incarnation" or "time here on earth?" What, exactly, is a heavenly

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Greg Forbes concludes, "Christ was put to death in the realm of the flesh but made alive in the realm of the Spirit. This does not imply a dualism between the material and immaterial, which is a Gk. philosophical notion quite foreign to biblical thought, but a contrast between the weakness of human nature (*σάρξ* is used in this sense in 1: 24; 4: 1, 2, 6) and the power of the life to come. In other words, Christ has moved from an earthly existence into the realm of resurrection life ..." (*1 Peter*, in EGGNT [Nashville, TN: B&H, 2014; Kindle ed.], KL 3922-3925).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel C. Arichea and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on the First Letter from Peter*, UBS Handbook Series (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1980), 113.

<sup>7</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, in BNTC (London, UK: Continuum, 1969), 151.

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sphere of existence, and did Christ not have this during the incarnation? This actually touches on the kenosis; what, exactly, should we think the kenosis consists of? Did Christ *ever stop* upholding all things in Creation during the incarnation (see Col 1; Heb 1)? This interpretation would have us believe it, and many evangelicals today hold some flavor of kenotic interpretation with the incarnation. In short, I don't believe Christ ever gave up or suppressed His "spiritual sphere of existence" during the incarnation, so there was nothing to "give life to," in that sense.

What about the implications for two-nature Christology as a result of the incarnation? This "spheres of existence" concept is basically functional dualism, and it undercuts what the Bible tells us about Christ's post-resurrection body.

Proponents of this theory often point to 1 Tim 3:16 ("He was manifested **in the flesh**, vindicated **in the Spirit**," RSV). However, this is open to different interpretations about how to understand the use of the two prepositions ἐν. For example, the ESV, NIV and NLT understand the second preposition to be expressing agency ("**by** the Spirit"); a perfectly reasonable option which undercuts this argument.

These commentators also point to Rom 1:3-4 which tells us Jesus, "was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead." The context here is completely different; Paul is making a statement that Jesus was descended from David (as the prophets said, cf. Rom 1:2) as regards His human genealogy, yet ordained and appointed to be the Son of God, as proven by His resurrection. There is nothing here about "spheres of existence," and commentators who reach for such connections are grasping at straws.

J. Ramsey Michaels does the best job here, when he explains, "the distinction here indicated by 'flesh' and 'Spirit' is not between the material and immaterial parts of Christ's person (i.e. his 'body' and 'soul'), but rather between his earthly existence and his risen state (cf. Rom 1:3-4; 1 Tim 3:16)."<sup>8</sup> However, even he falters when

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<sup>8</sup> Michaels (*1 Peter*, 204).

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he tries to explain; “‘spirit’ refers to that sphere of Christ’s existence in which God’s Holy Spirit was supremely and most consciously at work.”<sup>9</sup>

Again, this is incoherent. The idea seems to be that Christ was put to death in His incarnate, earthly state and given life to rise into a resurrected, spiritual state. No matter how much you tap-dance, you cannot escape giving the impression that Jesus’ resurrected body is docetic, in some fashion. This is precisely what Jesus sought to avoid in His immediate post-resurrection appearances. This “sphere of existence” concept is abstract, difficult to grasp and needlessly confusing. There is another way ...

**Option #2 – revenge of the datives** (e.g. KJV, NKJV, NIV). This interpretation hinges on taking the datives to be functioning differently, which is something some commentators would tear their hair out over.

The first dative (*σαρκί*) would be a dative of reference, limiting the scope of the participle *θανατωθείς* to a particular range (i.e. the body), and the second dative (*πνεύματι*) would be a dative of agency, denoting the personal agent who brought Christ to life. So, it would read, “although He was put to death **in the body**, He was given life **by the Spirit**.” Here, “flesh” just means “the body,” and “Spirit” would refer to the Holy Spirit. Thomas Schreiner remarked, “The deadlock can be broken if we recognize that the two dative nouns are not used in precisely the same way; the first is a dative of reference, and the second is a dative of agency. Christ was put to death with reference to or in the sphere of his body, but on the other hand he was made alive by the Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> Amen to that!

Grudem objects to this understanding because Scripture often contrasts the earthly with the physical.<sup>11</sup> He’s obviously hinging his argument on the meaning of “flesh” and “spirit,” rather than the datives. This observation is interesting but meaningless, particularly because Grudem (like many commentators who take this

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<sup>9</sup> Michaels (*1 Peter*, 204).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, in NAC (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2003), 184.

<sup>11</sup> “Whenever, as here, ‘flesh’ is contrasted with ‘spirit’ (pneuma), the contrast is between physical, visible things which belong to this present world and invisible things which can exist in the unseen ‘spiritual’ world of heaven and the age to come,” (Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter*, vol. 17, TNTC [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1988], 163).

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view) *cannot tell us what on earth Peter is talking about*. His best attempt is that it “must mean ‘made alive in the spiritual realm, in the realm of the Spirit’s activity.’”<sup>12</sup> Come again? What does this mean? He continues, “In the spiritual realm, the realm of the Holy Spirit’s activity, Christ was raised from the dead.”<sup>13</sup>

He objects to the datives having different meanings; “it would be somewhat unusual to expect readers to see exactly the same grammatical structure (in Greek) in parallel parts of the same sentence, and yet to know that Peter wanted the two parts understood differently (put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit).”<sup>14</sup> I disagree, especially when the other interpretation makes little sense. I’m not interested in neat syntactical categories; I’m interested in what on earth the text means. English readers today don’t decide meaning based on some alleged parallel syntactical structure of prepositions; they interpret based on context. I’m generally more moved by context and comprehension than by arguments based on syntax, especially when the interpretation which makes the most sense on its face (i.e. different uses of the datives) has a perfectly reasonable syntactical interpretation.

In addition, the participles are passives, meaning these actions were done to Christ. He was put to death by others, and He was certainly raised to life by the Spirit, too. Thus, this explanation also makes good sense of the passive voice of the participles.<sup>15</sup>

No, the simplest explanation is that Peter is referring to death and resurrection. Jesus was put to death **in** the body (dative of reference), but made alive **by** the Holy Spirit (dative of agency). This is simple, direct, and easily understood. It is the most likely option.

πνεύματι	ἐν	ᾧ	καὶ	τοῖς	ἐν	φυλακῇ	πνεύμασιν	πορευθεὶς	ἐκήρυξεν
dsm	prep	rel pro, dsm	conj	dpm	prep	dsf	dpn	appnsm	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,s,aor,a,i
spirit	in	which	then	the	in	prison	spirits	He went	He preached

<sup>12</sup> Grudem (*1 Peter*, 164).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1995), 140.

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dative of agency)	<i>temporal, mod.</i> ζωοποιηθείς δὲ πνεύματι	<i>temporal</i>		<i>spatial</i>	<i>dative reference</i>	d.o. ἐκήρυξεν	<i>attendant circumstance tied to ἐκήρυξεν, constative, deponent passive, implied subj is Christ</i>	<i>constative, simple active</i>
After that, He then went and made proclamation to the spirits [now] in prison,								

ἐν ᾧ. There are several options here:

- (1) *Metaphorical sphere*. This means Christ went to preach to the spirits in prison in the state of the spirit (i.e. the resurrected body). In this case, the antecedent of the relative pronoun would be πνεύματι.
- (2) *Reason*. The idea would be that, because Christ has been made alive in the spirit, He has gone to preach to the spirits in prison. The antecedent is not just πνεύματι, but the entire clause. This suggests Christ *could not* go and do this before He was made alive in the spirit, for whatever reason.
- (3) *A marker of a changed condition or circumstance* (see BDAG, s.v. “2581 ἐν,” 7 and s.v. “5396 ὅς,” 1.k.γ). The main idea is basically identical to the first option (above), but the syntactical category is different. Grammar nerds might be pleased with this option, but the sense in English is the same. The syntactical sense is conjunctive (see Wallace, *GGBB*, 343).
- (4) *Time*. The sense would be that, during the time when Christ was made alive in the spirit, He went to preach to the spirits in prison (see BDAG, s.v. “2581 ἐν,” 10). This suggests the infamous line from the Apostles Creed that Christ descended into hell before His resurrection. Or, even better, *after* Christ’s resurrection, He went to preach to the spirits in prison. The antecedent for the pronoun would be the entire clause.

The best option, in light of my conclusions about the dative of agency (“**by** the Spirit”), is to see this prepositional phrase as temporal (“after this”). So much hinges on how one understands those datives!

ἀπειθήσασιν	ποτε	ὅτε	ἀπεξεδέχετο	ἡ	τοῦ	θεοῦ	μακροθυμία	ἐν	ἡμέραις
aapdpm	adv	adv	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,s,impf,m,i	nsf	gsm	gsm	nsf	prep	dpf
they did not obey	once, formerly	when	He was waiting		the	God	long-suffering, patience	during	days
<i>Attributive (mod. πνεύμασιν), constative, simple active</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>iterative imperfect, indirect middle (God)</i>		<i>subj.gen.</i>		<i>adverbial nom.</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>obj.prep</i>
who did not obey in the past when God kept waiting patiently during Noah’s days,									

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There are several knotty problems to consider with this passage:

- (1) **Who** did Christ preach to?

He preached to spirits who are now in prison, who were around in Noah's day. These spirits had the capability to obey prior to the flood, but they refused to do so. God was patient and long-suffering while waiting for them. Whatever else this means, it at least means this.

- (2) **What** did He preach?

We've seen a clear progression; (a) put to death, (b) raised to life by the Spirit, (c) preached to these spirits in prison. So, it's likely Jesus is preaching a "song of victory" to these spirits, who now have no chance to repent. That is, it parallels Colossians 2:11-14, and Hebrews 2:14-15. In a modern colloquial idiom, He'd be saying to these spirits, "Look at me, losers! How do you like them apples!?"

If this is the case, Christ didn't really "preach" at all. Instead, He proclaimed His victory over evil. In other words, He "made proclamation."

- (3) **When** did He preach?

He preached after the resurrection. **First**, the conjunction *καὶ* gives a temporal sense ("and then"), which comes *after* the resurrection. Even if you understand it as being ascensive ("also"), it still conveys contemporaneous action. There is no way to understand the conjunction as referring to a past event. **Second**, the participles are aorist, indicating an undefined point of time in the past. These are constatives, and simply reference a time in the past (i.e. Noah's day) when these spirits had a chance to obey God, and did not. **Third**, the two temporal adverbs (*ποτε ὅτε*) tell us these are the same spirits "who did not obey in the past when ..."

The participles and the adverbs are reference markers, telling the reader the spirits who disobeyed God then are the same spirits Christ preached to after His

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resurrection. No matter which way you slice it, this preaching happened after the resurrection.

- (4) So, the million-dollar question is **who are the spirits?**

Here's what we know; (a) the spirits disobeyed God during Noah's day, (b) the spirits are now in prison, but they weren't during Noah's day, and (c) the spirits had the capability to repent at that point, which rules out fallen angels. The only reasonable answer is that Christ made proclamation to the wicked people who disobeyed God in Noah's day. That proclamation consisted of Christ trumpeting His ultimate victory, and assuring them their condemnation was final.

Some commentators (i.e. Jobes, Michaels<sup>16</sup>) believe Peter is referring to 1 Enoch. However, there is no hint in the text that this is so, and all appeals along this line are arguments from a deafening silence. The facts as I outlined above suggest these "spirits" are the wicked people who disobeyed God in Noah's day.

Michaels dismisses this option without providing justification for why he believes fallen angels can repent, and remarked that "spirits" often refers to evil angels in Scripture.<sup>17</sup> He also argues that Jesus wouldn't have any particular reason to care about proclaiming His victory to the wicked souls from Noah's day, but He would have reason to do so to fallen angels.<sup>18</sup>

These objections are weak. Angels **did not** have an opportunity to repent during Noah's day, God **did not** wait patiently for them to repent while the boat was being built, and angels **are not** in prison now. Michaels also underestimates the gravity of apostasy in Noah's day. This was the *third time* God had "started over," as it were, with mankind. The first was immediately after the fall, the second was after Abel's murder when He gave Adam and Eve a new boy named Seth, and the third was when He started over with Noah and his family. It was only after this third failure at Babel that God started over a *fourth time* with Abraham and the nation of Israel, the genealogical fountain from which Christ sprung.

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<sup>16</sup> Michaels (*1 Peter*, 206 – 210).

<sup>17</sup> Michaels (*1 Peter*, 207).

<sup>18</sup> Michaels (*1 Peter*, 209).

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Indeed, Satan came very near to destroying the God’s promise of a future Savior during Noah’s day. This is a fitting audience for Christ to proclaim His victory to. It’s contextually appropriate, and we don’t have to reach for tenuous parallels with extra-biblical literature Peter never even mentions.

- (5) So, where is this “prison?”

It must be in hell.

Νῶε	κατασκευαζομένης	κιβωτοῦ	εἰς	ἣν	ὀλίγοι	τοῦτ’	ἔστιν	ὀκτώ	ψυχαί
gsm	pppgsf	gsf	prep	rel pro, asf	npm	dem pro, nsn	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,s,p,a,i		nsf
Noah	it was being constructed	ship, boat, ark	into	which	few	that	is	eight	souls, lives
subj.gen.	<i>adverbial (time) mod. ἀπεξεδέχετο, historical present, simple passive, gen.abs.</i>	<i>gen.abs. / subj.gen.</i>	<i>spatial</i>	<i>obj.prep</i>	<i>apposition to ψυχαί</i>	<i>another apposition to ψυχαί</i>			<i>subj.nom.</i>
when the boat was being built in which a few souls (that is, eight)									

δισώθησαν	δι’	ὑδατος
3 <sup>rd</sup> ,pl,aor,pass,i	prep	gsn
they were saved, rescued, delivered	by, through	water
<i>constative, divine passive</i>	<i>means</i>	<i>obj.prep</i>
were saved by means of water,		

ὃ	καὶ	ὑμᾶς	ἀντίτυπον	νῦν	σώζει	βάπτισμα
rel pro, nsn	conj	2 <sup>nd</sup> ,pl,a	nsn	adv	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,s,p,a,i	nsn
which	also	you	corresponds to	now	it is saving	immersion baptism
<i>refers to ὑδατος</i>	<i>adjunctive</i>	<i>d.o. σώζει</i>	<i>apposition to βάπτισμα</i>	<i>time</i>	<i>durative</i>	<i>subj.nom.</i>
which also corresponds to the baptism that has now saved you.						

ὃ. The relative pronoun could be referring back to the “water” just mentioned,<sup>19</sup> but it’s likely referring to the entire clause “were saved by means of water.”

<sup>19</sup> cf. A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), 1 Pe 3:21.

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**ἀντίτυπον**: A nominative of apposition, providing more information about the subject nominative “immersion.” This is a difficult classification; indeed, Kostenberger (et al) cautions the predicate nominative is very similar to the nominative of apposition.<sup>20</sup> A.T. Robertson even said of the predicate nominative, “it is really apposition.”<sup>21</sup> The key factor why I classify this usage as apposition, not a predicate nominative, is that there is no present or implied “being” verb at all.

Peter is not saying Christian baptism is a fulfillment of an Old Testament type. He is simply saying Christian baptism *corresponds to*<sup>22</sup> and bears a marked resemblance to the account of Noah and His family being borne to safety on the floodwaters. There is a correspondence and similarity between the two, not a typological fulfillment. As A.T. Robertson wrote, “it is only a vague parallel, but not over-fanciful.”<sup>23</sup> Charles Bigg observed, “the mention of Noah had led him to speak of Baptism, which at first strikes him as **analogous** to the Flood, inasmuch as it is a deliverance from drowning in the waters of sin.”<sup>24</sup>

**νῦν**. An adverb of time (“now”), indicating Peter is referring to believers in his day and age.<sup>25</sup>

**σώζει**. A simple active, indicating the subject (“immersion”) performed the action of the verb. Context suggests a durative present (“**saved** you”), where Peter focuses on an act in the past which resulted in a new state of affairs. This is critical:

- (1) the subject is the baptism, and

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<sup>20</sup> “More commonly, however, the predicate nominative describes a larger category of which the subject is a subset. In this regard, the predicate nominative is not dissimilar to an apposition,” (Andreas J. Kostenberger, Benjamin L. Merkle, Robert L. Plummer, *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek: An Intermediate Study of the Grammar and Syntax of the New Testament* [Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016; Kindle ed.], KL 1529-1532).

<sup>21</sup> A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in Light of Historical Research*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1934), 457.

<sup>22</sup> See BDAG, s.v. “744 ἀντίτυπος,” 1.

<sup>23</sup> Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 1 Pet 3:21.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Bigg, *The Epistles of St. Peter and Jude*, in International Critical Commentary (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 164. Emphasis mine.

<sup>25</sup> “The temp. adv. νῦν moves the discussion from the time of Noah to that of Peter’s contemporaries, with καὶ ὑμεῖς (“also you”) possibly occupying an emphatic position (Elliott 669), serving to underscore that it is the readers who are Peter’s main concern,” (Greg Forbes, *1 Peter*, in Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament [Nashville, TN: B&H, 2014; Kindle ed.], KL 4065-4067).

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- (2) the baptism performs the action of the verb (i.e. this baptism has saved the Christians whom Peter is writing to)
- (3) which means the baptism is what results in the salvation of a sinner
- (4) which means this “baptism” is likely the baptism of the Holy Spirit

οὐ	σαρκῶς	ἀπόθεις	ρύπου
neg	gsf	nsf	gsm
not	flesh, body	laying aside, putting off	of dirt, filth
	<i>obj.gen</i>	<i>apposition to βάπτισμα</i>	<i>separation</i>
[This baptism] isn't a removal of filth from the body			

οὐ σαρκῶς ἀπόθεις ρύπου. σαρκῶς is an objective genitive, functioning as the direct object of the idea “removal of filth.”<sup>26</sup> ρύπου is a genitive of separation,<sup>27</sup> indicating “motion away from or distance, whether literally or figuratively.”<sup>28</sup> Under this interpretation, the word is a noun, not an adjective.

Is this literal or metaphorical; that is, is the filth actual dirt or sin? Is Peter saying (1) “this baptism is **not a removal of filth from the body ...**,” or is he saying (2) “this baptism is **not a cleansing from sin ...**”<sup>29</sup>

This passage is captive to a whole host of interlocking exegetical decisions:

- (1) Because I’ve already decided this “baptism” is done by the Holy Spirit (i.e. regeneration), because no other baptism can be said to “save you,”
- (2) then I’m now forced to *not* see Peter’s reference as metaphorical here, because how could the Holy Spirit not cleanse you from sin!?

Many commentators understand the literal reference (if it’s legitimate) to be referring to a Jewish baptism rite of ritual purification, which symbolized inward purification. The problem is that Peter has never adopted an anti-Jewish sentiment in his letter before. If this is his reference, it would seem to come out of left field.

<sup>26</sup> cf. Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997),

<sup>27</sup> cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 108.

<sup>28</sup> Köstenberger (et al), *Going Deeper with New Testament Greek*, KL 2664.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Michaels takes the figurative view (*1 Peter*, 216).

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The alternative is to not make connections Peter never makes, and to understand him to be saying something like, “this baptism **isn’t something as silly and inconsequential as** the removal of filth from the body, it’s something so much more!” We don’t have to reach for anti-Jewish references that don’t exist; we just have to step back and consider the way normal people actually talk. It’s perfectly reasonable to see the first clause as a semi-sarcastic negation (“this baptism **isn’t** something as pedestrian as a mere washing”), and to understand the second clause to define what it is (“an appeal to God for a good conscience”).

<b>ἀλλά</b>	<b>συνειδήσεως</b>	<b>ἀγαθῆς</b>	<b>ἐπερώτημα</b>	<b>εἰς</b>	<b>θεόν</b>
conj	gsf	gsf	nsn	prep	asm
but	consciousness	of good	appeal, pledge,	space	God
contrast	obj.gen	attributive	subj. nom.	to	obj.prep
but an appeal to God for a good conscience,					

**ἀλλά**. This is the contrasting thought which identifies what on earth this baptism is. It **isn’t** a removal of filth from the body (i.e. a washing). Instead, this baptism Peter speaks of **is** an appeal of a good conscience towards God.

**συνειδήσεως ... ἐπερώτημα**. There are two issues here; (1) is the genitive objective or subjective, and (2) what does **ἐπερώτημα** mean? The issue is clarified by what came before. Indeed, what you think this “baptism” is will determine what you do here.

We know Peter has said baptism is not the removal of filth from the body; it isn’t simply an external washing. Instead, it’s either a cry (i.e. appeal) or a promise to God (i.e. pledge) involving a good conscience. Because I’ve already determined this is Spirit baptism (because no other baptism can “save you”), I believe the best thing to do here is to understand this baptism of the Spirit (i.e. regeneration) as an appeal to God (i.e. plea for salvation) from a “good conscience” that has been awakened to the reality of sin and rebellion. That is, regeneration produces repentance and faith; this is referring to salvation. The genitive is objective.

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Baptism is not about “a perceptive awareness within oneself”<sup>30</sup> *per se*. It represents and pictures the appeal a Christian made to God for mercy, forgiveness and grace in a spirit of repentance. What did this appeal consist of? It consisted of “a perceptive awareness” of one’s own unrighteousness, God’s holiness, Christ’s imputed righteousness, and His finished work.

Anyone who attempts to construct an *ordo salutis* from this verse (e.g. repentance and an appeal to God comes before regeneration) is barking up the wrong tree. This isn’t Peter’s point, and it’d be wrong to make it his point.

δι’	ἀναστάσεως	Ἰησοῦ	Χριστοῦ
prep	gsf	gsm	gsm
by, through	raising, resurrection	of Jesus	Messiah
<i>reason</i>	<i>obj.prep</i>		
because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.			

δι’. The preposition likely has a causal meaning here (see BDAG, s.v. “1823 διὰ,” A.5). This usage for the δι’ with the genitive isn’t common, and is debated (but see Romans 8:3). The safer bet would be to go with *means*. But, I dare to go boldly where few others have gone, and label it causal. The reason is because, even if you use *means*, you end up explaining it in a causal manner anyway.

ὃς	ἐστίν	ἐν	δεξιᾷ	τοῦ	θεοῦ
rel pro, nsm	3 <sup>rd</sup> ,s,p,a,i	prep	dsf	gsm	gsm
who, he	He is	in, at	right hand	the	God
<i>refers to Christ</i>		<i>spatial</i>	<i>obj.prep</i>	<i>partitive</i>	
He’s at the right hand of God,					

ὃς. Nearly all English translations render this relative pronoun as “who,” but there’s no compelling reason why this pronoun can’t be translated as a 3<sup>rd</sup> person, singular pronoun (“he”).

Because it’s a relative clause, it’s dependent on what came before it. Peter was clearly talking about Christ just now, so that much fits. But, even though this phrase

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<sup>30</sup> Friberg s.v. “25575 συνείδησις,” 1.

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is *grammatically* dependent, I believe Peter is spring boarding from this last reference (“because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ”) to a profound truth that’s meant to end this exhortation in the most decisive way – Christ is now at God’s right hand, and any and everything is subject to Him!

This is a case where I think neat, proper grammatical categories (which the author was likely not terribly interested in as he wrote, no more than you are when you write) can obscure the larger issue.

πορευθείς	εἰς	οὐρανὸν	ὑποταγέντων	αὐτῷ	ἀγγέλων	καὶ	ἐξουσιῶν	καὶ	δυνάμεων
appnsm	prep	asm	appgpm	dsm	gpm	conj	gpf	conj	gpm
he went	into	heaven	they became subject	to Him	angels	and	authorities	and	powers
<i>adverbial (manner) mod. previous clause, constative, deponent passive, refers to Christ</i>	<i>spatial</i>	<i>obj.prep</i>	<i>attendant circumstance mod. πορευθείς, constative or ingressive, simple passive, genitive absolute</i>	<i>direct obj.</i>					
having gone into heaven, with angels, authorities and powers subject to Him.									