

**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 1**

by Hirokatsu Yoshihara

Introduction¹

Japan has an almost 470-year history of Christian proclamation since Francis Xavier's arrival in 1549² though the Christian faith was prohibited from 1639 to 1868.³ Japan's current Christian population is only 1,955,729 (1.54%) out of 126,995,411 and its evangelical population is 596,498 (0.47%), which represents 30.5% of the whole Christian population) according to Operation World.⁴ Among many

¹This paper was presented at the 25th Annual William W. Menzies Lectureship held at Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio City, Philippines on January 30 through February 3, 2017. I appreciate the audience and those who shared their questions and comments during the afternoon presentation and the evening panel discussion. Special thanks go to the postgraduate committee of the seminary, the main speaker Dr. Waldemar Kowalski, Dr. Teresa Chai, Dr. Kay Fountain, Rev. Lora Embudo, Rev. Zaldy Lim, Rev. Laurence Mascay, and Rev. Marlene Yap, as well as Dr. Chris Carter, supervisor, who was not present at the lectureship. All shortcomings and errors are mine.

²Tadataka Maruyama, "Japan," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Mission*, ed. A. Scott Moreau, Harold Netland, and Charles van Engen (Grand Rapids, MI, 2000), 513.

³Ibid. In fact, the Tokugawa Shogunate of the period allowed Christianity for almost all of the first 10 years since its official establishment in 1602. Kentaro Miyazaki describes: "The Tokugawa government's promulgation in 1614 of a complete ban on the *kirishitan* religion in all of Japan marked the beginning of a savage persecution that produced a great many martyrs. The three decades from 1614 to 1644 were a period in which the persecution and the martyrdoms reached their peaks. By the end of this period not a single missionary was left in the country, and from then on the faithful had to maintain their faith on their own, while outwardly pretending to be Buddhists." Kentarō Miyazaki, "Roman Catholic Mission in Pre-Modern Japan," in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, ed. Mark R. Mullins (Boston: Brill, 2003), 4; <http://www.questia.com/read/117948975/handbook-of-christianity-in-japan> (accessed October 30, 2016).

⁴<http://www.operationworld.org/japa> (accessed October 28, 2016). On their website, Evangelicals are "enumerated" as "all affiliated Christians (church members, their children, other participants of the faith community) of denominations that are definitively evangelical in theology as explained above" and "the proportion of the affiliated Christians in other denominations (that are not wholly evangelical in theology) who would hold

suggested reasons hindering Japanese' conversion to the Christian, especially evangelical, faith is the popular practice of ancestor veneration, which "has been an important aspect of religious practice in Japan for centuries."⁵

The strong inclination of the Japanese to bonding with the deceased around them has been symbolically observed through the popularity of a song, "Sen-no Kaze-ni Natte" (literally "becoming one-thousand winds," a.k.a. "A Thousand Winds"), which has been released by various singers since 2003.⁶ It is based on an English poem, "Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep," attributed to Mary Frye or one of other suggested sources.⁷ The poem tells how the poet (although dead) is awake and present around his/her living loved ones by becoming wind, light, snow, birds and stars. The song's largest hit was recorded by a professional opera singer, Masahumi Akikawa. His CD sales reached 1.2 million for two years alone, between May 2006 and March 2008. One of many YouTube clips⁸ of Akikawa's version of the song has reached more than 3 million playbacks since July 2010. The total playbacks of all of his clips of this song, and those by other singers, have reached several scores of millions.⁹ In addition, an Episcopal-affiliated educational institution,

evangelical views, whether Western in origin or otherwise." It further elaborates: "This is a theological and not an experiential definition. It does not mean that all evangelicals as defined above are actually born-again. In many nations, only 10-40% of evangelicals so defined may have had a valid conversion and regularly attend church services. However, it does show how many people align themselves with churches where the gospel is being proclaimed as such." <http://www.operationworld.org/glossary> (accessed October 28, 2016).

⁵Stephen Covell, "Religious Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture*: 147-165, ed. Yoshio Shigemoto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 160.

⁶A rather detailed description of the history of the introduction and development of the song is only found in Japanese Wikipedia. <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E5%8D%83%E3%81%AE%E9%A2%A8%E3%81%AB%E3%81%AA%E3%81%A3%E3%81%A6> (accessed October 28, 2016) (Japanese). A concise introduction to the song in English with some links to its music videos and a Japanese lesson based on its lyrics is at http://japanese-lesson.com/resources/karaoke/a_thousand_winds.html (accessed October 28, 2016).

⁷<http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk/queries/faps/#5> (accessed October 28, 2016).

⁸<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yqzCwL9xDc> (accessed October 28, 2016). This is a video of Akikawa's climactic performance in 2008 as the final performer at the most popular and prestigious annual TV song festival of the country. He had been invited to sing the song for the previous two years in a row, which is unusual for this festival. This attests to the great national popularity of the song.

⁹The clips include ones with Chinese or English subtitles. It means that this song has at least attracted a lot of people's interest also from the outside of Japan. This implies that such an affectionate feeling for the close deceased is not only limited to the Japanese people. Rather, it is universal. Accordingly, ministers all around the world must consider the pastoral implications bound up with this deeply held belief. The fact that these lyrics were, in fact, originally written in English supports this perception.

Heian-Jogakuin, started selling incense with the name of the song because the school was inspired by the process of the song's making.¹⁰

One of the factors that boosted the song's popularity and thus Japanese spirituality was definitely the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.¹¹ That earthquake reportedly caused more than 20 thousand casualties and missing people. While it opened some doors for evangelism,¹² there have also been many reports about how non-Christians mourn for their loved ones lost in the disaster. These survivors claim to feel the presence of the deceased, and they continue to talk to them at their altars, tombs, and other locations of significance to their late relatives.¹³

In response to Japanese' strong affection for the deceased, around the turn of the new millennium, a Japanese evangelical minister named Arimasa Kubo started teaching his "Second-Chance Theory."¹⁴ Some¹⁵ central contentions of Kubo are: 1. "Hades is not hell."¹⁶ Based on Rev 20:14 he elaborates, "Non-Christians . . . go to Hades after death, where they remain until God's final judgment of the end of the world." 2. "The gospel exists for those in Hades as well." He bases this understanding on his interpretation of Phil 2:8-11 and Rom 10:9. 3. "Bible verses speak about the Second Chance." The Bible verses to which he refers include: Ruth 2:20, Matt 4:4, 22:32, John 5:25, 28, Rom 1:17 and 1 Pet 4:6. 4.

¹⁰<http://www.heian.ac.jp/head/public/pdf/56/agnes9.pdf> (accessed October 29, 2016) (Japanese). At <http://www.tk.heian.ac.jp/topix/okou/> (accessed October 29, 2016) (Japanese), the advertisement by the school clearly states that this incense is intended to be used while praying for blessings for loved ones in the afterlife.

¹¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aftermath_of_the_2011_T%C5%8Dhoku_earthquake_and_tsunami (accessed October 29, 2016).

¹²<http://blog.goo.ne.jp/saigaihonbu/c/27f057abab937f780eef5bae8c44bf2> (accessed October 29, 2016), for example, for some English testimonies regarding relief and evangelistic activities by Japan Assemblies of God.

¹³There is an unconnected telephone box in Otuchi, Iwate, where the living talk to the deceased as if talking on the real phone. <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/%E9%A2%A8%E3%81%AE%E9%9B%BB%E8%A9%B1> (accessed October 29, 2016) (Japanese).

¹⁴<http://www2.biglobe.ne.jp/~remnant/seiseco.htm> (accessed October 29, 2016) (Japanese over several other pages starting this page). <http://www2.biglobe.ne.jp/~remnant/hades.htm> (accessed October 29, 2016) (English only on one page).

¹⁵All of the information in this paragraph is from <http://www2.biglobe.ne.jp/~remnant/hades.htm> (accessed October 29, 2016). His other contentions are: 1. "Before Christ, all who died went to Hades (Sheol)," based on Gen 37:35, 1 Sam 28:18, Eccl 9:10 and Psalm 88:3. 2. "The rich man went to Hades, not Hell," based on Jude 14-15 and Luke 16:19-31. 3. "Believers who lived before Christ are now in Heaven," based on Eph 4:8-9 and 1 Pet 3:19. 4. "Voices of praise will be heard from Hades," based on Rev 5:13. 5. "They who died before the great flood heard the message of Christ," based on 1 Pet 3:20-22. Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

“‘The Second Chance’ is not an obstacle for evangelism.”¹⁷ 5. According to 1 Pet. 3:18-20 and 4:6, “Christ preached His good news in Hades.”

Kubo identifies his argument in the tradition of William Barclay and Joel Green, especially in the exegesis of 1 Pet. 4:6. He quotes Barclay saying, “Christ descended to the world of the dead and preached the gospel there, giving them another chance to live in the Spirit of God. In some ways, this is one of the most wonderful verses in the Bible, for if our explanation is anywhere near the truth, it gives a breath-taking glimpse of a gospel of a second chance.”¹⁸ He also quotes Green, “‘the dead’ of 4:6 are dead members of the human family given postmortem opportunity to hear the good news.”¹⁹ Kubo also appeals to Yoshinobu Kumazawa,²⁰ retired president of Tokyo Union Theological Seminary,²¹ who “interprets these verses as Christ’s preaching of the good news in Hades.”²² He then concludes that these distinguished theologians “clearly taught that Jesus had descended to Hades and preached his Gospel to the people there.”²³

As these examples show, 1 Peter 3:18-22 and 4:6 are significant passages in today’s theological and pastoral scenes in Japan. Even in the theological trends in the English-speaking world, Millard Erickson identifies post-conservative evangelicalism and one of its characteristics as “a hope for a near-universal salvation. God has not left himself without a witness in all cultures, sufficient to bring people to salvation if they earnestly seek it.”²⁴ He then discusses postmortem conversion in the context of inclusivism on salvation:

A somewhat different position has sometimes been taken as an alternative to the inclusivist or implicit faith position. . . . This is the view that those who do not have an opportunity during this life to hear the gospel will be given such an opportunity after death. This is sometimes known as “eschatological evangelism” or “postmortem encounter.” This view has had

¹⁷Although there is no biblical reference provided here, Kubo compares dying, with and without believing, in Christ and states, “I choose to repent, believe in Christ and receive God’s salvation and His blessings which are given here and now, for the benefits to receive them on earth are too great to refuse.” Ibid.

¹⁸William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 249.

¹⁹Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2007), 122.

²⁰Kumazawa’s doctoral degree in theology is from Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg (aka Heidelberg University).

²¹Tokyo Union Theological Seminary is a private university recognized by the Japanese government.

²²<http://www2.biglobe.ne.jp/~remnant/hades.htm> (accessed October 29, 2016).

²³Ibid.

²⁴Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 30.

some support during various periods of the history of the Church. It has traditionally been based on two considerations. One is the item in later versions of the Apostles' Creed that says that Jesus "descended into Hades." The other is 1 Peter 3:17–19 and 4:6, . . .²⁵

Reflecting on these concerns and background, in this paper, I will exegete 1 Peter 3:18b-20a and 4:6 with particular reference to the notion of Jesus' postmortem evangelism to the unevangelized, a view recently advocated in Japan. My research question is: Do the verses of 1 Peter 3:18b-20a and 4:6 support the notion of postmortem evangelism that is debated in today's Japan?

In the next section, I will discuss the relationship between 1 Peter and contemporary extra-biblical literature including the non-canonical book of 1 Enoch, and some key elements, namely words and phrases, in the given text.

Arguments by Some Advocates of Postmortem Evangelism

Let me first examine major arguments by some advocates of postmortem evangelism (also known as "second-chance theory"). We will consider the positions taken by Arimasa Kubo,²⁶ Tsuneaki Kato,²⁷ William Barclay,²⁸ Bo Reicke,²⁹ Leonhard Goppelt,³⁰ and Joel Green.³¹ Arimasa Kubo (n.d.)

What then does Kubo concretely say about the above-mentioned verses?³²

²⁵Ibid., 119.

²⁶Kubo, <http://www2.biglobe.ne.jp/~remnant/hades.htm> (accessed October 29, 2016). All the quotations of his words in this section are from this website.

²⁷Tsuneaki Kato, "Yomi-ni Kudaru Kirisuto" [Christ, Who Descends to Hades]. In *Kato Tsuneaki Sekkyo Zenshu*, vol. 27: *Shitoshinjo* [Sermon Collection of Tsuneaki Kato, vol. 27: The Apostles Creed]: 337-57. Tokyo: Kyobunkan, 2006.

²⁸William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter*, rev. ed.

²⁹Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, 2nd ed. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985).

³⁰Leonhard 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).

³¹Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*.

³²The following is an English translation (by Yoshihara) of the Japanese text from which Kubo constructs his arguments on his second-chance theory, though he implies that he also sees in the Greek text that "(3:18) Christ was put to death in flesh but made alive in spirit. (3:19) And in spirit, Christ went to the spirits in prison and preached the gospel. (3:20) These spirits were those who had not obeyed though God was patiently waiting . . . (4:6) It was for the dead people to be (made) alive in spirit that the gospel was preached to them." The original Japanese version was from Japan Bible Society's *Shinkyodoyaku*

- (1) The “spirits in prison” in 1 Pet 3:19 are the people in Hades.
- (2) “But Jesus actually went to Hades, not Hell. He ‘preached’ in Hades. Furthermore, the original Greek word for ‘preach’ mentioned here at the verse 1 Peter 3:19 is ‘*kerusso*’, which, in the Bible, is used always in the context of ‘preach the Gospel’” (see Matt 4:23, Luke 9:2, Acts 2:30-32, 9:20, Rom 10:8, I Cor 1:23, Gal 2:2, II Timothy 4:2 and many others). “Some people assert that ‘*kerusso*’ means to condemn; however, this is wrong. Not one citation of this term is used in that context in the Bible. The term is reserved for ‘preaching Good News.’”
- (3) “Furthermore, several verses after this [sic] we read, ‘the gospel was preached even to the dead’ (1 Peter 4:6). It is the most natural comprehension that these verses speak of Christ’s preaching of the Gospel in Hades.”
- (4) “Other people interpret these verses as Noah’s preaching to the people in Noah’s time, and Jesus was in Noah’s preaching spiritually. They say that this was not a preaching in Hades, but about preaching on earth in ancient time. What a complex interpretation they invented! It would be impossible to interpret so, unless we twist the Bible verses in many parts.”
- (5) “Considering a person’s life span prior to the Great Flood was nearly 1000 years, most people who had been born before the Flood were alive until the time of the Flood. They died in the Flood and went to Hades. They listened to the message of Jesus who descended there.”
- (6) Those who have existed since the Flood will hear the gospel when the two prophets appear (Rev 11:3-12). “Furthermore, several verses after this [sic], we read “the gospel was preached even to the dead” (1 Peter 4:6). It is the most natural comprehension that these verses speak of Christ’s preaching of the Gospel in Hades.”
- (7) When the two prophets preach the gospel while they are dead between their martyrdom and resurrection (Rev 11:3-12), all the other people that die after Noah’s flood will hear the gospel and respond either positively or negatively, for “the dead” in 1 Pet 4:6 are “physically dead people.”

As such, Kubo’s arguments are: (1) the “spirits in prison” are those dead in Hades; (2) “κηρῦσσω” has only the positive sense of “preaching the good news”; and (3) Christ descended to Hades to preach salvation

Seisho [new co-translated Bible], officially named in English as New Confessional Translation, which was a translation by both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars and translators.

while being dead before His resurrection. He did not condemn the dead nor did he preach repentance to the living in Noah's days.

Kubo's unique theology is seen in (5), where he concretely states that the dead at the time of Noah covered all of the human beings before the Flood except for Noah and his seven family members. Even if he were to concede this point, it would not affect the integrity of his argument because he contends that Jesus preached salvation to all the dead, most of who had died without believing in God. He also makes idiosyncratic arguments in (6) and (7) where he posits that those who lived and died after the Flood will remain until the end-times. Then the two prophets appear and preach the gospel in Hades during their three and half days after martyrdom. Kubo sees two stages of God's judgment: first, the destruction by the flood, and second, a destruction that does not employ water (Gen 6:15).³³

Besides his exegesis of 1 Peter, Kubo emphasizes that the teaching of postmortem evangelism does not, and should not, hinder active earthly evangelism. His rationale lies in the benefits of early entry into salvation. Evangelists can urge people to embrace the transformative life made available through the Holy Spirit now rather than entering it only in the end after a shadowy sojourn through Hades. His strong motivation to promote postmortem evangelism is to provide the first chance to those who have been dead without having an opportunity to hear the gospel here on earth and then those who have failed to accept it while alive.

Tsuneaki Kato (2006)

While Kubo's second-chance theory caused a popular debate through his monthly magazine called *Remnant*, Tsuneaki Kato, a minister of the United Christian Church of Japan and one of the most famous and influential Presbyterian preachers in the country, taught the same view on Christ's descent.³⁴ He recognizes that the phrase

³³However, it seems that Kubo still holds the "harrowing hell" notion in Jesus' preaching, not only to the antediluvian dead, but also to all the Old Testament (OT) saints who lived and died until His own time. He says, "In the eyes of his disciples, Jesus appeared to ascend alone from the Mount of Olives, but actually, a multitude of spirits from Hades are thought to have been with Jesus. Saints, prophets, and believers who had been held hostage in Hades ascended with Jesus."

³⁴Being a professor of practical theology at Tokyo Union Theological Seminary, Kato also served as a visiting professor at Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg in 1986-7. He points out that the Japanese translation *yomi* for "hell" is more appropriate than the traditional *jigoku*, as "the place of darkness that spreads beyond death" because "the postmortem world of heaven and hell rather came into the church from the realm outside the Bible." Kato, "Yomi-ni Kudaru Kirisuto," 340 (I have translated all quotations from this source).

“descended to hell” was “added in a later age”³⁵ to the Apostles’ Creed. He finds it as a great comfort that the Lord is “there when one goes to *yomi*, the world of darkness, the world of death, which one may well think God’s hands do not reach,”³⁶ citing Psalm 139:8. He also expounds, “1 Peter [3:18ff] tells that the Lord Jesus Christ went to them [those who drowned in Noah’s flood] and preached the gospel to them.”³⁷ He also shows his compassion to those who have lost their non-Christian loved ones.³⁸

This is not an exegesis but a sermon based on the assumptions of Christ’s descent into Hades and preaching to the dead there. Nonetheless, he does register his reservations regarding the origin of the concerned article of the Apostles’ Creed. It is an influential example from a highly respected preacher in the nation.

William Barclay (1975)

Barclay’s arguments are similar to Kubo’s. However, it seems that Barclay, interestingly, thinks that Christ’s preaching took place not during the *triduum mortis* but after resurrection. “But when he rose again, he rose with a spiritual body, in which he was rid of the necessary weaknesses of humanity and liberated from the necessary limitations of time and space. It was in this freedom condition of perfect freedom that the preaching to the dead took place.”³⁹ Barclay’s arguments are largely speculative without detailed evidence, but his passion for God’s grace and evangelism is clearly observed, a passion shared by Kubo and Kato.⁴⁰

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Ibid., 347.

³⁷Ibid., 352.

³⁸Kato states, “‘Descended to hell’ declares that the Lord Jesus is not only concerned about the salvation of the living but tries to reveal His grace, going beyond the world of death and descending to *yomi*. This also shows the width and depth of the blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ,” which is elaborated as “Christ’s tremendous grace that tries to invite again into blessings the unbelieving who, for example, were destroyed in the great flood of Noah without their time and will for repentance and went down to *yomi*.” Ibid., 354-5.

³⁹Barclay, *ibid.*, 241.

⁴⁰“If Christ descended into Hades and preached there, there is no corner of the universe into which the message of grace has not come. There is in this passage the solution of one of the most haunting questions raised by the Christian faith – what is to happen to those who lived before Jesus Christ and to those to whom the gospel never came? . . . The doctrine of the descent into Hades conserves the precious truth that no man who ever lived is left without a sight of Christ and without the offer of the salvation of God.” Ibid., 242.

Bo Reicke (1985)

The exegesis by Bo Reicke, a Swedish scholar, is more technical with discussions of extra-biblical Jewish literature. One of his unique contentions is that the spirits in Noah's days were not only fallen angels but also men.⁴¹ He also points out that the 1 Peter text does not specify the time or place of Christ's descent. He also limits the significance of the teaching to two points, namely, "that Christ *preached*, and . . . that his preaching was for these *spirits*."⁴² He then emphasizes the Church's continual preaching to its oppressing community: "Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison is the prototype of the preaching of Christian messengers. Therefore, it is emphatically the duty of every Christian to proclaim the message of Christ in the midst of suffering and death to all heathen peoples, regardless of their power and the dangers involved."⁴³ Finally, Reicke speculates that the dead in 1 Pet 4:6 are all the dead,⁴⁴ but that "the spirits in prison are not to be equated with all the dead."⁴⁵

Leonhard Goppelt (1978/1993)

Goppelt's commentary is full of exegetical insights. Concerning postmortem evangelism, his position is that "'the spirits in prison' are the souls of Noah's unrepentant contemporaries."⁴⁶ He further states, however, "But 1 Peter does not restrict the audience of this proclamation, in contrast to early catholic tradition, to the righteous of the OT; Christ preaches, rather, more generally 'to the dead' (4:6), even to the most lost among them (3:19)"⁴⁷: namely, death in 4:5 is literal and, "in the context

⁴¹"Probably the people who perished in the flood are also numbered with these 'spirits.' They were the descendants of the fallen angels, and in the story of Gen vi received the punishment meted out as a consequence of the sin of the angels with the daughters of men. In speaking about persons of remote antiquity, no sharp distinctions were made between angels and men (cf. Jude 6f.). Human beings often assumed superhuman proportions. In particular those who were exceptionally evil (several examples of this kind are found in the books of Enoch and the apocalypses of Baruch, Jewish works of the last pre-Christian and first Christian centuries)." Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, 2nd ed., 109-10.

⁴²Ibid., 110-1.

⁴³Ibid., 111.

⁴⁴By "the living and the dead" undoubtedly are meant all the people who ever lived, or are still living when the judgment comes. That the final judgment is imminent, vs. 6a, is also evident from the fact that the gospel has already been 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 of the gospel, but explicit information is not given." Ibid., 119.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, 257.

⁴⁷Ibid., 263.

of 3:19, . . . the Hades proclamation of Christ applies not only, as 3:19 made clear, to the most lost but to all the dead.”⁴⁸ He points out Christ’s extended saving grace, as do Kubo, Kato and Reicke shown above:

In rabbinic tradition, the generation of the flood were regarded as thoroughly and ultimately lost. . . . However, 1 Peter declares: Even to this most lost part of humanity Christ, the One who died and rose, offers salvation. The saving effectiveness of his suffering unto death extends even to those mortals who in earthly life do not come to a conscious encounter with him, even to the most lost among them.⁴⁹

Joel Green (2007)

Green provides a solid exegesis and his conclusion, which agrees with the majority, is that the spirits in prison are the Watchers⁵⁰ of 1 Enoch 6-16 and that Christ preached condemnation to them prior to His ascension. On the other hand, he identifies the dead in 4:6 as “dead members of the human family given postmortem opportunity to hear the good news,”⁵¹ as seen above.

Green’s evidence for this interpretation of 4:6 is unique. He denies the possibility of the believing dead because the time of 1 Peter’s writing does not look as urgent as that of Thessalonians.⁵² He appeals to the fact that “the idea of postmortem proclamation and even conversion is not as rare in early Christianity as is often postulated.”⁵³ Drawing on extra-biblical literature⁵⁴ and “baptism on behalf of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:29),⁵⁵ Green also points out: “From the early second century on, Peter was widely regarded as referring to Christ’s descent into Hades in order that he might, (1) share fully the fate of humanity, (2) conquer Death or Hades (or both), (3) rescue the righteous dead, and/or (4) proclaim salvation to the dead.”⁵⁶ He posits a hermeneutical method called “interpretive approach.”⁵⁷

⁴⁸Ibid., 289.

⁴⁹Ibid., 259.

⁵⁰Green, *1 Peter*, 123.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., 127.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Shepherd of Hermas: Ibid; Gospel of Peter: Ibid, 128; Odes of Solomon: Ibid., 128-9: “What is clear is that Ode 42 and 1 Peter share such common motifs as imprisonment and proclamation to the dead.”

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., 128.

⁵⁷“For persons whose tendency is to think of Scripture providing the foundation for theological claims, an interpretive approach of the sort we have outlined will seem

Thus, advocates of postmortem evangelism come from various backgrounds. Erickson gives a concise summary of these positions on postmortem evangelism:

The theory of universal explicit opportunity holds that everyone will have an opportunity to hear the gospel in an overt or explicit fashion. Those who do not actually hear it during their lifetime here upon earth will have an opportunity in the future. There will be a second chance. After death, they will be enabled to hear. Some proponents of this theory believe that even those who have heard and have rejected will be confronted with the claims of Christ in the life hereafter. Others maintain that everyone will have a first chance, rather than a “second chance,” whether in this life through general revelation, or through a postmortem encounter with the gospel. When this belief is coupled with the idea that everyone given such an opportunity will of course accept it, the inevitable conclusion is universal salvation. This view is difficult to reconcile with Jesus’s teaching about the afterlife (see Luke 16:19–31, especially v. 26).⁵⁸

When considering this issue, we must take into account the sincerely evangelistic motivation of many of the advocates of the “Second Chance” position. Yet, some sort of critical engagement seems necessary. Therefore, in what follows, we will make some efforts in this direction.⁵⁹

problematic. This is because most of us imagine that, in order to take at face value a theological datum, it must be witnessed in Scripture. We should recall that, well into the second century, a number of Christian books circulated just as widely, or more so, than those that would eventually be collected to form the New Testament (NT) Scriptures—that is, there were no generally accepted authoritative texts that could serve this foundational role. More to the point, in the theological hermeneutic of the early Church, the witness of 1 Peter need not provide a foundation for belief in Christ’s descent into hell; rather, belief in Christ’s descent into hell might provide the lens by which to make sense of texts like 1 Pet 3:19; 4:6. For those interpreters, faithful reading of Scripture followed the divine economy by which God had assembled the mosaic of Scripture.” Ibid., 131-2. He even mentions N. T. Wright, interpreting the text through a drama, and baptism in 1 Pet 3:21 as an antitype. Ibid., 132.

⁵⁸Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 941-2. In the “Note,” Erickson names Clark Pinnock and John Sanders. Interestingly, Kubo believes that there will still be choices to accept or reject Christ even in postmortem evangelism.

⁵⁹“The view does not, however, diminish the urgency of world missions (Pinnock 1991:114). The uncertainty of all inclusivist theology makes evangelism the wiser course (1992:172). Pinnock sees postmortem encounter as providing a path of salvation for

Selected Exegetical Issues from 1 Peter 3:18b-20a and 4:6

Commentators identify 1 Peter 3:13 through 4:6 is a highly complex text for exegesis.⁶⁰ Erickson calculates the possible interpretations of the text as 180 and states the logical combinations of the exegetical choices will narrow the range down to the following six possibilities.⁶¹

1. Christ “in spirit” preached through Noah when Noah was building the ark. 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).
2. Between His death and resurrection, Christ preached to humans in Hades, giving them a message of repentance and righteousness, thus giving them opportunity to believe and be saved, though they had not availed themselves of such an offer during their time on earth.
3. Between His death and resurrection, Christ went to people in Hades and announced that He had triumphed over them and that their condemnation was final.
4. Between His death and resurrection, Christ proclaimed release to people who had repented just before the Flood. He led them from imprisonment in purgatory to heaven.
5. Between His death and resurrection or between His resurrection and ascension, Christ descended into Hades and proclaimed His triumph over the fallen angels who had sinned by mating with women before the Flood.

adherents of other faiths (1992:46–47).” Terry John Mark, Ebbie C. Smith, and Justice Anderson, *Missiology* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1998), 425.

⁶⁰Barclay says, “This is not only one of the most difficult passages in Peter’s letter, it is one of the most difficult in the whole New Testament; and it is also the basis of one of the most difficult articles in the creed, ‘He descended into Hell.’” It is, therefore, better first of all to read it as a whole and then to study it in its various sections.” Barclay, *ibid.*, 232. William Dalton quotes from N. Brox: “Ich sehe keine Möglichkeit, zunächst durch eine Gesamt-analyse oder-übersicht ein plausibles Gesamtverständnis zu gewinnen, innerhalb dessen die Details sich erklären” [I do not see any possibility to obtain a plausible general understanding by a general analysis or survey, within which the details are explained] (Translation by Yoshihara). William Dalton, *Christ’s Proclamation to the Spirits* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989), 147.

⁶¹Millard J. Erickson, “Is There Opportunity for Salvation after Death?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (1995): 137.

6. The reference to Jesus' preaching is not to be taken literally. It is symbolic, conveying in this graphic form the idea that redemption is universal in its extent or influence.⁶²

Before anything, I would like to mention two assumptions that have been discussed among recent commentators: (1) the "descent into hell" article of the Apostles' Creed, which the advocates of postmortem evangelism emphasize as part of their basis of arguments, and (2) the relationship between the Petrine text and extra-biblical Jewish literature including 1 Enoch.

On the "descent" article of the Apostles' Creed, which seems to function as a guiding principle for postmortem evangelism, several commentators have pointed out that it has no authority or legitimacy. Erickson summarizes: "It is worth noting that the presence of the clause in the Apostles' Creed, which undoubtedly was a major factor in inducing belief in the doctrine during the medieval period, did not occur until relatively late."⁶³ I would like to confirm that our exegesis should not be controlled by the ecclesiastical creeds unless one takes such a hermeneutic position as Green's, as seen above.

Relationship between 1 Peter and Extra-Biblical Jewish Literature

In most recent commentaries, consulting extra-biblical literature⁶⁴ such as 1 Enoch is presupposed in the exegesis of 1 Peter. R. T. France

⁶²Ibid. In the following arguments, I will exclude Interpretation 6 because it only deals with what Jesus does in the passage symbolically and it does not engage with the notion of postmortem evangelism in Japan.

⁶³Ibid, 135. He continues, "It is not found universally in the creed until the eighth century, though it was found in some versions as early as patristic times. It is included in the Athanasian Creed, composed about the middle of the fifth century and accepted by both the Eastern and Western wings of the church."

Wayne Grudem gives a more concrete description: "Moreover Rufinus, the only person who includes it before 650, did not think that it meant that Christ descended into hell but understood the phrase simply to mean that Christ was "buried." . . . But this means that until A.D. 650 no version of the Creed included this phrase with the intention of saying that Christ "descended into hell." The only version to include the phrase before 650 gives it a different meaning." Wayne Grudem, "He Did Not Descend into Hell" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34, no. 1 (1991): 102, 105.

Waldemar Kowalski points out that the arguments by Erickson and Grudem are actually based on Ephesians 4 (Personal communication on January 31, 2017). Although some advocates of postmortem evangelism refer to the concerned verses in the chapter of the epistle, I will not deal with this creedal article any longer because it is not related to 1 Peter. Suffice to say that the article does not support the advocates' arguments biblically.

⁶⁴As to a brief history of the literature, Robert Charles summarizes it as follows: "This hope was to a large degree realized in the centuries immediately preceding and following the Christian era, when the currency of these apocalyptic writings was very widespread, because they almost alone represented the advance of the higher theology in Judaism,

states the necessity of utilizing extra-biblical sources: “In fact, if you are not prepared to dirty your hands in the muddy waters of apocalyptic and rabbinic speculations, much of the New Testament must necessarily remain obscure. To try to understand 1 Peter 3:19–20 without a copy of the Book of Enoch at your elbow is to condemn yourself to failure.”⁶⁵

In addition to the similarities in content concerning the fallen angels in Gen 6 and the Flood,⁶⁶ however, what seems more significant is the direct historical relation between Noah and Asia Minor. Karen Jobes introduces an episode that when Jews settled in Asia Minor, one of the towns had “ark” in its name and that they believed that it was related to the settling of Noah’s ark.⁶⁷ She also states that Noah and his wife were engraved on Roman coins with the emperor on the other side over a period of five emperors, illustrating his popularity in Asia Minor.⁶⁸ She concludes: “Given . . . the remarkable interest in Noah during the later Roman period in Asia Minor, it seems likely that even Peter’s Gentile readers knew enough about the traditions of what caused the flood to understand 1 Pet. 3:19–20.”⁶⁹

What is interesting here is that while the existence of 1 Enoch and other extra-biblical literature behind 1 Peter cannot be denied, not only Jews but also Gentiles in Asia Minor may have known the story of Noah and other related information very well. In contrast, some commentators doubt that 1 Enoch was known in Asia Minor. Grudem says:

which culminated in Christianity. But our book contained much of a questionable character, and from the fourth century of our era onward it fell into discredit; and under the ban of such authorities as Hilary, Jerome, and Augustine, it gradually passed out of circulation, and became lost to the knowledge of Western Christendom till over a century ago, when an Ethiopic version of the work was found in Abyssinia by Bruce . . .” Robert Henry Charles, ed., *Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), 163.

⁶⁵ R. T. France, “Exegesis in Practice: Two Samples,” in *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principles and Methods*, edited by I. Howard Marshall (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1977), 265. France, on another occasion, also says, “to try to interpret it without reference to the Book of Enoch is a recipe for chaos, making it a happy hunting-ground for extraneous ideas like purgatory and the harrowing of hell, to which it in fact gives no support.” R. T. France, “Inerrancy and New Testament Exegesis,” *Themelios* 1, no. 1 (1975): 13.

⁶⁶“But it is the Book of Enoch which gives the most detailed account of the sin and punishment of the angels, to which it returns again and again. The story is told in great detail in 1 Enoch 6–16, and the prison where the angels are bound is described in 18:12–19:2; 21:1–10. There are further references in 54:3–6, and throughout chapters 64–69. The story is told again in symbolic form in chapters 86–88, and a further reference occurs in 106:13–17.” France, *ibid.*, 270.

⁶⁷Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 245.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 245-6.

Against this claim must be put the fact that even though 1 Enoch is quoted in Jude 14–15, no one has ever demonstrated that 1 Enoch was that widely known or even familiar to the great majority of churches to which Peter was writing. In a recent introduction to 1 Enoch, E. Isaac writes, “Information regarding the usage and importance of the work in the Jewish and Christian communities, other than the Ethiopian Church, is sparse ... It seems clear, nonetheless, that 1 Enoch was well known to many Jews, particularly the Essenes, and early Christians, notably the author of Jude.”⁷⁰

At least, it seems to be appropriate to take note that 1 Enoch cannot guarantee all proper exegesis of 1 Peter but that Noah himself was more surely known to Gentile readers in Asia Minor.

⁷⁰Wayne Grudem, “Christ Preaching through Noah,” *Trinity Journal* 7, no. 2 (1986): 17. For the same opinion, see also Jobes, *1 Peter*, 244-5.