(viz. in the spirit, according to which  
His Jew life was. *In which,* not *by  
which:* see below) **He also went and  
preached** (went, used of a local transference here, just as “*is gone*” [the same  
word], below in ver. 22: and **preached,**  
of a preaching good news, as in all other  
places of the New Test.) **to the spirits  
in prison** (the disembodied spirits, which  
were kept shut up [Jude 6; 2 Pet. ii. 4] in  
the place of the departed awaiting the final  
judgment: in Scheol, as the Jews called it);  
**which were once disobedient** (this clause  
is a secondary and dependent one, descriptive of the spirits intended: that they  
were those of men who were formerly  
disobedient), **when** (marks distinctively the  
time intended by the word **once) the long-suffering of God was waiting** (and this  
marks the period of their disobedience, viz.  
those 120 years of Gen. vi. 3) **in the days  
of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which** (by having entered into  
which) **a few persons, that is, eight  
souls** (individuals) **were saved** (from  
drowning) **by water** (not, “*into which  
a few, &c. got safe through the water,*”  
which was not the fact. The water is  
in the Apostle’s view, the *medium of saving,*  
inasmuch as it bore up the ark: see the  
next verse). So much for the interpretation of the detail of this passage; from  
which it will be seen that we have regarded it, in common with the majority  
of Commentators, as necessarily pointing  
to an event in our Lord’s redemptive  
agency which happened, as regards time,  
in the order of the context here: and  
that that event was, His going (whether  
between His death and resurrection, or  
after the latter, will be presently discussed)  
to the place of custody of departed spirits,  
and there preaching to those spirits, which  
were formerly disobedient when God's long-suffering waited in the days of Noah. Thus  
far I conceive our passage stand committed: and I do not believe it possible to make it say less, or other, than this. What  
was the intent of that preaching, and what  
its effect, is not here revealed; the fact

merely is stated. The statement of the  
fact, however, has been felt to be accompanied by such great difficulties, that other  
meanings have been sought for the passage  
than that which the words present at first  
sight. Expositors have endeavoured to remove the idea that the gospel was preached  
to the dead in Hades, either 1) by denying  
the reference to our Lord’s descent thither  
at all, or 2) by admitting that, but supposing it to have had another purpose. I  
give, following the classification in Huther’s  
note, an account of the principal upholders  
of these views. Under I., I place all those  
who deny any reference to Christ’s descent  
into Hades, distinguishing the minor differences between them as to what *preaching*  
is there indicated.

I. 1. Augustine, Bede, Thomas Aquinas,  
Lyra, Hammond, Beza, Sealiger, Leighton,  
&c., and recently Hofmann, maintain that  
the **preaching** mentioned was the preaching of righteousness *by Noah to his contemporaries:* that Noah thus preached not  
of himself, but by virtue of the Spirit of  
Christ inspiring him; and that thus his  
preaching was in fact a preaching by Christ  
in the Spirit. But this necessitates a forced  
interpretation of the words **in prison;** Augustine understanding by them, *in the  
darkness of ignorance as in a prison:*  
Beza, &c., that they *are now* in prison for  
their then unbelief. It must be evident  
to every unprejudiced reader, how alien  
such au interpretation is from the plain  
meaning and connexion of the words and  
clauses. Not a word is indicated by St.  
Peter on the very far-off lying allusion  
to the fact that the Spirit of Christ

preached in Noah: not a word, here, on  
fact that Noah himself preached to his  
contemporaries. Again, the same *subject,  
Christ,* runs through the whole, without  
a hint, that we are dealing with historical  
matter of fact, in *some* of the terms, as  
“*suffered,*” “*put to death,*” “*made alive,*”  
and with recondite figure in *others,* as  
“*went and preached.*” Again, whether we  
take the *metaphorical prison* of Augustine,  
which I suppose will hardly find any advocates,