

## THE ONLY SURE WORD

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*In the face of challengers in his second letter, the apostle Peter makes it clear in 1:16-21 that God's word is his source of authority and spiritual knowledge. In doing this, he shows that the knowledge gained in God's written revelation prevails over that gained anywhere else. Because of its superiority, Scripture deserves concentrated attention. All other conceivable sources of knowledge must bow the knee to God's Word.*

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We were robbed! A Roman Catholic charismatic group snatched some key businessmen who had been studying the Bible with us for some months, and it hurt. In contrast to our steady work in God's Word, they could offer fantastic charismatic experiences like being spiritually slain and tongues-speaking without stepping outside the bounds of tradition and the Mother Church. How can we compete?

How often had we faced this type of question? A member of one of our Bible studies asks what I think about the recent apparitions of Virgin Mary on a neighboring island of the Philippines. An estimated one million were expected to visit. There they hoped to hear Mary's voice with a new message for the nation. How can we convince these

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new Bible students, coming from an experience-oriented culture, that any search for spiritual knowledge outside God's Word amounts to a rejection of God and His Word?

The advantages of ministering in the Philippines, the "only Christian nation in Asia"<sup>2</sup> (i.e., 85% Roman Catholic), include the assumption of the vast majority that the Bible is the Word of God. For example, missionaries to the Philippines rarely face inerrancy as an issue. However, the superiority of Scripture to all other sources of knowledge is constantly under challenge. Aside from direct apparitions, other "miraculous" happenings, signs and omens, superstition, various prophets receiving new revelation, and the more subtle traditions, teachings, and experiences of men all vie for equal status and even superiority to written revelation.

Peter evidently faced a similar challenge from foes of a pre-Gnostic variety in his second letter.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, in 2 Pet 2:16-21, he answers their challenge with a *comparison of four different sources of knowledge*. He moves through the passage from the least authoritative source to the one with most authority.

For Peter's readers and for the present time, it is not enough to recognize God's written revelation as without error; it is also *superior* to all other sources of knowledge and *sufficient* for "everything that relates to life and godliness" (1:3). An understanding of Peter's progress of thought in these verses, together with their context, will correct a wrong understanding of the passage perpetuated by most of the current English translations (see comments on v. 19 below).

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<sup>2</sup>*World Christian Encyclopedia*, ed. David B. Barrett (Oxford: Oxford University, 1982) 562.

<sup>3</sup>Michael Green (*Second Peter and Jude*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968] 81; cf. also comments on v. 16b) feels these false teachers are not pre-Gnostics because Peter is here answering their accusation that he was using fables, when they themselves used the same. This requires too much consistency on the part of false teachers, however, that they would not accuse Peter of doing the very thing they were guilty of. Moreover, it could be that Peter contrasts his method of not relying on legends with theirs to show the superiority of his authority.

*For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:16).<sup>4</sup>*

As Peter neared the end of his life, he wanted to remind his readers of the most important truths (1:12-15).<sup>5</sup> Yet even as he wrote, he remained mindful of attacks upon his authority, and therefore identified his sources of knowledge about these vital truths. His teaching is only as valuable as the source he bases it on.

### FIRST SOURCE: ILLEGITIMATE MYTHS

The first possible source—an illegitimate one—Peter calls *μύθος* (*muthos*, "myth") from which the English word "myth" with the same meaning comes.<sup>6</sup> The adjectival participle used to describe these myths as "cleverly devised" comes from *σοφίζω* (*sophizō*, "I become wise, skilled"). This word also took on a sarcastic meaning as early as Plato and Demosthenes (*Rep*, 496a; *Demos*. 25:18) possibly in relation to those clever Greek sophists who could invent ingenious arguments for any side of an issue. "Cleverly concocted" and "artfully spun" (NEB) both adroitly convey the idea.<sup>7</sup> Peter uses an instrumental participle of *ἐξακολουθεῖω* (*eksakoloutheō*, "I follow, depend on") to introduce this first source: "Not by means of following cleverly concocted tales. . . ."

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<sup>4</sup>All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise specified.

<sup>5</sup>Note the phrases, "remind you of these things" (v. 12), "stir you up by way of reminder" (v. 13), and "call these things to mind" (v. 15).

<sup>6</sup>It is unlikely that Peter had seen Paul's use of this word for fanciful Jewish genealogies in 1 Tim 1:4; 2 Tim 4:4; Titus 1:14 since these letters originated at approximately the same time as 2 Peter. Peter refers to this kind of error as "heresies" (2 Pet 2:1) and "false words" (2 Pet 2:3).

<sup>7</sup>John Calvin uses some adroitness himself when he writes that Peter is explaining that he is not like the teachers "who presumptuously mount the pulpit to prattle of speculation unknown to themselves," in *Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1958) 383.

One of the vital truths that Peter emphasized in his first letter and about which someone may have accused him of concocting tales is Christ's "power and coming" (1 Pe 1:5, 7, 11, 13; 2:12; 4:5-7, 13; 5:4; cf. 2 Pet 2:9; 3:4, 7, 9-12).<sup>8</sup> As here, normally it is Jesus' return rather than His incarnation that Scripture associates with power (e.g., see the previous references in Peter's letters). In addition, "coming," *παρουσία* (*parousia*, "arrival, presence"), when used in relation to Christ in the NT, only describes His second coming. This agrees with its Koine use for a hidden divinity making his presence felt by a revelation of his power or, in a secular sense, for the visit of a high-ranking person.<sup>9</sup>

The mystery religions which surged in popularity in the Greek and Roman worlds around the first millennium's beginning developed elaborate schemes of the supernatural to which only the initiated were privy. Peter had nothing to do with those.

This first source of knowledge, being manmade, encompasses a large number of ancient claims of knowledge as well as modern ones.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>This could possibly be an occurrence of *hendiadys* to avoid a long string of genitives, in which case *δύναμιν καὶ παρουσίαν* ("power and coming") would stand for *δύναμιν παρουσίου* (power of [His] coming). Thus the Twentieth Century NT translates, "the Coming in power."

<sup>9</sup>Calvin (*Library of Christian Classics* 382) understood this as referring to the first appearance of Christ. In addition, John Owen, in a footnote in his translation of Calvin, writes, "The whole passage refers only and expressly to his first coming." This leads him to understand that it is the believer's own experience with the gospel ("star arise in your hearts") that renders the written prophecies more sure to him personally (*ibid.*, 386).

<sup>10</sup>Such man-made guides addressed include religious leaders, modern counseling and psychology, new revelation in the signs and wonders movement, popular techniques of spiritual warfare, philosophy and rational thinking, science, tradition, and even personal experience and emotion. Several books have recently addressed this very topic from the point of view of the sufficiency of God's Word, including *Power Religion*, ed. Michael Horton (Chicago: Moody, 1992); Thomas Ice and Robert Dean, Jr., in *Overrun by Demons* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1990); and John MacArthur, *Our Sufficiency in Christ* (Dallas: Word, 1991). We laughingly remember the occasion when I shared this passage in a devotional meditation before leaving from the mission field for a furlough. After the meditation, a woman approached my wife and remarked with emotion as she patted her heart, "I just feel it in my heart that you will return."

This very passage shows the deficiency of Catholic tradition and religious experience as guides to Christian experience.

## SECOND SOURCE: LEGITIMATE PERSONAL PERCEPTION

*But we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain (2 Pet 1:16b-18).*

Next, Peter mentions the second source of knowledge, one which he did rely on and count as valuable. If the earlier participle, ἐξακολουθήσαντες (*exakolouthēsantes*, "following," v. 16a), is instrumental, so is probably the parallel participle, γεννηθέντες (*genēthentes*, "becoming," v. 16b): "not by (means of) following cleverly concocted myths did we make known to you . . . , but (ἀλλ' , *all'*) by (means of) being (becoming) eyewitnesses. . . ."<sup>11</sup>

Peter flings a verbal dart at his pre-Gnostic adversaries with his use of ἐπόπται (*epoptai*, "eyewitnesses"). A NT *hapax legomenon* (i.e., used only this once in the NT), *epoptēs* had become by NT times a technical term used in mystery sects to designate those initiated into a higher knowledge. If Peter intended this cultic sense, he did so to reverse their snobbish use of the word by excluding the false teachers from his circle of true eyewitnesses.

Peter, with John and James, had personally witnessed Christ revealed in glory on the mountain of Matt 17:1-8.<sup>12</sup> Clearly he consid-

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<sup>11</sup>One may take both participles to be causal without a change of meaning: "not because we followed . . . but because we were eyewitnesses. . . ."

<sup>12</sup>This reference to the transfiguration experience confirms Peter as the author of this epistle, liberal scholarship notwithstanding. Peter even uses the emphatic pronoun ἡμεῖς (*hēmeis*, "we") and refers both to being an eyewitness (v. 16) and to hearing (v. 18). Many dismiss this as secondhand mention by someone who had heard of the transfiguration from Peter or another apostle (e.g., Bo Reike, *The*

ered this mountain experience to be a basis for belief in the Second Coming of Christ. That sanctified mountain<sup>13</sup> episode foreshadowed the glory and power in which Christ will return. All three of the Syntopic Gospels record that Jesus also understood an intended connection between the transfiguration and "the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom" (Matt 16:28; cf. Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27).<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps this connection in Peter's mind is also visible when he records the messianic proclamation announced<sup>15</sup> by the Magnificent<sup>16</sup> Father (cf. Ps. 2:7; Isa 5:1; 42:1).<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately this title remains rather hidden in the KJV, NASB, RSV, and NIV renderings, all of which render "beloved" as adjectivally modifying "Son." More accurate are the NEB and RSV footnotes which translate the two articular phrases separately: "this is My Son, my Beloved," because Peter adds a second pronoun, *μου* (*mou*, "my") that none of the gospel accounts includes.

Verse 17 poses the interesting syntactical challenge of identifying

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*Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, vol. 37 of *The Anchor Bible* [Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1964] 142, 144).

<sup>13</sup>The mountain became "holy" because of what took place there. Similarly, Jerusalem was the "holy city" (Matt 4:5; Rev 11:2).

<sup>14</sup>Though Green (*Second Peter and Jude* 82) says that mention of the transfiguration is rare in early Christian literature, in the Apocalypse of Peter someone familiar with 2 Peter also mentions it in connection with Christ's return (in the *Akhmim* and *Ethiopic* fragments, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, trans. J. K. Elliot, [Oxford: Clarendon, 1993] 609-12). This may reflect the early church's interpretation of the verse.

<sup>15</sup>"Announced" (*ἐνεχθείσης*, lit. "was brought," v. 17). The word also depicts God's utterance of a word or an announcement in vv. 18, 21. Could this be the origin of the southern expression, "Preacher sure brought a good message this morning"?

<sup>16</sup>*Μεγαλοπρεποῦς* is probably a euphemism for God.

<sup>17</sup>*Τοιοῦδε* ("of such kind") evidently introduces the following announcement in much the same way as *τοιοῦτος* does in Classical Greek (BDF, par. 289). Joseph Henry Thayer adds that it suggests something excellent or admirable (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and rev. Joseph Henry Thayer [reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958] 627).

which independent verb the participle λαβών (*labōn*, "having received") modifies. Kistemaker, with others, explains it as an incomplete sentence, broken by v. 18 and continued in v. 19.<sup>18</sup> An ellipsis is possible here such as "[the prophetic word was established] when..." but it is much simpler to understand the participle as temporally modifying the finite verb in v. 18, ἠκούσαμεν (*ēkousamen*, "we heard"): e.g., "When He received honor and glory . . . we also heard this voice."<sup>19</sup>

In short, Peter considers his eyewitness experience as valid and even powerful for corroborating truth. Experience is not reliable as a final arbitrator of truth because the interpretation of experience apart from divine revelation is subjective. The next step in Peter's sequence demonstrates this. Nevertheless, experience is not without value.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, believers receive encouragement and an expansion of their faith when they see the truth of God's promises confirmed by some incident in their lives. We as Western missionaries, in our desire to elevate objective truth, must not be too hasty to demean experience in its valid role of fleshing out truth. The sad result will be an elevation of biblical truth out of the realm of practice and into the realm of theory.<sup>21</sup>

### THIRD SOURCE: SUPERIOR SCRIPTURE

*And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place . . .*  
(2 Pe. 1:19a).

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<sup>18</sup>Simon Kistemaker, *First and Second Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 267.

<sup>19</sup>Both the NASB and the RSV seem to handle the syntax this way.

<sup>20</sup>Biblical signs and wonders provided testimony to the truth for those who witnessed them. Yet they are clearly inferior in the witness of written revelation and point to further revelation which interprets them (cf. Luke 16:29-31; John 20:29).

<sup>21</sup>Rodney Henry (*Filipino Spirit World*, [Manila: OMF Publishers, 1971]) discusses this separation in the realm of the spirit world.

Verse 19 introduces one of the two major interpretive problems of this passage, both of which have theological importance. Green summarizes this first problem with the following questions: "Does it [the verse] mean that the Scriptures confirm the apostolic witness (AV)? Or does it mean that the apostolic witness [eyewitness experience] fulfills, and thus authenticates, Scriptures . . . ?"<sup>22</sup> Almost all the modern English translations reflect this second sense (including NASB, NIV, NKJV, JB, RSV, and NEB).

An examination of the NASB clarifies the issue: "And so we have the prophetic word *made* more sure. . . ." In this translation Peter's experience on the mountain serves to confirm the prophetic or written Word. In other words, Scripture would have lacked some of its authority had apostolic experience not authenticated it. Objective truth would thus be dependent upon subjective; signs and wonders would continue to confirm the canon; this might lead to reliance on philosophies and theories of men to complement the inadequacies of the Bible.

The translation choice revolves around the use of *καί* (*kai*, "even" or "and") and of *βεβαιότερον* (*bebaioteron*, "sure").

***Kai: Exegetical or Simple Conjunction?***

By adding the word "so," the NASB has supported the idea that v. 19 gives a *result* of the previous verses. In that case, written revelation receives its confirmation and is "made more sure" by the visual revelation of the transfiguration. Similarly Strachan suggests that the transfiguration experience made the OT "prophetic Word" more certain, even though it was already certain before Peter's time. Therefore he translates, "Thus we have still further confirmation of the words of the prophets."<sup>23</sup>

*Kai* can sometimes contain that type of exegetical or inferential sense (i.e., thus, so), but only rarely. Much more plausible, rather, is the

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<sup>22</sup>Green, *Second Peter and Jude* 86.

<sup>23</sup>R. H. Strachan, "The Second Epistle General of Peter," *EGT* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961) 5:131. Likewise, Moffatt translates, "gained fresh confirmation of the prophetic word."



simple *kai* copula introducing an *additional* source for the truths Peter is bringing to their memories as he continues to ascend, as it were, through his four-part sequence.

### *The Meaning of Bebaios*

*Βέβαιος* (*Bebaios*, "Reliable, Firm") and its cognates, used 19 times in the NT, originally described something firm, fit to tread on; it "is concerned with that which is based, or still to be fixed or anchored to a foundation, assumed to be unshakable."<sup>24</sup> In secular Greek, it was often a legal term used of an unassailable position or guarantee. Good translations include "permanent, firm, reliable, dependable, certain." In a significant parallel usage of the cognate verb, Mark wrote that Jesus "*confirmed* the word by the signs that followed" (16:20).

A verbal interpretation of *bebaios* in the present verse, "*made more sure*," seen in many versions including the NASB, is unlikely for two reasons:

(1) *Bebaios* is clearly an adjective and it seems tenuous to translate it verbally, "made more sure," as if it were *βεβαιωθέντα* (*bebaiōthenta*). In fact, Peter does use this adjective with a verbal sense only a few verses earlier in this very letter, *but only* with the complementary *ποιεῖσθαι* (*poieisthai*, "do, make"), "to make certain" (1:10). (Incidentally, the reduplicated stem adds no more of a perfective or verbal sense than in *βέβηλος* [*bebēlos*, "worldly"] or *πεποίθησις* [*pepoithēsis*, "confidence"].)

(2) A different approach translates *bebaios* elatively so that the comparative adjective implies no comparison: "We also have the *very* certain prophetic Word." However, of the seven other times Peter uses a comparative adjective, he always uses it comparatively instead of elatively, sometimes with an expressed object of comparison (1 Pet 1:7; 3:17; 2 Pet 2:20, 21), sometimes without (1 Pet 3:7; 5:5; 2 Pet 2:11). (First Pet 5:5 is a possible exception in using a comparative adjective substantively if translated "young men.") If the present verse follows that norm, he must be comparing the prophetic word to something. Since the

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<sup>24</sup>H. Schönweiss, "Firm, Foundation, Certainty, Confirm," *NIDNTT* 1:658.

following verses make clear that he is speaking of the written Word, he has now advanced to present the written Word as superior to the audio/visual experiences of vv. 17-18.<sup>25</sup>

Hence, *bebaios* as in all its nine uses in the NT, is an adjective, moved forward in its clause for emphasis.<sup>26</sup> Almost alone, the AV correctly translates, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy."<sup>27</sup> Barbieri paraphrases, "If you don't believe what I have said, then believe what is written in the Word of God."<sup>28</sup> In good presuppositional form, Peter asserts that the written Word needs no authentication from religious experience or otherwise.

Theologically, such an interpretation makes especially good sense coming from a Jew whose heritage traditionally favored written revelation to oral.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, in the larger context of the NT,

<sup>25</sup>Comparatives can sometimes be used for superlatives. Thus Bo Reicke (*Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* 158) translates, "And we regard the prophetic word as most reliable." This would fit well if Peter is comparing three different sources of knowledge, namely, myths, direct revelation, and written revelation. The suggestion offered above is preferable.

<sup>26</sup>Interestingly, this construction, verb-adjective-article-adjective, is quite uncommon. A study of its occurrences is inconclusive as to whether the adjective, in this case *βεβαιος*, is used attributively or predicatively. Apart from its idiomatic uses with *πᾱς* ("all, every") and *ὅλος* ("whole, complete"), the construction appears only a few times. Luke 5:7 has the adjective, *ἀμφοτέρα* ("both"), used attributively in this construction. Particularly parallel to 2 Pet 1:19 is Acts 17:16, which describes Athens as "the full-of-idols city." (Or is it "that the city was full of idols"?) Hebrews 11:23 can either be understood as attributive, "they saw the beautiful child," or predicate, "they saw that the child was beautiful." Cf. also Rom 4:16, with *εἶναι* ("to be").

<sup>27</sup>The presence of the article would be better translated as "the more sure word. . . ."

<sup>28</sup>Louis Barbieri, *First and Second Peter*, Everyman's Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1977) 105.

<sup>29</sup>Unfortunately, this preference for written revelation was not applied to a preference for the OT. In fact, the Rabbis seemed to favor the *Mishnah* and *Gemara* to the OT. Edersheim, citing the Talmud tractate Baba Met 33a, writes, "The Talmud has it, that he who busies himself with Scripture only (*i.e.* without

support from the OT was the irrefutable source of authority of the apostles, the "final word" as it were.<sup>30</sup>

Kistemaker takes yet another approach and writes,

This wording [the common translation in which the transfiguration serves to confirm written revelation] does justice to the sequence of the apostolic message confirmed by the transfiguration and by the Old Testament Scripture.<sup>31</sup>

In this case, he confines "the prophetic Word" to the OT Scriptures and chronologically juxtaposes it with the apostolic witness in the NT which confirms the former.

But Peter does not seem to be confining himself to the OT. He rather equates this "prophetic Word" (τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον, *ton prophētikon logon*) with the "prophecy of Scripture" (προφητεία γραφῆς, *prophēteia graphēs*) in v. 20. With the reuse of that same term, *γραφῆ* (*graphē*, "writing"), he equates "prophecy of Scripture" with other writings of Scripture, including Paul's mentioned in 2 Pet 3:15-16. Further, *προφητικός* (*prophētikos*, "prophetic") appears again only in Rom 16:26 where it refers specifically to the NT. Finally, a study of Peter's use of the word *λόγος* (*logos*, "word") suggests no restriction to OT.<sup>32</sup> Kistemaker's limitation to the OT fails here.

Because written revelation remains the highest authority for truth

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either the *Mishnah* or *Gemara*) has merit, and yet no merit" (Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* [reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendricksen, 1993] 75). However, concerning the value of oral revelation, the Rabbis had developed the concept of the *bat qōl* (בַּת קוֹל, literally the "daughter of a voice," "an echo of a heavenly voice that was audible on earth and proclaimed some divine oracle or judgment" (M. J. Harris, "Quiet, Rest, Silence, etc.," *NIDNTT* 3:113).

<sup>30</sup>Especially prominent in Matthew, the apostles' sermons in Acts, Romans 9–15, Hebrews, 1 Peter 2.

<sup>31</sup>Kistemaker, *First and Second Peter and Jude* 269.

<sup>32</sup>A study of Peter's 14 uses of *λόγος* (including those in Acts) reveals a wide variety of meanings, most often referring to the gospel. It never refers only to the OT.

during the present age, Peter commends his readers for focusing on it.<sup>33</sup> *Προσέχω* (*prosechō*, "pay attention") usually pairs with a dative to define its focus, what occupies attention. When used positively, the word speaks of deliberate concentration on something (e.g., Heb 2:1).

Moulton and Milligan point out that *εὖ* (*eu*, "well") or *καλῶς* (*kalōs*, "well") with the future tense *ποιήσεις* (*poiēseis*, "will do, make") and a following participle, can suggest an imperative similar to "please" or "kindly"<sup>34</sup> (e.g., 3 John 6). However, in this clause *ποιεῖτε* (*poiēite*) is a present indicative, and so Peter is commending them for something they were already doing (e.g., Jas 2:8, 19). Of course, a commendation can have the same practical force as a mandate. Peter knew that this focus on the written Word would protect them from false teachers who relied on manmade tales.

Peter's comparison of God's Word to a lamp suggests several OT passages (2 Sam 22:29; Ps 18:28; 119:105; Prov 6:23). The word for "dark," *ἀύχμηρῶ* (*auchmērō*), only here in the NT, also connotes a dry place, or even murky and filthy.<sup>35</sup> The light from Scripture shows the dirt of people's lives and the filth of false teaching, cleaning them out and providing guidance for a straight walk. God's Word alone provides everything needed pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:3) so that believers can grow in Christlikeness (1:4).

When over a million flock to a small Philippine town and claim to hear Mary's voice commanding them to pray the Rosary, to see Mary cry tears of blood, we can only point back to the unchanging Word for

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<sup>33</sup>Strachan ("Second Epistle General" 131 f.) suggests that the pronoun *ᾧ* refers not to the preceding noun, but to the whole preceding clause. In that case the "lamp shining" would refer to the transfiguration as an especially crucial sign of Christ's return, substantiating the prophecies. Conversely, of the 49 times *ᾧ* appears in the NT without a preposition, it *always* refers to a noun or pronoun, usually expressed and rarely implied, but never to a clause. In addition, the transfiguration has not, in fact, served such a significant role historically.

<sup>34</sup>MM, 95.

<sup>35</sup>One Koine epitaph reads: "May there be many blossoms upon the newly-built tomb, not *parched* [*ἀύμηρός*] bramble, not worthless goat-weed." It is also used to describe the dark and dry sleeping place called Hades (MM, 95).

protection. Subjective experiences are subject to man's misuse while God's unchanging Word explains itself.<sup>36</sup>

#### FOURTH SOURCE: FACE-TO-FACE WITH CHRIST

*Until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts* (2 Pet 1:19b).

Several different interpretations of 2 Pet 1:19b are possible, none of which is without difficulty:

(1) Some, pointing at the final phrase, "in your hearts," suggest "until" refers to a time when a higher level of divine insight in a Christian's life will supersede a lower level of faith in the written Word.<sup>37</sup> This view smacks of the very Gnostic elitism that Peter is confronting. Paul clearly refutes the notion of perfectionism in Phil 3:12-14.

(2) Kistemaker<sup>38</sup> and Hiebert<sup>39</sup> think that this time alludes to a subjective response ("in your hearts") of those awaiting Christ's return. Yet ἕως (*heōs*, "until") introduces a terminal point, whether related to location, quantity, some activity, or time, as in this case. In what sense would that positive attitude toward Christ's return provide an end to the need to concentrate on Scripture?

(3) A more novel approach would have this final part of v. 19

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<sup>36</sup>Experiences which were valid and legitimate in the time of Peter, such as witnessing the transfiguration, no longer continue in the same way in this time following the completion of the NT canon.

<sup>37</sup>Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, 4th ed., 4 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903) 4:400.

<sup>38</sup>Kistemaker, *First and Second Peter and Jude* 271

<sup>39</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Prophetic Foundation for the Christian Life: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:19-21," *BSac* 141/562 (April-June, 1984):158-68.

providing the terminal point neither for the reliable Word,<sup>40</sup> nor for the time of focusing on that Word, but modifying the immediately preceding clause, "as to a lamp shining in a dark place" (v. 19a). Accordingly, the lamp of God's Word shines in a dark heart until the day of salvation faith dawns. This finds support in 2 Cor 4:6, "God . . . is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." This interpretation is unlikely because of the following thoughts.

(4) The most common explanation emphasizes the need to concentrate on God's Word until the time that Christ returns and believers receive fuller light in heaven directly from Him.<sup>41</sup> Scripture frequently compares Messiah Jesus to a star or light (Num 24:17; Mal 4:2; Luke 1:78; 2 Cor 4:6; Eph 5:14), even a Morning Star (Rev 2:28; 22:16).<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the day of Christ's return relates to an ending of darkness for believers when they stand in the complete light of God's presence (Rom 13:12; Rev 21:23-25). Many people understand 1 Cor 13:9-12, "when the perfect comes . . .," to speak of this superseding of written revelation by Christ's presence. Presence with God, then, would be the fourth source of spiritual knowledge, but one not yet available to the believer.

This preferred view prompts some interesting questions: Will written revelation be of no more relevance at the revelation of Christ? Or will it rather be replaced by something superior such as "adult" things inevitably replace C. S. Lewis' child's sandbox? Will Christians know all in heaven, or will heaven be a place of eternal learning?

The only obstacle to this view lies in the final phrase, "in your

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<sup>40</sup>Both the NASB and Nestle's 26th edition of the Greek NT suggest this with their punctuation.

<sup>41</sup>Green, *Second Peter and Jude* 89. This interpretation would be even more obvious if the textual variant is followed which places the article before *ἡμέρα* ("the day"), but the textual support for the article is weak.

<sup>42</sup>Though Revelation uses a different term, *ὁ ἀστὴρ ὁ πρωϊνός* ("morning star"), rather than *φωσφόρος* ("morning star") used here, the terms are synonymous.

hearts," which does not seem to fit an eschatological interpretation. Several recommend that this refers to the final transformation of the believer's heart connected with Jesus' return (1 John 3:2),<sup>43</sup> but this is a weak rejoinder.

A convenient and preferable solution to the problem lies in beginning a new sentence with the problematic phrase and continuing into v. 20: "Since you know this first of all in your hearts. . . ."<sup>44</sup> 'En (en, "in") prepositional phrases do sometimes introduce nominative participial clauses, even starting new sentences on rare occasions.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, in an idea parallel to knowing something in one's heart, Eph 1:18 explains that when the heart is enlightened, one *knows* the hope to which God has called believers.<sup>46</sup>

This explanation of the prepositional phrase has it introducing the 2 Pet 2:20-21, where a second major interpretive problem exists.

### THIRD SOURCE REVISITED

*But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Pet 1:20-21).*

#### *Divine Origin of Written Revelation*

After his brief look at the ultimate, face-to-face exposure to

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<sup>43</sup>Calvin, *Library of Christian Classics* 381 ff.

<sup>44</sup>Green (*Second Peter and Jude* 89) does not allude to this possibility.

<sup>45</sup>Cf. Matt 11:25; 13:1; Eph 3:17; Phil 2:7; Col 1:10, 11; 3:16, 22; 1 Tim 5:10; Titus 3:3; Heb 4:7; 10:10; Jude 20. The first two begin even a new sentence in the Nestle 26th ed. Greek Text.

<sup>46</sup>Many other activities take place within believers' hearts, including sin (Matt 5:28; 9:4; Acts 7:39; Jas 3:14), thinking and remembering (Matt 24:48; Mark 2:6; Luke 2:19, 51; 3:15; 9:47), doubt (Mark 11:23; Luke 24:38), and God's love (Rom 5:5), belief (Rom 10:9). Further, the Holy Spirit and Christ dwell there (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 3:17).

knowledge still to come, Peter returns to the present and written revelation. Strachan takes *γινώσκοντες* (*ginōskontes*, "knowing") *temporally*—"while realizing this"—and Green renders it as an *imperative*—"Recognize this truth to be of utmost importance"<sup>47</sup>—but it suits the context better to see a *causal* force, giving the reason why believers should concentrate on Scripture, "Since you know this above all."<sup>48</sup> Thus Peter returns to the earlier emphasis, reminding them of the most important truths.<sup>49</sup>

Verse 20 gives one of the reasons why written revelation is superior to subjective experiential knowledge.<sup>50</sup> The final clause of v. 20 includes the second major syntactical problem of the passage. The problem revolves around the word *ἐπιλύσεως* (*epiluseōs*, literally "loosen, untie"). The NT uses the noun only here, but Mark 4:34 uses the verb to speak of interpreting a parable, and Acts 19:39 for unraveling and settling a dispute. Though the semantic connotation is clear, the object of the interpretation remains unclear. Four potential meanings are worthy of discussion.

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<sup>47</sup>Strachan, "Second Epistle General" 132; Green, *Second Peter and Jude* 89. Though the simple temporal participle is very often possible, it is often best to resort to it only when no other interpretive possibilities fit (Dan Wallace, "Selected Notes" [unpublished syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary, circa 1981]). The NASB and the NIV understand an imperatival participle in both 1:20 and 3:3. This is possible, but the rarity of this use of a participle makes it unlikely. In contrast, of the 22 times the nominative participle of *γινώσκω* used adverbially appears in the NT, 19 either clearly or probably express the cause for an associated action (Matt 12:15; 16:8; 22:18; 26:10; Mark 6:38; 8:17; 15:45; Luke 9:11; John 5:6; 6:15; Acts 23:6; Rom 1:21; 6:6; Gal 2:9; 4:9; Eph 5:5; Phil 2:19; Heb 10:34; Jas 1:3; 2 Pet 1:20; 3:3).

<sup>48</sup>*Τοῦτο πρῶτον* ("This first") occurs only here in the NT, but appears with the same meaning of "above all" in the LXX of Isa 9:1, stressing urgency of action.

<sup>49</sup>This verse is grammatically similar to 3:2-3 where Peter gives the reason for his readers to remember the words of the prophets.

<sup>50</sup>Though Peter may view prophecy in its narrow sense—those truths and events *foretold* by the prophets—he probably sees it in the broader sense of all Scripture. The same word in the following verse has its wider sense because of its similarity to 2 Tim 3:16.



**(1) Individual interpretation must yield to corporate interpretation.**

It is primarily the Roman Catholic tradition that understands Peter to be discouraging individuals from trying to interpret Scripture apart from the authoritative aid of the church—i.e., he forbids private interpretation by individual readers.<sup>51</sup>

*Ἰδίᾳς* (*Idias*, "one's own") can mean private in contrast to corporate (e.g., Mark 4:34; Gal 2:2). However, this view is contextually difficult because it renders v. 21 useless, although the verse's clear function is to support what v. 20 expresses.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, this meaning contradicts other Scriptures which recommend that the individual approach Scripture to understand it for himself (Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; 1 John 2:27). Calvin asks how Scripture can be called "light" if it is not clear to the individual Christian. He writes bluntly, "Execrable, therefore, is the blasphemy of the Papists, who pretend that the light of Scripture does nothing but dazzle the eyes, in order to keep the simple from reading it."<sup>53</sup>

**(2) Verses must be interpreted in light of other Scriptures.** Here, *idias* would mean "its own" (as in Luke 6:44; John 15:19; 1 Cor 15:38; 1 Tim 5:8), emphasizing the solidarity of God's Word. Indeed, extraction of verses from their nearby and greater contexts leads to error. This view certainly harmonizes with biblical truth, but is an unlikely meaning here. Aside from leaving v. 21 hanging, it does not properly handle the

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<sup>51</sup>The *Jerome Biblical Commentary* explains, "This is to be found in the apostolic tradition handed on in the Church" (eds. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, and Roland E. Murphy [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1968] 496). The Jerusalem Bible translates, "Interpretation of scriptural prophecy is never a matter for the individual." In our own setting in the Philippines, one particular lay organization of the Roman Catholic Church advised members to read the Bible devotionally and mediatively, but to depend on the Church and its clergy for deeper interpretation.

<sup>52</sup>Although *γάρ* ("for," v. 21) can sometimes function in ways other than expressing cause or providing an explanation, of the 25 times Peter uses the conjunction an overwhelming majority give a supporting reason for a previous statement.

<sup>53</sup>Calvin, *Library of Christian Classics* 389.

very unusual clause, "is a matter of one's own interpretation" (NASB, RSV, *ιδίας ἐπιλύσεως γίνεται*, *idias epiluseōs ginetai*). A fuller discussion of this clause relates more closely to the next view.

(3) *Meaning is not dependent on the individual reader's interpretation.* This view, held by Barbieri, Kistemaker, and Green, invalidates all arbitrary exegesis, denying that any one verse can have multiple meanings for different individuals.<sup>54</sup> Rather, as v. 21 explains, because God Himself wrote Scripture, it is sure that a single, objective meaning exists for any passage and the interpreter must strive to discover it. Divine origin (v. 21) implies a divine and immutable meaning.

This view fits nicely into the context by showing why objective written revelation is superior to the subjective, visual revelation of vv. 16-18, the latter of which lends itself to various interpretations by various witnesses.<sup>55</sup> Peter may be offering this as a corrective to the false teachers who were twisting Scripture to support their myths and stories (3:16).

The use of *idias* in this instance is impersonal, referring to any reader, one's own (novel) interpretation. Of the other eight times Peter uses this pronoun, its antecedent is always clear. Yet here the only possible antecedent is the plural "your" in v. 19b. This cannot be the antecedent because the subject of v. 19b is not interpretation. It is necessary to infer an antecedent. The impersonal translation is possible, but unlikely because it is uncommon in the NT. This is the only time the NASB translates *idios* by "one's own."

The meaning of the genitive, *idias epiluseōs*, with *ginetai* poses a more perplexing problem. This coupling of *ginomai* ("I become") with

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<sup>54</sup>It is important to distinguish between meaning, which is singular for any passage, and application, which can be multiple.

<sup>55</sup>Thayer suggests that the point is the believer's need of the Holy Spirit to understand what he reads, "an interpretation which one thinks out for himself, opp. to that which the Holy Spirit teaches" (*Greek-English Lexicon* 296). Just as the Spirit is the source of the writing, v. 21, so He also is the source of interpretation or understanding.

a genitive in the predicate is very rare.<sup>56</sup> If *ginetai* were translated as the simple copula, "is," the genitive would then carry a loose descriptive meaning, such as "a matter of," "related to," or "dependent on."<sup>57</sup> It is also possible to perceive direction or purpose in the genitive: "no prophecy . . . is for one's own interpretation, or designed for a personal interpretation."<sup>58</sup>

**(4) Scripture did not originate in the human author's interpretation of what he saw.**<sup>59</sup> *Idias* in this instance refers to the writer of Scripture rather than the reader. Human authors and prophets did not receive visions and have permission to explain personally those visions resulting in Scripture. Nor in foretelling did they personally decipher the meaning of current events to forecast what was to come. Instead, as v. 21 clarifies, their prophecies came from God. Both Hiebert and Calvin, together with the NIV, hold this final view which describes the inspiration process.<sup>60</sup>

In this case, interpretation of Scripture itself is not the focus, but

<sup>56</sup>Of the 3 other possible occurrences of this combination of *γίνομαι* and a genitive in the predicate, Mark 13:18 uses a genitive of description, "happen in the winter"; Rev 11:15 uses the genitive possessively; and Acts 20:3 remains enigmatic.

<sup>57</sup>In Rom 9:16, the genitive has the idea of dependence: "so then it *does* not depend on the man who wills. . . ." A. T. Robertson admits that the genitive had become very broad by Koine times, often overlapping with the accusative (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the light of Historical Research* [Nashville, Broadman, 1934] 506).

<sup>58</sup>For other genitives of direction/purpose in Peter, cf. 1 Pet 2:16, "as a covering for evil"; 3:21, "an appeal to God for a good conscience"; 5:2, "exercising oversight . . . not for sordid gain."

<sup>59</sup>The Living Bible paraphrases, "was ever thought up by the prophet himself."

<sup>60</sup>Hiebert, "Prophetic Foundation" 165. In a similar vein, Strachan ("Second Epistle General" 131 ff.) understands it to mean that the prophet, when he described a revelation applied to his own generations' historical situation, did not give the only application, but other historical applications were possible: "The prophets . . . saw clearly only the contemporary political or moral situation, and the principles involved and illustrated therein."

interpretation of history or visions in order to write Scripture. Like the two previous views, this one does find support in other Scripture (Dan 12:8-9; 1 Pet 1:10-12) and in v. 21 which parallels and expands the idea. Further, this fourth view receives its strongest recommendation from *ginetai* plus the genitive to describe Scripture's origin. *Ginomai* often carries the meaning "come about" or "arose," describing the origin of something (e.g., 1 Tim 6:4; 1 Pet 4:12; 2 Pet 2:1). This semantic connotation pairs nicely with a genitive (or ablative) of source—"comes about *from* the author's own interpretation"—or of means—"comes about *by means of* the author's own interpretation."<sup>61</sup>

The fourth interpretation that refers v. 20 to the divine origin of written revelation is preferable, but the third is a definite possibility.

### *The Method of Divine Inspiration*

In what amounts to an example of synthetic parallelism, Peter restates in v. 21 the essence of v. 20 with further details on inspiration's mechanics. He adds emphasis to his first statement by moving *θελήματι ἀνθρώπου* (*thelēmati anthrōpou*, "will of man") forward to its beginning and by the addition of *ποτέ* (*pote*, "formerly, ever") to the negative *οὐ* (*ou*, "not"): "for *never* by means of human will was prophecy uttered."<sup>62</sup> This reference to human will is reminiscent of John 1:13 which describes mistaken sources of regeneration.

Peter gives the most detailed description of the inspiration process by any biblical writer. Evidently a cooperation took place, by which the human author, while normally not losing self-control or bypassing his own self, received guidance from God to write God's words. Although the nominative participle, *φερόμενοι* (*pheromenoi*, "being carried

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<sup>61</sup>Admittedly, both genitives (or ablatives) of source and means are rare, but 1 Pet 3:21 may be an example of the former, "dirt *from* the flesh," and the participle in 1 Pet 2:15 is certainly an example of genitive (or ablative) of means, "*by* doing right you may silence the ignorance. . . ." In addition, a genitive of means would parallel the dative of means, *θελήματι* ("through the will") in v. 21.

<sup>62</sup>For *ποτέ* with the negative, cf. also Eph 5:29; 2 Pet 1:10.

along"), can be either adjectival or adverbial,<sup>63</sup> an adverbial participle is more enlightening. Whether it be a participle of means—"men by means of being carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God"—or cause—"men because they were carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God"—the participle clarifies *how* men spoke from God. The same passive participle describes the powerful sound of blowing wind when the Spirit came to control the apostles at Pentecost (Acts 2:2). Perhaps more descriptive is the same word used of a ship uncontrollably driven by storm wind (Acts 27:15, 17). Green brings out the idea of cooperation with these appropriate comments: "The prophets raised their sails, so to speak (they were obedient and receptive), and the Holy Spirit filled them and carried their craft along in the direction He wished."<sup>64</sup>

The preposition *ὑπό* (*hypo*, "by") indicates the Spirit's role as agent of God's revelation. Second Sam 23:2, Acts 1:16, and 1 Cor 2:10 indicate the same, as do John 14:26 and 16:13-15. God's work *through* a man, while not forcing his will or skirting his personality, and yet totally controlling the outcome, surely magnifies His power. Indeed, God's Word is one of His greatest miracles!<sup>65</sup> Fully appreciated, it certainly surpasses being slain in the Spirit or a crying, dancing image of Mary.

#### A FINAL SUGGESTED TRANSLATION OF 1 PET 1:16-21

<sup>16</sup>For it was not by means of following cleverly concocted tales that we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but because we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

<sup>17</sup>For at the time that He received honor and glory from God the Father when such an announcement was uttered by the

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<sup>63</sup>Of the approx. 134 times Peter uses the anarthrous, nominative participle (the articular participle is uncommon), both adjectival and adverbial are very common.

<sup>64</sup>Green, *Second Peter and Jude* 91.

<sup>65</sup>Several important texts add *ἅγιοι* instead of *ἀπό*, resulting in the translation "holy men of God spoke" (cf. KJV, RSV footnote). Mss. supporting the alternative include the Majority text, uncials  $\aleph$  A 68  $\psi$ , and Vulgate. But the reading with *ἀπό* found in p<sup>72</sup> and in B P and numerous other mss. is stronger.

Magnificent Glory, "This is My Son, My Beloved in Whom I am well pleased," <sup>18</sup>we also heard this voice uttered from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. <sup>19</sup>In addition, we have the more dependable prophetic word, to which you are doing well to devote yourself as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises, <sup>20</sup>since you know this above all in your hearts, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from an author's own interpretation; <sup>21</sup>for prophecy was never uttered by means of human will, but men, by being carried along by the Holy Spirit, spoke from God.

### CONCLUSION

In our age, enemies of Christianity disbelieve God's Word, but even some professing Christians belittle Scripture by adding to it. Added to Scripture are myths and miracles of still quasi-pagan religious, fabulous experiences eagerly sought by people looking for excitement instead of truth, and sophisticated psychotherapies and theories grounded in godless presumptions. These "Prophets of Addition" demean Scripture's sufficiency by suggesting alternate sources of spiritual knowledge and solutions. To them Peter responds with his message of Scripture's superiority. To them God uttered this same message more than seven centuries before Peter when He said about those who advised Isaiah to look elsewhere for answers:

And when they say to you, "Consult the mediums and the spirits who whisper and mutter," should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (Isa 8:19-20).



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