



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond V26 N17 April 28, 2024

HIGHER UP

“When Jesus is Lord (Part 2)”

1 Peter 3:18b-22

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Jesus Christ

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God, who became man, died for sinners, and rose from the dead.

“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

Hebrews 1:3



Noah’s flood water symbolizes baptism—how so?

Jesus died on Friday, April 3, A.D. 33 (Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 114; see full discussion 65-114) around 3:00 in the afternoon (Mt 27:45-50; cf. Jn 19:30), and was resurrected, that is, his mortal body was raised immortal, early Sunday morning (Jn 20:1; cf. Mk 16:2; Lk 24:10), which raises the following question: if Jesus’ physical body lay in the tomb from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning, where was Jesus’ “spirit” (Mt 27:5) or soul, namely, the immaterial part of his humanity, once it left his body? Some interpreters believe that 1 Peter 3:19-20 addresses that question: “. . . he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.”

This sentence is extremely difficult to interpret because it raises a number of questions, each of which has a number of possible answers. Here are the questions it raises: 1) *Who* are the spirits in prison—unbelievers who have died, Old Testament believers who have died, or fallen angels? 2) *What* did Christ preach—a second chance for repentance, the completion of his redemptive work, or final condemnation? and 3) *When* did he preach—in the days of Noah, between his death and resurrection, or after his resurrection? As you can see, three questions, each with three possible answers, lead to a variety of views.

One commentator does an excellent job of summarizing these views (see Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, TNTC, 204). He writes:

“The following five views have been the most commonly held (the italicized words indicate the identity of ‘the spirits in prison’ in each view):

View 1: When Noah was building the ark, Christ ‘in spirit’ was in Noah preaching repentance and righteousness through him to *unbelievers who were on the earth then* but are now ‘spirits in prison’ (people in hell).

View 2: After Christ died, he went and preached to *people in hell*, offering them a second change of salvation.

View 3: After Christ died, he went and preached to *people in hell*, proclaiming to them that he had triumphed over them, and their condemnation was final.

View 4: After Christ died, he proclaimed release to people who had repented just before they died in the flood, and let them out of their imprisonment (in Purgatory) into

heaven. (A common Catholic interpretation.)

View 5: After Christ died (or: after he rose but before he ascended into heaven), he travelled to hell and proclaimed triumph over fallen angels who had sinned by marrying human women before the flood. (Cf. Ge 6:2, 4.)”

After summarizing the views, he goes on to give a detailed defense of View 1 (see 205-39).

Another commentator provides a succinct description of View 1, which is the view taken in this study of 1 Peter 3:18b-22. He writes:

“The ‘spirits’ (*pneumasin*, a term usually applied to supernatural beings but also used at least once to refer to human ‘spirits’: cf. Heb. 12:23) are described in 1 Peter 3:20 as those who were disobedient **when God waited patiently for Noah** to finish building the ark. They had rebelled against the message of God during the 120 years the ark was being built . . . Those ‘spirits’ are now ‘in prison’ awaiting the final judgment of God at the end of the age.

“The problem remains as to *when* Christ preached to these ‘spirits’ . . . The preincarnate Christ was actually in Noah, ministering through him, by means of the Holy Spirit. Peter (1:11) referred to the ‘Spirit of Christ’ in the Old Testament prophets. Later he described Noah as ‘a preacher of righteousness’ (2 Peter 2:5). The Spirit of Christ preached through Noah to the ungodly humans who, at the time of Peter’s writing, were ‘spirits in prison’ awaiting final judgment.”

(The answer to *when* did Jesus preach implies the answer to *what* did Jesus preach, namely, repentance.)

“This interpretation seems to fit the general theme of this section (1 Peter 3:13-22)—keeping a good conscience in unjust persecution. Noah is present as an example of one who committed himself to a course of action for the sake of a clear conscience before God, though it meant enduring harsh ridicule” (Roger M. Raymer, “1 Peter,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 851).

So contrary to the opinion of some, Peter does not answer the intriguing question regarding the whereabouts of Jesus’ “spirit” (Mt 27:5) or soul, namely, the immaterial part of his humanity, once it left his body. For an answer to that question, one must see other New Testament passages (see “He Descended into Hell,” desiringgod.org/articles/he-descended-into-hell).

1

EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read 1 Peter 3:18b-22

18b He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. 19 After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits – 20 to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, 21 and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also – not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.

Read in another translation

18b. . . 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. (ESV)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 18b, 21.
- Bracket "in the Spirit" in v. 18b.
- Bracket "After being made alive" in v. 19.
- Circle "made proclamation" in v. 19.
- Circle "imprisoned spirits" in v. 19.
- Underline "through water" in v. 20.
- Circle "symbolizes" in v. 21.
- Circle "saves" in v. 21.
- Bracket "the pledge of a clear conscience" in v. 21.
- Bracket "at God's right hand" in v. 22.

Underline "if it is God's will" in v. 17. What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Explain the *contrast*, “put to death in the flesh *but* made alive in the spirit” (ESV). (See note on v. 18.)
 2. Identify the “imprisoned spirits.” *Who* are they and *where* are they imprisoned?
 3. *What* exactly did Jesus *proclaim* to them? (See note on v. 19.)
 4. For how long did Noah preach and God patiently wait for the disobedient to repent? (See Ge 6:3.)
 5. Peter says that the eight people onboard the ark “were saved *through* water.” How so? (See note on v. 20.)
 6. To *what* does “*this* water” (v. 21) refer and to *what* does it *correspond* (ESV)? Explain.
 7. The rite of baptism itself does not save, but what it *signifies* does. What does baptism *signify*?
 8. Baptism entails “the *pledge* of a clear conscience toward God” (v. 21). Put what that means in your own words. (See note on v. 21.)
 9. Verse 22 speaks of Christ’s vindication. How so? (See v. 18a; cf. v. 22.)
 10. **Discussion:** Talk about any *similarities* you see between Peter’s readers, Noah, and believers today.
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Commentary On The Text

1 Peter 3:18b-22 contains some extremely difficult interpretive questions. The numerous questions, their numerous possible answers, and the weighing of evidence for each, leading to interpretive answers, all contribute to the difficulty. What Martin Luther said about verses 19-20, in particular, might be said about the entire passage: "A wonderful text is this, and a more obscure passage perhaps than any other in the New Testament, so that I do not know for a certainty just what Peter means" (*Commentary on Peter and Jude*, 166). Still, our inability to fully comprehend the text's meaning does not imply we cannot comprehend its meaning at all.

On this difficult passage, one commentator writes: "These verses begin with the example of Jesus as worthy of understanding and imitation in order to cope with persecution (when God so wills). Jesus suffered as a righteous man (for the unrighteous), but he was also vindicated and now sits at the right hand of God. Between the statement of Jesus' suffering and his vindication Peter brings up some kind of preaching of Jesus to spirits (3:19). These spirits are then subjected to further scrutiny as Peter identifies them with the spirits who were alive at the time of Noah, which in turn gives rise to a Petrine comparison of the delivery of God's people during the Flood (through the ark) with the delivery of contemporary Christians through baptism (3:20-21). All of this is tied off with a conclusion about the vindication of Jesus. Even though Jesus suffered (3:18), he was ultimately vindicated by God (3:22)" (Scot McKnight, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Peter*, 214-15).

1 Peter 3:18b-22 continues the thought of 3:13-18a, which ends, "For it is better if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God" (vv. 17-18a). What's more, in the midst of that suffering, Peter tells believers to be prepared to explain the reason behind the hope they have (v. 15). But if this passage, 3:18b-22, is about Jesus who suffered for doing good, why bring Noah into the discussion? Why did Peter need to tell his readers about the flood and to explain that its water corresponds in some way Christian baptism?

The apostle begins by stating that with respect to his suffering, Jesus was put to death "in the body" (lit. "in the flesh), a reference to "death in the physical sphere of his existence," which would entail the death of his physical body, but he was made alive "in the spirit," that is, "in the spiritual sphere of his existence," namely, the sphere in which the Spirit and power of God are displayed without hindrance and human limitation," which would entail his resurrection (see note on v. 18).

In which state (v. 18b begins *en hō*, "in which"), "he went and made proclamation to imprisoned spirits." Five

different views of what Peter is referring to here are discussed on page one. The most plausible in my opinion is View 1, summarized as follows: When Noah was building the ark, Christ 'in spirit' was in Noah preaching repentance and righteousness through him to *unbelievers who were on the earth then* but are now 'spirits in prison' (people in hell). This means that Peter is not answering the question: if Jesus' physical body lay in the tomb from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning, where was Jesus' "spirit" (Mt 27:5) or soul, namely, the immaterial part of his humanity, once it left his body? Put differently, Peter is not describing what Jesus did between his death and resurrection, that is, between Friday afternoon and early Sunday morning while his body lay in the tomb.

Peter's allusion to Jesus' proclamation through Noah leads him to comment on Christian baptism. According to the apostle, "this water symbolizes" — cf. "corresponds to" (ESV) — "baptism that now saves you." One commentator unpacks Peter's rather opaque use of typology. He writes: "'Corresponding to' is a translation of the Greek word *antitypon* ('antitype'). This is one of the places in the New Testament where the writer identified something as a type (cf. also Rom. 5:14; 1 Cor. 10:6, 11; Heb. 9:24). The flood in Noah's day was a type (i.e., a divinely intended foreshadowing) of baptism. God washed away from the earth its past evils and sins with the Flood, and Noah and his family could start life anew . . . Baptism 'saves' Christians now like the water that floated Noah's ark saved him. Water baptism does not save us by cleansing us from defilement, either physically or spiritually, but by announcing publicly that the person baptized has placed his or her faith in Jesus Christ. Baptism (really our faith in Christ that baptism symbolizes) 'now saves' us from the consequences of siding with the world (cf. James 1:21; 2:24; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; Col. 3:8-9; Heb. 10:22). Baptism is the evidence that a person has made a break with his or her past life and is now taking a stand with the Savior" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on 1 Peter," 2024 ed., 87-88, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/1peter.pdf) — it entails a pledge to live in newness of life.

Peter closes his digression on the example of Jesus by describing Jesus' vindication. Following his resurrection, he ascended to heaven, and is now seated at God's right hand — thereby signifying his messianic authority — "with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him" (v. 22). Peter elaborates on Jesus' vindication in his sermon delivered on the day of Pentecost, which concludes with these words: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah" (Ac 2:36). Jesus suffered unjustly for doing good, but God vindicated him, implying that he would do the same for Peter's readers. What's more, in the same way Jesus ministered to Noah's world through Noah, he would minister to his readers' world through them.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 18 *in the Spirit* Cf. “in the *spirit*” (ESV); “*by the Spirit*” (NIV©1984, NKJV). There is much debate over the nature of the contrast: “put to death *in the flesh*” but made alive *in or by the Spirit or spirit.*” On the one hand, the expression could mean that Jesus’ body was put to death but later was resurrected by the Holy Spirit, making the Holy Spirit the agent in his resurrection (cf. Ro 8:11; see Roger M. Raymer, “1 Peter,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 851; also Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, NIBC, 113). But that means the Greek preposition *en* is used in *two* different ways in the *one* contrast. One commentator explains: “The NIV translation [©1984] ‘but made alive by the Spirit’ (similarly, AV), is also possible since there is no distinction in Greek between ‘spirit’ and ‘Spirit’. But 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)” (Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter*, TNTC, 156). On the other hand, the expression could mean that Jesus was put to death in the physical sphere of his existence but made alive in the spiritual sphere of his existence. One commentator explains: “Rather ‘flesh’ refers to Christ in his human sphere of life and ‘spirit’ refers to Christ in his resurrected sphere of life” (Edwin A. Blum, “1 Peter,” in *The Bible Expositor’s Commentary*, vol. 12, 242). “The statement that Christ was ‘made alive in the Spirit,’ therefore, means simply that he was raised from the dead, not as a spirit, but bodily (as resurrection always is in the NT), and in a sphere in which the Spirit and power of God are displayed without hindrance or human limitation (cf. 1:21). Death in the flesh is conquered and reversed” (J. Ramsey Michaels, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 49, *1 Peter*, 205).

v. 19 *After being . . .* Lit. “in which” (ESV). “In which refers back to ‘in the spirit’ in verse 18. It means ‘in which realm, namely, the spiritual realm’. It does not necessarily mean ‘in the resurrection body but rather ‘in the realm of the Spirit’s activity’ (the realm in which Christ was raised from the dead, v. 18)” (Grudem, 157; also Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on 1 Peter,” 2024 ed., 84, planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/1peter.pdf).

v. 19 *made proclamation* I.e., a reference to Noah’s message of repentance preached through the spirit of Christ in him during the time leading up to the flood. “The content of this preaching was not a message of final condemnation (see Views 3 and 5 on p. 204) or the completion of redemption (see View 4 on p. 204), but concerned the need to repent and come to God for salvation” (Grudem, 160).

v. 19 *imprisoned spirits* Cf. “spirits *now* in prison” (NASB 1995) (see Grudem, 159). A reference to those who did not respond to the preaching of Noah who are *now* in sheol/hades. (See page one; cf. Constable, 84-87).

v. 20 *saved through water* Cf. “brought safely through water” (ESV); “saved through water” (NRSV). Paradoxically, the flood waters that brought death to the wicked *outside* the ark, brought deliverance to the righteous *inside* the ark. “Baptism *corresponds* to escaping through water in that the water of baptism is in some ways a counterpart to the waters of the flood . . . Coming up out of the waters of baptism correspond to being kept safe through the waters of the flood, the waters of God’s judgment on sin, and emerging to live in ‘newness of life’ (cf. Rom. 6:4)” (Grudem, 162-63).

v. 21 *symbolizes* Cf. “baptism which *corresponds to this*” (ESV).

v. 21 *saves* “In reality, believers are saved by what baptism symbolizes—Christ’s death and resurrection. The symbol and the reality are so closely related that the symbol is sometimes used to refer to the reality (see note on Ro 6:3-4)” (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on 1Pe 3:21). “We could paraphrase, ‘Baptism now saves you—the outward physical ceremony of baptism but the inward spiritual reality which baptism represents’” (Grudem, 163).

v. 21 *clear conscience* Cf. “one’s pledge to keep a good conscience toward God” (CJB); paraphrased, “I pledge to keep my conscious clear.” The meaning of “pledge of a clear conscience” has been “endlessly debated” (J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 162). It most likely refers to the baptismal candidate’s commitment to live in the newness of life pictured in baptism. “There can be no doubt that among the baptismal undertakings was a repudiation of the immoralities of paganism and acceptance of the Christian way of life” (Kelly, 163). “‘The pledge of a good conscience toward God’ renders a difficult expression in Greek (cf. Notes). The thought appears to be as follows: The conviction of sin by the Spirit in the mind calls for a response of faith or commitment to Christ and his work. This is concretely and ‘contractually’ done in the act of baptism” (Edwin A. Blum, “1 Peter,” in *The Bible Expositor’s Commentary*, vol. 12, 243). “The **pledge** made by believers in their baptism to serve God and so maintain that **good conscience** is their expression of faith that through accepting the work of Jesus on the cross they have been forgiven and made right with God; they have a clear conscience before him” (Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter*, NIBC, 116).

v. 22 *God’s right hand*

See Acts 2:32-35; cf.

Ps 110:1.

4

APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Don't let suffering prevent you from giving a reason for your hope, for Jesus will minister through you like he did Noah and ultimately God will vindicate you like he did Jesus.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

This week we're studying a confusing passage. It kind of makes you feel like you're a first grader studying trigonometry. If you think this is confusing for you, how do you think your kids feel? Parents, we have a great opportunity to help them understand several important aspects of how we relate to God's Word. First, we're not going to understand everything we read in the Bible. That's good. That makes us hunger for God in a way we might not if reading His Word was easy. Secondly, the way we handle our confusion shows spiritual maturity. Are you closing the Bible and walking away or are you making the effort to try to understand? As we get into God's Word, we begin to apply certain rules of thumb and ask ourselves fact-finding questions: Is this prescriptive or descriptive? What do I know to be biblically true about this subject? Where can I look for explanation? (Try a different version or look through the noted cross-references or concordance.) All of these questions will help you begin to clear the confusion. Third, God is supernatural and when you ask Him to bring clarity to your confusion, He'll do it. Once I had a difficult time understanding a passage and I prayed for days that He would reveal clarity. Standing in the kitchen, the lightbulb came on and I suddenly understood! Lastly, the Bible is worth it. It's worth the deep dive of discovery. It's incredibly rewarding when you hit an a-ha! moment of understanding. Let's help our kids know it's ok to be confused because it helps us lean on God. We're praying for you!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read 1 Peter 3:18b-22

1. Once Jesus was made alive in the spirit, where did he go and why?
2. What does verse 21 say water baptism symbolizes?
3. Where does verse 22 say Jesus is?

What Do You Think?

What do you think Jesus proclaimed to the imprisoned spirits?

What Do You Do?

This passage seems very confusing. Read it again and write down all the questions you have. Talk about these questions with your family throughout the week.

CORE COMPETENCY: Jesus Christ

I believe Jesus Christ is fully God perfectly man and died for my sins.

MEMORY VERSE: Psalm 139:23-24

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- I completed my Bible Study
- I memorized this week's verse
- I brought my Bible to church
- I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have five children: Elijah, Levi, Bo, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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