

Ask Away – December 19

1. What is the “Dispersion”? (1 Pet 1:1)

The word “Dispersion” comes from the Greek *Diasporas*, which means “scattered or dispersed.” The term was used to refer to the scattered Jewish communities living outside Israel after the Babylonian exile (cf. the Greek form of Deut 30:4; Neh 1:9; Isa 49:6; cf. also 2 Mac 1:27). It occurs two other times in the NT with this meaning (John 7:35; James 1:1). While the term normally referred to ethnic Jews, Peter uses it here to refer to spiritual Jews (Rom 2:29), that is, to all the scattered Christians whether they were Jew or Gentile (indeed the readers were mostly Gentiles; cf. 1 Pet 2:9–10; 4:3–4).

2. What is Peter referring to when he says, “...a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time”? (1 Pet 1:5)

The NT tells us: (a) we have been saved (Eph 2:8), (b) we are being saved (1 Cor 1:18), and (c) we shall be saved (Rom 5:9). Thus, for believers, salvation is something that happened in the past, works itself out in the present, and will be completed in the future. In this context, Peter is focusing on the present and future aspects of salvation. Right now, God’s power is keeping all who are being saved (all who have a present, living faith) for a final salvation when Jesus Christ returns to earth (“in the last time”).

3. What are the “...things into which angels long to look”? (1 Pet 1:12)

The word “things” refers to “the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories” which the prophets foretold and which the readers heard from those who preached the gospel (1 Pet 1:10–11). The Bible implies that angels are observers of earthly events (see Gen 18:1–8; Job 1:7; Luke 15:10; 1 Cor 4:9; 1 Tim 5:21; Heb 1:14). Thus it is only natural that they should be intently interested in seeing the unfolding of God’s plan of salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection and the preaching of the gospel.

4. What is Peter talking about when he says, “...[Jesus] went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison...”? (1 Peter 3:19)

This is a difficult passage, and there are various interpretations.¹ The current majority view among scholars is that Christ proclaimed His victory to the evil angels who sinned during Noah’s day (cf. Gen 6:1–4; Jude 6).² However, whatever view is taken, we must remember Peter’s larger point—it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. As Jobes says, “Even though Christ suffered unjustly to death for doing good, that suffering was not the defeat it may have appeared to be but was instead a victory over all angels, authorities, and powers” (1 Pet 3:22). Thus this difficult passage is truly a word of encouragement to suffering Christians.³

¹ For a good overview of the various views, see I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991).

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter Jude*, New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003): 185.

³ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005): 237.

5. What does Peter mean when he says, “Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you...”? (1 Peter 3:21)

Peter wanted his readers to understand that baptism is symbolic of salvation, for it pictures the believer’s union with Christ (being immersed in water is symbolic of death and burial with Christ, and being raised up from the water is symbolic of resurrection with Christ to newness of life; cf. Rom 6:3–5). Baptism saves us, not because the ritual has some mystical power, but in the sense that it visibly expresses our saving faith in Christ. Peter’s comment on the correspondence between baptism and the flood makes sense when you realize that just as it was not the flood waters but the ark that saved Noah, so it is Christ and the power of His resurrection that saves us, not the waters of baptism themselves.