

SPIRITS IN PRISON.

N.B. – Before reading the following four articles the reader is requested to carefully re-examine an article in our issue of June last under the caption, "Sons of God and Daughters of Men."

"Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring US to God, being put to death in the flesh but quickened [in] spirit. By which also, [in addition to this work done for US] he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." – 1 Pet. 3:18-20.

A satisfactory interpretation of this Scripture has long been sought, and but few have found a solution perfectly consistent and satisfying to themselves. Under the increasing light of the Lamp it is now becoming clear, to us at least.

The two views of the passage commonly held we shall state first, and then give our present views.

The most common view is, that during the time that Jesus was entombed he was off on a missionary tour preaching to the antediluvians. It is part of this view that the antediluvian sinners were suffering torture in a place they call hell.

If its advocates would consider it, they would find that their interpretation favors a view of future probation for the antediluvians, a thing which they strenuously oppose. For if Christ preached to them it must have been for some purpose, and surely it was not to merely mock and deride them; his preaching must have been a message of hope – a part of his blessed "good tidings of great joy." And if there is a future probation for the

antediluvians, why may not our position be correct, that in Christ all the families of the earth shall be blessed?

This is the objection which consistency would urge against this view from the standpoint of those who hold it. But if we view it from the scriptural standpoint, and with the correct idea of death, we must reason that if Jesus was really dead during those three days, as the Apostles declare, then he could do no preaching, for "the dead know not anything," (Eccl. 9:5), and "there is no work, nor devices, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave." (Eccl. 9:10.) Secondly, if Jesus had been an exception to the rule and could have preached, the antediluvians could not have heard, for certainly they have no wisdom, nor knowledge, in the grave. Hence this view is found generally unsatisfactory and out of harmony with the Scriptures.

The second view, and the one which seemed most reasonable to us until recently, is to refer the preaching to that which Noah did under the direction of the Spirit of God to the antediluvians, who at this time are imprisoned in death. The objection to this view is that the preaching was not done to men, nor to the spirits of men, but to spirits, spiritual beings; and the preaching was not done by Noah, nor by the Spirit of God, but by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

As we at present see the subject, it seems very clear that the spirits are those spiritual beings whose disobedience took place during the days of Noah, and whom God therefore imprisoned or restrained in some of their former liberties and privileges; even "those angels who kept not their own principality, but left their own habitation [or normal condition] he has kept in perpetual chains, [restraints,] under thick darkness, for the judgment of the great day." Jude 6. – Diaglott.

This interpretation seems to meet all the circumstances of the case thus far. Now we inquire, In what way could Jesus preach to these during the time he was dead? We answer that it is not so stated. It was by the facts that he preached, as we sometimes say that "Actions speak louder than words." It was by his sufferings, death and resurrection that the preaching was done. Thus, as Jesus went from step to step in his work, his course was preaching a grand sermon to those angels who once had been placed in control of man, and had themselves fallen instead of lifting up mankind. In Jesus they saw exemplified obedience even unto death, and its reward – resurrection – to spiritual being of the DIVINE NATURE. Such was the great text, and the lesson from it is stated by the Apostle in verse 22, viz., that Jesus was now highly exalted and given a name [title] above every name was "gone into heaven, and is at the right hand of God [position of highest favor]; ANGELS and authorities and powers being made subject to him." They knew Jesus before he left the glory of the heavenly condition and became a man. They knew the object of his self-sacrifice as a man. They saw him obedient even unto death and then his high exaltation came as a reward (Phil. 2:9). They must have felt keenly their loss through disobedience, cut off from communion with God, restrained as unworthy of former liberty and communion with the purer minded of mankind, and their own future an unsolved mystery. We can but imagine that sorrow and chagrin filled their hearts as they contrasted their course of disobedience and its results with Jesus' obedient course and its majestically grand results. We can fancy them saying, Would that we had realized before as fully as we now do the wide contrast between the results of obedience and disobedience. Would that we might have another trial; with our increased knowledge our course would be very different.

A clear distinction should be borne in mind as between Satan and these angels. Satan evidently sinned against great light, so that

infinite wisdom finds no place to do more for him. His was not a temptation to sin from bad example in others, as was the case with the "angels who sinned" in the days of Noah, being led into evil by their contact with fallen man, for Satan is the father of lies and was a sinner prior to man's fall, and was man's tempter. With reference to Satan nothing is stated in Scripture to indicate a future trial; but, to the contrary, it is expressly stated that he is to be "destroyed." Heb. 2:14; Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:10.

Here we start the inquiry: Is it possible that there may be probation for these spirits in prison who were formerly disobedient in the days of Noah, led into sin through man's bad example? We **[R697 : page 3]** answer that God's loving care over and for man, while we were yet sinners, and his impartiality would lead us to hope that he might as well have some provision for the spirits imprisoned in death. Though because of the different penalties upon the two classes the means of recovery may not necessarily be the same in all particulars: for instance, these angels not being condemned to death need not to be redeemed from death.

If those angels which sinned are to have a future trial – during the Day or age of judgment [or trial], it follows that there is hope for them. If then under the able instruction and assistance of the glorified church they forsake sin and lay hold upon righteousness, they shall be accounted worthy of everlasting life and happiness.

If we find no Scripture statement contradictory of this – no statement telling of their destruction, may we not have hope for them and search for some Scripture statements favoring that hope?

We find but two statements apparently contradictory; the one is (Mark 1:24; Luke 4:34; Matt. 8:29), "Art thou come to destroy us before the time?" This shows us that these imprisoned spirits had in mind destruction or torment as their final doom, but it by no means proves that their suppositions were correct, no more than

for some of the so-called Orthodox to believe that nine-tenths of humanity will be everlastingly tormented would be a proof of it. The fact is that we find Satan, the master teacher who has taught men to thus blaspheme God's character through misrepresentation of his plans, was the master and chief over these cast-down spirits, and evidently had misrepresented Jehovah's plans to the imprisoned spirits as he has to men. He is the father of lies.

The second text is (Matt. 25:41), "into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." This cannot be used as an argument against a hope for a probation for the imprisoned spirits, for though by force of circumstances and restraint from any other service, they are now, Satan's angels or messengers or servants, yet they may not always be such, IF an opportunity were granted for them to return to God's service and be angels of God. The passage relates to the "lake of fire" or destruction into which at the close of the Millennial age all are to be cast, who are out of harmony with God. Satan will be of those cast into that everlasting destruction, and with him all who do unrighteousness or have pleasure therein – all of whom, spirits or men, are reckoned to be on his side, his angels or messengers – evil doers shall all be cut off from life. To cut off such, and such only, was God's plan from the beginning, for such only, destruction and cutting off from life forever was designed.
