

**A Study of 1 Peter 3:18b-20a and 4:6:
A Response to the Notion of Christ's Postmortem Evangelism
to the Un-evangelized, a View Recently Advocated in Japan
Part 2**

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Exegesis of Some Key Elements of the Text

In the following arguments, I consider 1 Peter 3:8-4:6 as a cohesive discourse with a pedal note, fundamental motif: “repay evil with blessing because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (3:9).¹ With this wider literary context in view, I will focus my discussions on 3:18b-20a and 4:6, which pertain to the notion of postmortem evangelism discussed in today's Japan. The following are the concerned verses in Greek:

¹All scriptural quotations from the Bible in English are from New International Version (NIV) (2011) unless otherwise stated. The Greek text is from Nestle-Aland (NA) 28th.

Here is my assumption of the literary context:

Here, besides the exhortation to wives (3:1-6) and husbands (3:7), the discourse is for “all of you” (3:8). The pedal note, fundamental motif, of the discourse is “repay evil with blessing because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing” (3:9). In 3:10-12, avoiding evil words and deeds is talked about in the quotations from a Psalm (34:12-16). In 3:13-14, suffering even in doing good is encouraged with a hope of blessing and an exhortation not to be afraid but just to “revere Christ as Lord” (3:15). In 3:15-16, the readers are also encouraged to be ready to explain humbly and calmly about their hope to everyone asking so that malicious ones may be ashamed.

In 3:17, doing good and doing evil are compared again, and the former is said to be better. Verse 3:18 provides a reason for that, saying, “Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.” Then, there come 3:18b-20a. 3:20b-21, which talks about eight people saved through water, which symbolizes water baptism. Verse 3:22 talks about Christ's ascension “with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.”

In 4:1-2, “since Christ suffered in his body,” the readers are encouraged to keep away from sin and live accordingly. In 4:3-4 the readers are reminded that they have already experienced all kinds of vices and that the pagans, surprised that the readers did not join them in sin, may “heap abuse” on them (4:4). Here, again, doing good and doing evil are contrasted. In 4:5 the reader is reminded that those abusive non-believing ones will have to be responsible to God “the judge of the living and the dead.” Then comes 4:6.

(3:18b) . . . ἵνα ὑμᾶς προσαγάγη τῷ θεῷ θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι· (3:19) ἐν ᾧ καὶ τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν, (20a) ἀπειθήσασιν ποτε ὅτε ἀπεξεδέχετο ἢ τοῦ θεοῦ μακροθυμία ἐν ἡμέραις Νῶε κατασκευαζομένης κιβωτοῦ . . .

(4:6) εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ καὶ νεκροῖς εὐηγγελίσθη, ἵνα κριθῶσι μὲν κατὰ ἀνθρώπους σαρκὶ ζῶσι δὲ κατὰ θεὸν πνεύματι.²

In order to properly exegete the text, I set several questions: *How*, *when* and *where* did Christ go in 3:18b-20a, and *to whom* and *what* did He preach in 3:18b-20a and 4:6? To answer these questions, I will discuss the following phrases: (1) “θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ, ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι” (3:18b), (2) “ἐν ᾧ” (3:19), (3) “τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεὶς ἐκήρυξεν” (3:19), and (4) “νεκροῖς” (4:6).

“θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκὶ, ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι”³ (3:18b)

The two participial phrases “θανατωθεὶς σαρκὶ” / “ζωοποιηθεὶς πνεύματι” are in antithesis to the μὲν-δέ construction to modify the

²Here is some convenient transliteration and gloss for the verses:

(3:18b) ἵνα (hina: ‘so that’), ὑμᾶς (humās: ‘you’ (< ὑμεῖς)), προσαγάγη (prosaagāgē: ‘bring to’ (< προσάγω)), τῷ (tō: ‘the’ (< ὁ)), θεῷ (theō: ‘god’ (< θεός)), θανατωθεὶς (thnatōtheis: ‘kill’ (< θανατόω)), μὲν (men: ‘on the one hand’), σαρκὶ (sarki: ‘flesh’ (< σὰρξ)), ζωοποιηθεὶς (zōopoiētheis: ‘make live’ (< ζωοποιέω)), δὲ (de: ‘on the other hand’), πνεύματι (pneumatic: ‘spirit’ (< πνεῦμα)).

(3:19) ἐν (en: ‘in’), (hō: ‘who/which’ (< ὅς)), καὶ (kai: ‘even’), τοῖς (tois: ‘the’ (< ὁ)), ἐν (en: ‘in’), φυλακῇ (fulakē: ‘prison’ (< φυλακή)), πνεύμασιν (pneumasin: ‘spirit’ (< πνεῦμα)), πορευθεὶς (poreutheis: ‘go’ (< πορεύομαι)), ἐκήρυξεν (ekēryxen: ‘proclaim’ (< κηρύσσω)).

(3:20a) ἀπειθήσασιν (apeithēsasin: ‘disobey’ (< ἀπειθέω)), πότε (pote: ‘once’), ὅτε (hote: ‘when’), ἀπεξεδέχετο (apexedeheto: ‘wait eagerly’ (< ἀπεκδέχομαι)), ἢ (hē: ‘the’ (< ὁ)), τοῦ (tou: ‘the’ (< ὁ)), θεοῦ (theou: ‘god’ (< θεός)), μακροθυμία (makrothymia: ‘patience’), ἐν (en: ‘in’), ἡμέραις (hēmerais: ‘day’ (< ἡμέρα)), Νῶε (Nōe: ‘Noah’), κατασκευαζομένης (kataskeuazomenēs: ‘prepare’ (< κατασκευάζω)), κιβωτοῦ (kibōtou: ‘ark’ (< κιβωτός)).

(4:6) εἰς (eis: ‘to’), τοῦτο (touto: ‘this’ (< οὗτος)), γὰρ (gar: ‘for’), καὶ (kai: ‘even’), νεκροῖς (nekrois: ‘dead’ (< νεκρός)), εὐηγγελίσθη (euēnggelisthē: ‘preach (the good news)’ (< εὐαγγελίζω)), ἵνα (hina: ‘so that’), κριθῶσι (krithōsi: ‘judge’ (< κρίζω)), μὲν (men: ‘on the one hand’), κατὰ (kata: ‘according to’), ἀνθρώπους (anthrōpous: ‘man’ (< ἄνθρωπος)), σαρκὶ (sarki: ‘flesh’ (< σὰρξ)), ζῶσι (zōsi: ‘live’ (< ζάω)), δὲ (de: ‘on the other hand’), κατὰ (kata: ‘according to’), θεόν (theon: ‘god’ (< θεός)), πνεύματι (pneumatic: ‘spirit’ (< πνεῦμα)).

³“θανατωθεὶς” (“θανατόω”: “to cause cessation of life, put to death” (BDAG: 443)); “σὰρξ” (“of the body of Christ during his earthly ministry” (BDAG: 915); “ζωοποιηθεὶς” (“ζωοποιέω”: “to cause to live” (BDAG: 431); “πνεύματι” (“πνεῦμα”: “that which animates or gives life to the body” (BDAG: 832)).

subjunctive “προσαγάγη”⁴ (18a). Recent interpretations of “ζωοποιηθείς” seem to be in agreement that it refers to Christ’s bodily resurrection.⁵ Edmond Hiebert says, “The verb (ζωοποιηθείς), used in ten other places in the New Testament, refers to the resurrection of the dead . . . or denotes the giving of spiritual life.”⁶

France describes an interpretation that does not agree with this view: “Some commentators have interpreted ζωοποιηθείς πνεύματι of something less than, and prior to, the resurrection of Christ, of an intermediate disembodied state. This is to make the clause fit in with an interpretation of verse 19 in terms of a descent of Christ to Hades between his death and resurrection.”⁷

As stated, this bodily-resurrection interpretation itself is already a critical blow to the advocates of Christ’s descent between His death and resurrection during His intermediate state, based on 3:18-20a.⁸ In fact, the interpretative history shows that the notion was not related to this verse until Greek Fathers in second century CE.⁹ This implies, if not supports, the recent majority interpretation that “ζωοποιηθείς πνεύματι” does not mean “quicken in spirit.” Dubis states, “Instead, most recent commentators understand these nouns to refer to two modes or spheres of existence, not constituent parts of Jesus.”¹⁰

⁴“προσαγάγη” (“προσάγω”: “of Christ, who brings people to God” (BDAG: 875)).

⁵ For example, Mark Dubis, *1 Peter* (Waco, TX: Baylor, 2010), 118; Ben Witherington III, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2007), 183; John S. Feinberg, “1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 48, no. 2 (1986): 315.

⁶D. Edmond Hiebert, “The Suffering and Triumphant Christ,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 139 no. 554 (1982), 149. Namely, “John 5:21 [twice]; Rom. 5:17; 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:22, 36, 45)” and “(John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 3:21).”

⁷France, “Exegesis in Practice: Two Samples,” 263. See also Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation to the Spirit*, 42. Dubis, *1 Peter*, 119: “The pairing of ζωοποιηθείς with θανατώθεις strongly suggests that ζωοποιηθείς refers to Jesus’ bodily resurrection, not some other type of “enlivening” between Good Friday and Easter morning.”

⁸Feinberg states a problem of such a view, saying that “at the time of Christ’s preaching (if it was between death and resurrection), he had not completed the work of salvation, so he really had nothing new to offer. . . .” Feinberg, “1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State,” 327.

⁹Witherington, *ibid.*, 184-5. “The first noncanonical mention of the idea of a descent into hell seems to be found in Justin’s Dialogue with Trypho, but it is not associated with the interpretation of this text. That does not come until Clement of Alexandria interprets 1 Peter 3:19 this way, and this then became the dominant interpretation, at least by the time of Irenaeus at the end of second century A.D.”

¹⁰Dubis, *1 Peter*, 217; “his entirety”: Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 241; not “Platonic dualism”; John Yates, “‘He Descended into Hell’: Creed, Article and Scripture Part II,” *The Churchman* 102, no. 4 (1988): 308. Also, “In the spiritual realm, the realm of the Holy Spirit’s activity, Christ was raised from the dead.” This is important because in the NT generally this “spiritual” realm is the realm of all that is lasting, permanent, eternal.” Wayne Grudem, “Christ Preaching through Noah,” *Trinity Journal* 7, no. 2 (1986): 21.

Can this “πνεῦμα” be then interpreted as the Holy Spirit? Achtemeier and some others take that view, recognizing it in the dative of agency as “by the Spirit.”¹¹ It is ambiguous grammatically and in context. I would take it in the dative of sphere respecting the antithesis.

Syntactically, I understand that the parallelism modifies “προσαγάγη.” The result translation will be “so that he might bring you to God through having been put to death in the earthly realm and been bodily resurrected in the heavenly realm.”

“ἐν ᾧ” (3:19)

The relative pronoun “ᾧ” is morphologically ambiguous between masculine and neuter. Recent commentators are in agreement that it refers to “πνεύματι” as its antecedent.¹² What is complex is its interpretation. Feinberg identifies eight choices¹³ and narrows them to four, namely “in which,” “by which,” “in whom” and “by whom.”¹⁴ One major interpretation is “in that (whose) condition” or “thus,” namely emphasizing Christ risen in the resurrected and glorious body.¹⁵ This

¹¹Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 250; Dubis, *1 Peter*, 118; Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, edited by Ferdinand Hahn, translated and augmented by John E. Alsup, 1st English ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993) (Original German version in 1978), 255; Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2007), 120; Howard Marshall, *1 Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 3:19. Witherington says either will do. Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 182. Grudem is clearly against it, suggesting that the more explicit agentive “ὑπο” would have been used. Grudem, “Christ Preaching through Noah,” 21. So is David MacLeod. David J. MacLeod, “The Sufferings of Christ,” *Emmaus Journal* 14, no. 1 (2005): 11.

As to the discrepancy in the antithesis between dative of reference and agency, Dubis introduces Schreiner’s discussion that “such is clearly the case in passages like 1 Tim 3:16,” thus without any problem. Dubis, *1 Peter*, 118. Jobes is against this break and maintains that both are dative of reference. Jobes, *1 Peter*, 240.

¹²France, “Exegesis in Practice: Two Samples,” 268, 269; Dubis, *1 Peter*, 118, 119.

¹³“(1) in (by) the spirit, i.e., attitude, (2) in (by) the spirit world, i.e., the realm of disembodied spirits, the underworld, (3) in (by) the spirit, i.e., immaterial substance, (4) in (by) the spirit of Christ, i.e., Christ’s divine immaterial substance, (5) in (by) the realm of the spiritual relationship, (6) in (by) the sphere of the spirit, i.e., the eternal, the heavenly, thus, giving him a spiritual or glorified body as opposed to a natural body, (7) in (by) the spirit world, i.e., angelic spirit world (especially the realm or world of, evil spirits), or (8) in (by) the Holy Spirit.” Feinberg, “1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State,” 314.

¹⁴Ibid, 319.

¹⁵France, *ibid.*, 268: “For πνεύματι in verse 18 refers, as we have seen, to Christ’s risen state. To take ἐν ᾧ as “in the spirit” must therefore mean that verse 19 is talking about an activity of Christ after his resurrection.” Also, Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, 256; Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 184; Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation to the Spirits*, 144.

leads to an interpretation that Christ proclaimed His victory after His resurrection.

Some unique interpretations are to distinguish Christ's bodily resurrection and His life back to the heavenly realm and take the latter as the interpretation here (Grudem),¹⁶ or construe the relative pronoun literally referring to the S/spirit (Feinberg).¹⁷ By positing such, Grudem argues that Christ was back to "the spiritual realm" and "in the realm of the Spirit's activity, the eternal, spiritual realm" (the realm in which Christ was raised from the dead, v 18).¹⁸ Feinberg argues that Christ was raised by the Holy Spirit, and through the Spirit, He preached.¹⁹ What follows these is that Christ preached before His incarnation, in Noah's days.

The adequacy of Grudem and Feinberg's arguments has to wait for discussions of other concerned elements. Yet, these are interesting with regard to the properties and functions of "ἐν ᾧ." Grudem evidently suggests that Peter frequently uses "a relative pronoun to introduce a new subject," which "indicates that there is a strong possibility of a lack of clear chronological sequence in this section."²⁰ He elaborates:

Similarly, Peter's exchange of subject in which he first uses Christ as an example for believers (v 18), and then refers to Christ as the one who empowers and Noah as the example for believers (vv 19–20), should not be seen as unusual for Peter, who frequently can change metaphors and combine various ideas closely together in his writings (compare 1:7–8; 2:3–4, 9–10; 3:21–22).²¹

Goppelt is in the same line, recommending "thus" interpretation. "But nothing is said in the words ἐν ᾧ καὶ about the time and manner in which Christ went to the spirits in prison."²²

Witherington is against this view, but he favors "in which condition". "When Peter uses the phrase *en hō*, its antecedent is always a whole phrase that precedes, not a single word. It is thus unlikely that

¹⁶Grudem, "Christ Preaching through Noah," 21.

¹⁷Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State," 335.

¹⁸Grudem, *ibid.*, 21. "It does not necessarily mean "in the resurrected body"." *Ibid.*

¹⁹Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State," 335. Also, see J. Ronald Blue, "Untold Billions: Are They Really Lost?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (1981): 342.

²⁰Grudem, *ibid.*, 29.

²¹*Ibid.*, 29.

²²Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, 256.

“in which” means “in the Spirit.”²³ Dalton, in the same position, calls “ἐν ᾧ” “a favorite idiom of the writer of 1 Peter.”²⁴

Therefore, while the “in the Spirit / whom” interpretation is linguistically plausible, the actual tendency of Peter’s usage may not necessarily support it. This needs further scrutiny. One syntactic thing to be mentioned here is the independence of the relative clause. A relative pronoun takes a finite verb.²⁵ This behavior is distinct from the participial phrase, where nominal agreement is in case, number and gender, and the infinitival phrase without any morphological agreement. A relative clause has been thus considered to constitute a more independent syntactic unit.²⁶ Jobes’ interpretation of the three participles (θανατωθείς, ζωοποιηθείς, and πορευθείς) being “grammatically linked ... by the phrase *en hō kai*” to represent “the redemptive event”²⁷ is thus not grammatically, but only conceptually, the case. The same is “πορευθείς” in verse 22: “θανατωθείς” and “ζωοποιηθείς” are syntactically linked in the μέν-δέ construction,²⁸ but “πορευθείς” is not. If they are linked it is only conceptual, which is supported by the contextual interpretations which refer to “going” to heaven, or ascension. I thus contend that “θανατωθείς” and “ζωοποιηθείς” as an antithesis modify “προσαγάγη” (so that He might bring you/provide you access to God by having been put to death . . . and raised to life . . .). Also that “πορευθείς” modifies “ἐκήρυξεν” (went and preached/proclaimed). The existence of the adverbial “καί” (even) and the pre-positioned “τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν” with an emphatic function suggests this syntactic interpretation, breaking the sequence of the three participles.

Would it then be possible, by the way, for the risen Christ to visit Hades to preach the gospel or even preach through Noah? As seen above, Barclay takes this view, at least for the former, the risen Christ being perfectly free from any limitations.²⁹ In fact, the risen Christ appears to His disciples, then disappears. He did not necessarily stay with all the disciples until His ascension. However, beyond this is only speculation. We do know for sure about Jesus’ historical birth through His historical

²³Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 184.

²⁴Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation to the Spirits*, 145.

²⁵Namely morphologically bound by its syntactic subject (often implicit in Greek but assumed in the nominative) in person and number, which thus applies to the indicative, imperative, subjunctive and optative).

²⁶Linguistically, it is traditionally called an “island.”

²⁷Jobes, *1 Peter*, 242. Dubis shares the same view. Dubis, *1 Peter*, 119.

²⁸Thus, syntactically, I rather agree with Jobes calling these two alone to be “two aspects of the redemptive event: Christ’s death and subsequent resurrection.” Jobes, *1 Peter*, 241-2.

²⁹William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 241.

ascension. At this point, the interpretations 2-4 in Erickson's list above are all eliminated because they all locate the event described in the passage between Jesus' death and resurrection. Remember that Interpretation 1 points to Jesus' (or more systematically-precisely "the Son's") proclamation of repentance in Noah's time, and Interpretation 5 leaves room for Jesus' proclamation of His victory after His resurrection. Now, I will focus on these two positions: Interpretation 1 and Interpretation 5.

“τοῖς ἐν φυλακῇ πνεύμασιν πορευθεῖς ἐκήρυξεν”³⁰ (3:19)

Let us here reiterate interpretations 1 and 5 of Erickson's list with proper modifications:

1. When Noah was building the ark, Christ “in spirit” or “in the Spirit” preached repentance (through him). This was a message of repentance and righteousness, given to unbelieving persons who were then on earth but are now “spirits in prison” (i.e., persons in hell or Hades).
5. After His resurrection, Christ ascended to heaven or descended into the underground and proclaimed His triumph over the fallen angels who had sinned by mating with women before the Flood.

For the sake of convenience, I will refer to these as (1) The Preaching View and (5) The Triumph View.

In the Preaching View, (a) “πνεύμασιν,” (b) “φυλακῇ,” (c) “πορευθεῖς” and (d) “ἐκήρυξεν” respectively refer to (a) Noah's contemporary unbelievers, (b) a place where those people are kept for the final judgment, (c) going from heaven to Noah and (d) repentance. In the Triumph View, on the other hand, they are (a) fallen angels in Noah's days, (b) a place where those angels are kept for the final judgment, (c) going to the place and (d) Christ's victory.

Some commentators argue that “πνεῦμα” in the New Testament (NT) absolutely refers to angels, especially if there are no modifying elements.³¹ In addition, since the exegesis of 1 Peter cannot stand now

³⁰“φυλακῇ” (“φυλακή”: “Of the nether world or its place of punishment” (BDAG: 1067)); “πνεύμασιν” (“πνεῦμα”: “that which animates or gives life to the body” (BDAG: 832)); “ἐκήρυξεν” (“κηρύσσω”: “to make public declarations” (BDAG: 543)).

³¹“Every other place in the New Testament where the term “spirits” is used it absolutely refers to nonhuman, supernatural spiritual beings, that is, good or evil angelic

without consulting 1 Enoch, the Triumph View seems to prevail.³² Witherington summarizes, “For our purposes here we note that it is ... part of 1 Enoch, which includes 1 Enoch 6–11; 64–69; 106–108 that is almost exclusively being drawn on in 1 Peter.”³³

As to “φυλακή,” the Triumph View presents clear ideas. Quoting from 1 Enoch 17-18, France says that the place of the fallen angels is in “the furthest west, where heaven and earth join.”³⁴ According to France, this idea was later developed:

The prison of the angels is elevated still further by the rather later 2 Enoch, which locates it in the second of seven heavens (2 Enoch 7:1–3; 18:3–6; cf. also Test. Lev 3:2), using a new cosmology developed in Hellenistic circles, and much valued in late Jewish and early Christian works (see e.g. 2 Cor. 12:2). It has therefore been suggested that 1 Peter 3:19 had this view in mind, and regards Christ as visiting the fallen angels in the course of his ascension (thus taking πορευθείς in the same sense as in verse 22), as he passed through the lower heavens towards the seventh.³⁵

spirits (e.g., Matt. 12:45; Mark 1:23, 26; 3:30; Luke 10:20; Acts 19:15–16; 16:16; 23:8–9; Eph. 2:2; Heb. 1:14; 12:9; Rev. 16:13, 14). The term only refers to human beings (for example, in Hebrews 12:23) when it is qualified (“spirits of righteous men made perfect”). It is therefore likely that Peter here meant angelic beings when he spoke of “spirits.” The fact that they are “in prison” indicates that they are evil angels or demons.” MacLeod, “The Sufferings of Christ,” 19. See also Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians*, 184.

³²Witherington points out many echoes between 1 Enoch and 1 Peter; “For example, 1 Enoch 108 speaks of the spirits punished (1 En. 108:3–6), and this follows hard on the announcement in 1 Enoch 106:16–18 that Noah and his sons were saved”; 1 Enoch 108:3b and 1 Peter 1:23; 1 Enoch 108:8 and 1 Peter 1:7, 18; 1 Enoch 108:7–10 and 1 Peter 3:9, 16; 4:4, 16; 1 Enoch and 1 Peter 5:4, 6; 1 Enoch 108:13 and 1 Peter 1:17; 2:23; “the common use of Psalm 34 (see 1 En. 108:7–10; cf. 1 Pet 3:10–12).” Witherington, *ibid.*, 187.

Witherington continues: “None of this is a surprise when we recognize that 1 Enoch is influential in various of these Jewish Christian eschatological works. for instance, Jude not merely refers to the text of 1 Enoch in Jude 4, 6, 13; he even cites 1 Enoch 1:9 in Jude 14–15 of his discourse. Second Peter is also directly dependent on 1 Enoch at 2 Peter 2:4 and 3:13.” *Ibid.*, 188.

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴France, “Exegesis in Practice,” 270. He continues that, “there, beyond a chasm, he [Enoch] finds the prison in ‘a place which had no firmament of the heaven above, and no firmly founded earth beneath it’, which is described as ‘the end of heaven and earth.’” *Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*, 270-1. 2 Enoch 7:1, for example, reads, “And those men took me and led me up on to the second heaven, and showed me darkness, greater than earthly darkness, and there I saw prisoners hanging, watched, awaiting the great and boundless judgement.” Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 432.

The Triumph View is also supported by the assumption that “κηρύσσω” can be used both positively and negatively, as Feinberg shows, although in favor of the Preaching View.³⁶

Grudem, also in favor of the Preaching View, argues that “πνεῦμα” can refer to human beings even when used absolutely.³⁷ He further provides more concrete evidence:

The extant Greek sections of 1 Enoch use πνεῦμα 37 times. Of these 37 times, the word is used 20 times to refer to angelic or demonic spirits. However, it is used 17 times to refer to human spirits (1 Enoch 9:10; 20:3, 6[2]; 22:3, 6, 7, 9[2], 11 [2], 12, 13[2]; 98:3, 10; 103:4)—and 20 versus 17 is no overwhelming preponderance of use. We are unjustified in drawing from this data any conclusions about what Peter’s readers would have thought the phrase “spirits in prison” meant.³⁸

Not only that, but Grudem shows that the 10 examples of “πνεῦμα” in 1 Enoch refer to the dead human spirits as if they were in prison while waiting for the final judgment.³⁹ He insists that “φυλακὴ” is never used in the book⁴⁰—France even says Sheol or Hades “is never called φυλακὴ in biblical literature.”⁴¹ As to the reconciliation with the position that those alive (not in prison) in Noah’s time are described now as “spirits in prison,” Grudem suggests: “It is quite natural to speak in terms of a

³⁶“*Kērussō* is a cognate of *kēruō* and has the fundamental meaning of ‘to act as a herald.’ There is nothing implicit in the meaning of the word which suggests the content of the heralding, but only that proclaiming or heralding is done. Moreover, usage of the word in the NT is inconclusive as to its meaning in 1 Pet 3:19. . . . there are also places where the passage is neutral as to the content of the proclamation or where it obviously cannot mean the proclamation of the gospel (e.g., Luke 12:3; Rev 5:2).” Feinberg, “1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State,” 325. Goppelt shows an opposite view: “But throughout the NT κηρύσσειν, ‘preach’, is used of the proclamation of salvation in Christ and the Christian message.” Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, 257.

³⁷“In fact the word πνεῦμα is used ‘without a defining genitive’ to refer to a ‘departed’ human spirit (the spirit which had left Abel after Cain killed him) in 1 Enoch 22:6 and again in 22:7; another example is found in 1 Enoch 20:6 (Greek text). These examples are significant because Selwyn, Dalton, and France all emphasize 1 Enoch as the supposed background for this passage in 1 Peter.” Grudem, “Christ Preaching through Noah,” 7.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 8.

³⁹*Ibid.* “Moreover, in some of these instances the human spirits of those who have died are seen to be bound or confined in a place of waiting until they face the final judgment (1 Enoch 22:3–13 [which uses πνεῦμα 10 times in this sense]; cf 98:3), and could readily be said to be ‘in prison.’”

⁴⁰*Ibid.* “Here 1 Enoch does not use the same word Peter uses for ‘prison’ (φυλακὴ) when he talks about these imprisoned human spirits, but it does not use the word when it talks about imprisoned angelic spirits either (φυλακὴ does not occur in 1 Enoch).”

⁴¹France, “Exegesis in Practice,” 271.

person's present status even when describing a past action which occurred when the person did not have that status. For example, it would be perfectly correct to say, 'Queen Elizabeth was born in 1926,' even though she did not become Queen until long after 1926."⁴² This makes enough sense to me though we may need more evidence from Greek texts.

Grudem further extends a strong argument for the Preaching View:

(1) "The OT narrative indicates that there were human beings who disobeyed God 'when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark,' but there is no indication of angelic disobedience during that time."⁴³

(2) "The entire section immediately preceding the command to build the ark (Gen 6:5–13) clearly emphasizes human sin and only human sin as the reason God brings the flood upon the earth."⁴⁴

(3) "When Peter further defines the 'spirits in prison' as those 'who disobeyed when the patience of God was waiting,' it strongly suggests that God was waiting for repentance on the part of those who were disobeying."⁴⁵

(4) "It is confirmed in 'any strand of Jewish tradition,' not only in 1 Enoch."⁴⁶

Finally, Grudem raises a hermeneutical question: "Is the usual nature of the New Testament writings such that knowledge of a specific piece of extra-biblical literature would have been required for the original readers to understand the meaning (not the historical origin, but the meaning) of a specific passage?"⁴⁷ In my brief discussion of 1 Enoch and extra-biblical literature above, I suggested that it was more

⁴²Grudem, "Christ Preaching through Noah," 8.

⁴³Ibid., 12.

⁴⁴Ibid., 13, 14. Grudem continues, "The text does not say that God was sorry that he had made angels, but that he was sorry that he had made man (v 6); it does not say that God decided to blot out fallen angels, but man (vv 6, 13). It is not the violence and corruption practiced by angels which arouses God's anger, but the violence and corruption practiced by man (vv 5, 11, 12, 13)."

⁴⁵ Ibid. Grudem further states: "Otherwise there would be no point in Peter's mentioning God's patience. Furthermore, the word ἀπεκδέχομαι, "waiting," has the nuance of hopeful or expectant waiting for something to happen ("await eagerly," BAGD, 83). The "angelic" interpretation of this passage does not seem able to do justice to this phrase, because there is no statement in the OT or NT that fallen angels ever have a chance to repent (cf 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6; Heb 2:16)."

⁴⁶Ibid., 14.

⁴⁷Ibid., 17.

significant that Gentile believers in Asia Minor knew Noah, even if not 1 Enoch itself so much. Jobes, though she supports the Triumph View, offers a thoughtful suggestion: “The fact that Peter neither refers to Enoch nor quotes from 1 Enoch shows that he is not interested in accrediting or exegeting 1 Enoch but is simply using a tradition that would have been familiar to his readers.”⁴⁸ Another possibility is, again, that Peter has put intentional double meaning, whereby the text could be taken as either of the Preaching or Triumph Views by obscure word choices such as giving no object to “κηρύσσω” or using “πνεῦμα” instead of “ἄγγελος” or “ἄνθρωπος” (or “ψυχή”), etc.

I would prefer the Preaching View⁴⁹ because it seems to fit better in the literary context of doing good in the midst of evil, in terms of patiently preaching God’s grace and human repentance. It naturally introduces the following passage on water baptism. In fact, it will constitute a literary unit with 3:20-21 in the key motifs of preaching and salvation, many (“spirits”) preached to and only eight (Noah’s family) saved, in parallel to the similar testimonial verses in the discourse (3:15-16; 4:4, 6).

Stating that only eight were saved even though the pre-incarnate Christ preached could be discouraging to preaching believers. Yet, it is a repeated and default reality of the Old Testament (OT), continually so to Peter’s days, surrounded by non-believers as a small community of faith, in the ungodly cultural and social milieu. It could be rather encouraging to learn that God was concerned about their testimonies even after Christ’s ascension. The Holy Spirit is with their testimonies (1:12) and sanctification (1:3). Theologically, this view also echoes with “the Spirit of Christ” (1:11) in the prophets, the God who spoke to their ancestors through the prophets (Heb 1:1) or Lukan / OT pneumatology, which is connected in prophetic activities.⁵⁰

Above all, Christ took victory—via the reminding phrase of His resurrection “δι’ ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ” (3:21), which echoes with the preceding “ζωοποιηθεῖς,” the discourse goes back to the

⁴⁸Jobes, *1 Peter*, 245. She also suggests: “Peter’s allusion to the tradition of the Watchers does not necessarily require a literary knowledge of the book of 1 Enoch. The book of 1 Enoch may preserve a tradition that was more generally and widely known.” *Ibid.*, 244-5.

⁴⁹Chris Carter states that he prefers the triumph view and points out that I have not referred to J. N. D. Kelly’s commentary with the best argument for the triumph view in his judgment (Personal communication on January 23, 2017). I admit that it is a shortcoming of this paper. I will incorporate Kelly’s arguments in the future development of my research. J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1969).

⁵⁰William W. Menzies, and Robert P. Menzies, *Spirit and Power* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000).

redemptive events. Christ “has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him” (3:22); The readers did not have to fear fallen angels, secular authorities and powers, even if 3:19-20a does not refer to the triumph proclamation to fallen angels in Noah’s days.

The Triumph View echoes with 3:22. Since “πορευθείς” (3:19) may refer to going to the second heaven, Christ’s ascension is two-seventh (2/7) accomplished in 3:19-20a. His ascension is then retold in 3:22 more completely. Here is Grudem’s question, again: “If one holds to a preaching of condemnation in this text, it seems difficult to explain in a satisfactory way why the proclamation of final condemnation was made only to these specific sinners (or fallen angels) rather than to all those who were in hell.”⁵¹ It is true that the Noahic diluvian destruction was theologically significant in God’s salvific history as His first worldwide judgment, the second and final one to which we are awaiting today. Thus, Kubo’s contention might make sense in his system that postdiluvian sinners have to wait for their end-time release even if having accepted the gospel in postmortem evangelism. Whether preaching repentance or proclaiming victory, Noah’s days seem to be symbolic to today’s eschatological wicked generation, even if one takes the view of OT saints’ release to Heaven at Christ’s death, resurrection or ascension.

On the contrary, the Preaching View takes Noah as one of the “prophets” (1:11) and the “preacher of righteousness” along the Petrine context (2 Pet 2:5). Christ in the S/spirit only preached to Noah’s generation though the mode is not stated, assumedly as well to other generations throughout the OT days (Heb 1:1). Noah was taken as a symbolic figure from the significant first judgment, especially in the Asia Minor context, considered as the best example in teaching about water baptism in its conceptual parallelism to the water destruction.

“νεκροῖς” (4:6)

Finally, let us briefly exegete “νεκροῖς” (4:6). As seen in the introduction of some proponents of postmortem evangelism, this verse is a key verse as their basis of contention, although some directly bring their interpretation of 3:19-20a as Christ’s descent between His death and resurrection (Kubo, Kato, Reicke, Goppelt) while the other holds another view of it (Barclay). Reicke’s following word is perhaps one of the best explanations among them: “That the final judgment is imminent, vs. 6a, is also evident from the fact that the gospel has already been

⁵¹Grudem, “Christ Preaching through Noah,” 19. Carter suggests that Kelly “has answered this more than adequately” (Personal communication on January 23, 2017).

preached to the dead. Exactly how this was done is not stated. It is possible to imagine Christ's descent into the lower regions after his burial as the time for this preaching . . . but explicit information is not given."⁵²

While Green emphasizes that Christ's descent was common in early extra-biblical literature,⁵³ Dalton is cautious because it was not traditional in the Roman Catholic Church, where the dead were Noah's converted "contemporaries" or "the just" of the OT.⁵⁴

However, the literary context is clear enough to show that the discourse is about Peter's Christian readers and their non-believing contemporaries. 4:4 says, "They will heap abuse on you," succeeding which, 4:5 talks about those non-believers' future judgment and 4:6: "εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ νεκροῖς εὐηγγελίσθη." Interestingly, it is pointed out that "εὐαγγελίζω," which "always means to "bring good news""⁵⁵ and that it "in normal New Testament usage necessarily requires a live audience!"⁵⁶ Clement of Alexandria might have thus come up with an interpretation of the spiritual dead, namely sinners, having been evangelized to be believers.⁵⁷ "He had a strong following in the early church and this interpretation has persisted until fairly recent times."⁵⁸ Dalton finely summarizes the most recent and popular interpretation: "The preaching of the gospel to Christians who have since died is not in vain."⁵⁹ In this interpretation, "νεκροῖς" is used like "πνεύμασιν" (3:19)

⁵²Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 119.

⁵³Goppelt calls the descent interpretation "apostolic" because of the second-century popularity of this interpretation. Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, 263. David Horrell suggest a similar idea: "it should also be clear that there is no sharp disjunction between the various beliefs expressed in the New Testament, particularly in 1 Peter, and the second-century (and later) ideas about Christ's preaching to the dead." David G. Horrell, "'Already Dead' or 'Since Died'?" in *Becoming Christian* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 97.

⁵⁴"Just like the 'last minute conversion' of 3:19, it was elaborated and made popular in Roman Catholic circles by Robert Bellarmine. So until fairly recent times, Roman Catholic exegetes saw in the "dead" of 4:6 either the same people as the contemporaries of Noah (converted at the coming of the flood), or else, more generally, the just of the Old Testament."⁵⁴ Dalton, *Christ's Proclamation to the Spirits*, 53-4. Surprisingly, Dalton, a Jesuit scholar himself, says that "Roman Catholic scholars until recently have hesitated to offer an interpretation which would seem to suggest the possibility of conversion after death" against popular Catholic practice of veneration of the dead. *Ibid.*, 33.

⁵⁵Stewart D. F. Salmond, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 480.

⁵⁶Dalton, *ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁷Dalton, *ibid.*, 55-6. Dalton quotes Clement: "Et mortuis evangelizatum est, nobis videlicet, qui quondam extabamus infideles" (And the gospel was preached to the dead, namely to us, who had been unbelievers) (Translation mine).

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, 59. Besides Dalton, Dubis, Jobses, Marshall and many other contemporary commentators are in this position.

in the Preaching View; namely they were alive when the event (preaching, in both verses) took place, but now, at the time of writing, they had died to be “spirits” and “dead” respectively. In fact, though this needs more scrutiny, Peter may have an inclination to be attracted by his own words in the discourse: “πνεῦμα” is found in 3:18 and “νεκρός” in 4:5 though each rendering may be different from each other.

In this paper, I would follow the most recent “since died” interpretation, namely that people became believers because the gospel/Christ was preached; they are dead now due to untold reasons but will live in the spiritual realm. It fits my assumption of the literary context, “repay evil with blessing” (3:9). Preaching in oppression (3:19) (Preaching View above) was succeeded by the descriptions of Noah’s salvation (3:20-21) and Christ’s victory (3:22). A parallel development is seen in chapter 4: Doing right in oppression (4:1-4) will lead to the oppressors’ judgment (4:5) and believers’ release and life in the heavenly realm (victory) (see the same antithesis as that in 3:18b) (4:6). Dalton summarizes, again:

Thus, as we would expect from the context of 4:1–5, the point of 4:6 is to vindicate the faithful Christians against the abuse of their pagan adversaries. While the pagan persecutor will have to give an account to him who judges the living and the dead, the faithful Christian, even in death, will live with the life of God.⁶⁰

The postmortem evangelism view should be thus rejected contextually.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have introduced the spiritual situation in Japan with regard to ancestral veneration. It is quite natural for non-Christians to remember their deceased loved ones, talk to them, and bow down to them in order to show their respect, offer requests to them and worship them in everyday life; and so may some self-claimed Christians be doing.

Arimasa Kubo’s “second-chance theory,” along with other pastors and theologians, emerged as a comfort and a hope to those who have lost their loved ones without Christ and those who are interested in the Christian faith in evangelistic settings.

⁶⁰Ibid.

However, a brief exegetical survey in this paper has shown that postmortem evangelism cannot be based on the concerned Petrine text.⁶¹ My temporary translation of the passage will be as follows:

(3:18b) . . . so that He (Jesus) might bring you [plural] to God by being killed in the earthly realm but being resurrected in the heavenly realm. (19) In the heavenly realm, by the way, He went to the spirits (now) in prison and preached (repentance). (20a) They once disobeyed when God's patience was waiting eagerly in Noah's days, when the ark was being prepared . . . (4:6) . . . because, for this, the good news was preached even to the now dead so that they might be judged according to men in the earthly realm but live according to God in the heavenly realm.

Such an interpretation may have been popular in earlier days of Christian history, when there were no canonical books, no literacy and education among lay members, or no computers and internet. In our highly informed cultural milieu, however, our exegesis must be more scientific, objective, and evidence-based while embracing the same passion for the lost as those advocates of the theory sincerely show. For me, my studies of this text have just begun. Being Japanese, how I wish there were postmortem "first-time," if not second, evangelism. Only the Lord knows the truth. May I continue to deepen my understanding of the Scripture for the sake of the Lord and the world!

⁶¹Feinberg concludes his article with these words: "Consequently, whatever one wants to say about biblical teaching concerning the intermediate state, he must say it on the basis of some other passage than this one!" Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State" 336.

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⁶² "Logos" represents Logos Bible Software/Verbum, the integrated literature management software produced and provided by Faithlife Corporation (Bellingham, Washington, 2000-16). Its most updated version at the writing of this paper is: Version 7.2 SR-1 (7.2.0.0038: Released November 30, 2016) (accessed December 5, 2016).

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