or the *present* being in prison of Beza,  
&c., it cannot surely be doubted that we  
are equally putting force on the Apostle’s  
words, and that the **spirits in prison** must,  
be taken as describing the local condition  
of *the spirits at the time when the preaching took place.* Moreover, **went,** as compared with ver. 22 (which Hofmann gets  
most lamely over, by saying that it  
presents no greater difficulty than the  
statement that Christ accompanied the  
Israelites through the wilderness in 1 Cor.  
x. 4: to which we may answer, If this  
were a plain statement, involving such an  
application of the word, we might then  
discuss the intelligibility of it)—the expression, **were once disobedient,** marked  
off as not belonging to the same time as  
the *preaching,* shew, as plainly as words  
can shew, that we are reading of some  
act of Christ which He *then, at the time  
described, went and did, with reference  
to spirits who were, at some other time  
specified, in a certain state.* And, which  
has not been sufficiently noticed, a crowning objection to this view is the use of  
the word *spirits,* connecting [**wherein,**  
i.e. *in the spirit*] our Lord’s state with  
the state of those to whom He preached:  
a word only used of men when departed  
out of this life.

I. 2. Several Commentators, principally  
Socinian, but also Grotius and others, understand by **the spirits in prison** either  
the Gentiles, or the Jews (under the yoke  
of the law) and Gentiles (under the power  
of the devil) together, and by the word  
**preached,** the preaching of the Spirit of  
Christ by the Apostles. These expositors  
take the mention of the disobedient in  
Noah’s time to be merely by way of sample  
of the disobedient in all time, or, at least,  
in the time when the Apostle was writing.  
As Huther well says, “How this interpretation heaps on caprice upon caprice,  
need not be shewn.” I will add, that its  
supporters do not appear to attempt to  
justify it philologically, as indeed it is  
plain they cannot. Every word of every  
clause protests against it.

II. We now come to those who understand the passage of our Lord’s descent into Hades, but, offended by the idea  
of the possibility of salvation being opened  
to spirits of the disobedient kept awaiting  
judgment, diverge from one another and  
from the straightforward explanation.

II. 1. Many understand **the spirits in  
prison** of souls awaiting condemnation,  
but explain **preached** of announcing, not  
salvation, but condemnation. But, besides  
that this verb, as remarked above, has,  
as applied to Christ and His Apostles, but  
the one meaning of preaching the good  
tidings of Salvation,—besides the utter  
superfluity of such a “preaching” to spirits already reserved to damnation,—what  
a context would such a meaning give, in  
the midst of a passage intended to convey  
consolation and encouragement by the  
blessed consequences of Christ’s sufferings!

II. 2. Some of the Fathers, as Irenæus,  
Tertullian, Hippolytus,—the Schoolmen,  
Zwingle, Calvin, &c., explain **preached**  
rightly, of announcing salvation, but regard **the spirits in prison** as the spirits  
of the *just*, especially of the Old Test.  
saints. The most extraordinary instance  
of this class of interpreters is Calvin, who  
destroys his own explanation, by confessing  
that the Greek will not bear it.

II. 3. Estius, Bellarmine, Luther, Peter  
Martyr, Bengel, &c., assume that the  
words refer, not to all the unbelievers of  
Noah’s time, but only to those who repented at the last moment when the flood  
was upon them.

II. 4. Athanasius, Ambrose, Erasmus,  
Calvin, hold both kinds of preaching, the  
evangelic to the spirits of the just, the  
damnatory to those of the disobedient.

One or two singular interpretations do  
not fall under any of the above classes:  
e.g. Marcion maintained that the preaching of Christ was to those whom the Old  
Test. calls ungodly, but who were in reality  
better than the Old Test. saints; Clement  
of Alexandria, that they were the *just  
among the philosophers,* who were nevertheless imprisoned under idolatry.

It remains that we should enquire,  
whether this preaching to the imprisoned  
spirits by our Lord, took place between  
His death and His resurrection, or after  
the latter. The answer will very much  
depend on the sense which we give to the  
words **in which.** The argument which  
Wiesinger so much insists on, that the  
clauses must come in chronological sequence, will not determine for us; because  
**in which He also** might very well be a