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GOT MILK? SEPTUAGINT PSALM 33
AND THE INTERPRETATION OF 1 PETER 2:1-3

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*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk,
so that by it you may grow up in your salvation . . .*

1 Pet 2:2 (NIV)

The author of 1 Peter writes to first-century Christians of Asia Minor encouraging and exhorting them to be faithful to the Lord and loving to each other as they face various griefs and sufferings for the name of Christ.¹ Peter knows them to have been born anew (1:3) by the imperishable seed of God (1:23), and into a reality of living hope based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1:3). By virtue of their faith in Christ, they have entered into a new life that has alienated them from the priorities and values of their society to such an extent that Peter addresses them as visiting strangers (1:1) and resident aliens (2:11).² In 2:1-3 Peter continues the new-birth motif begun in chapter 1 with an explanation and exhortation that new life in Christ means a transformation of values and behavior:

¹Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ²Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. (NIV)

Peter exhorts his readers to pursue those attitudes and behaviors that will sustain their growth in their new life in Christ. Those interpreters who saw this epistle as originally a baptismal homily or liturgy found support in 2:2 for the addressees as new believers, an idea which continues to have influence.³ However, Peter is not describing the recent conversion of his readers, for he has already described *all* believers as new-born children of God, and uses the metaphor to instruct them to crave pure spiritual milk, even as a newborn baby craves its mother's

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¹ I will refer to the author as Peter, since the epistle presents itself as having been written by the apostle, regardless of who the actual writer is understood to be.

² This is true regardless of the social position they had before conversion to Christ. For a discussion of the possible sociologically marginalized status of the original readers, see John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Sociological Exegesis of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981).

³ E.g., E. R. Perdelwitz, *Die Mysterienreligion und das Problem des 1. Petrusbriefes* (Giessen: A. Töpelmann, 1911); B. H. Streeter, *The Primitive Church* (London: Macmillan, 1929); Frank L. Cross, *1 Peter: A Paschal Liturgy* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1954).

milk, that is, instinctively, eagerly, and incessantly. Although milk is elsewhere in the New Testament used as a metaphor for teachings suitable for immature Christians (Heb 5:12) and worldly Christians (1 Cor 3:1), such a negative connotation is not found here. Rather Peter presents pure spiritual milk as that which all Christians need in order to grow up into their salvation. For Peter salvation is not a state of maturity in this life but deliverance from God's judgment when the Lord returns.

While the correspondence between Christian believers and newborn infants is indisputable, the specific referent of the milk metaphor that Christians are to crave is less so. Peter's use of this metaphor in 2:2 presents two puzzling, yet exegetically central, questions: How should λογικόν, an unusual word in the biblical corpus, appearing here as an attributive adjective modifying γάλα ("milk"), be understood and translated? And to what specifically does the metaphor of milk refer? The answer to either question informs the other. However the metaphor is understood, it must be logically coherent both with the participial phrase "putting off all evil," etc., with which it is syntactically joined in the Greek and with the direct allusion to LXX Ps 33:3, "since you have tasted that the Lord is good."

Modern interpreters almost unanimously understand the referent of the pure spiritual milk metaphor to be the word of God, whether in the form of apostolic preaching or the Bible.⁴ They take λογικὸς γάλα to mean "spiritual milk," using various interpretations of the word "spiritual," and relate that to the word of God either through the cognate relationship between λόγος and λογικός or by proximity with the immediately preceding context in verses 1:23-25:

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word [λόγος] of God. For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word [ῥῆμα] of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word [ῥῆμα] that was preached to you. (NIV)

Therefore, the milk to be craved is understood to be the pure word-milk, that is God's word untainted by error. Grudem finds support here for describing the nature of the Bible, ". . . this adjective implies that Scripture is free from impurity or imperfection, that it will not deceive or lead astray its readers, and that it affirms no falsehood."⁵

⁴ For instance, Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 145; William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 191; Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 126; Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988), 78; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The First Epistle of Peter* (London: SCM, 1958), 45; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 83; Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter* (trans. J. E. Alsup; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 128; Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988; repr. 1997), 95; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 85; Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (AB 37; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 88.

⁵ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 95.

Certainly the thought that Scripture is the milk of Christian life has much appeal both in the immediate context of 1 Peter and on general principle; that is, Christians should read their Bible in which they find the revelation of Christ and thereby grow in their salvation from new birth to final glory. Nevertheless, even though this interpretation is coherent and almost unanimous among modern interpreters, it is not without its problems. In fact, Hort, followed by Beare, baldly states that “The familiar rendering ‘milk of the word’ is simply impossible” because λογικός could never be equivalent for τοῦ λόγου, despite any etymological similarity.⁶ Few modern interpreters would commit an etymological fallacy, and so they take λογικός γάλα to mean “spiritual milk,” but understand it to refer to the word of God on the strength of the immediate context. However, if Peter specifically had the word of God in mind when he wrote λογικός γάλα, whether in the form of apostolic preaching or inscripturated revelation, he surely could have used the exegetical genitive τὸ γάλα τοῦ λόγου (“the milk of the word”) to refer directly back to 1:23 without ambiguity. The fact that Peter chose a word rarely used in Christian writings with the same root as λόγος but with a somewhat different meaning should be a clue that there is more to it.

Further considerations must also inform the exegesis of the referent of the milk metaphor. Firstly, the word-milk interpretation lacks metaphorical coherence with the context presumed to inform it. In 1:23-25, the λόγος of God is identified as the seed, or sperm, that regenerates new life in the believer. The gospel preached to the Christians of Asia Minor is understood to be the eternal ῥῆμα of the Lord that, according to Peter, was already known to Isaiah (Isa 40:6-8). While λόγος and ῥῆμα are generally synonymous in Greek usage, it appears that Peter took advantage of the lexical variation the language offered to distinguish in his thought the external preaching of the word of God from the internal effect of regeneration in those who believe it, for in 1:25 he uses ῥῆμα and 1:23, λόγος.⁷ In Peter’s thought, the regeneration of new life by God’s word is inextricably linked with the external preaching of God’s word, nevertheless the two concepts are distinct. Given this distinction and Peter’s choice of the cognate word λογικός in 2:2, the word (λόγος) of God as the regenerating seed in 1:23 (as opposed to the preached ῥῆμα in 1:25) would be the more likely referent of the milk metaphor if it does in fact refer to the word of God. But the metaphorical incoherence between milk and seed raises the question of whether the same concept, word of God, should be construed as the referent of both metaphors.

⁶ F. J. A. Hort, *The First Epistle of St. Peter. I.1–II.17. The Greek Text with Introductory Lecture, Commentary, and Additional Notes* (London: Macmillan, 1898), 100; followed by Francis Wright Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (2d rev. ed.; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 89.

⁷ Even if this material originated as an early Christian hymn, it is widely acknowledged that the author re-worded his source material to the extent that certain reconstruction of his source is not possible. Moreover, he freely re-words his quotations from the LXX, e.g., 1:24, and so his wording does not appear to be bound by his sources. He would have been free to use λόγος or ῥῆμα consistently had he chosen to do so.

If Peter intended this abrupt and unaided shift from the word-seed metaphor that regenerates new life to the word-milk metaphor that sustains it, one must conclude something along the lines that the word of God, as both seed and milk, both initiates and sustains new life in Christ, respectively. As Goppelt puts it, “That those who are born from the word continue to seek the word as a child seeks its mother’s milk is not only a life-sustaining obligation; it also corresponds to their actual need.”⁸

A second consideration in the exegesis of 2:1-3 is whether the notoriously difficult to define word λογικός should be taken to mean “spiritual” here as most interpreters do, and if so, in what sense? Erasmus understood the milk of 1 Pet 2:2 to be “milk not for the body, but for the soul.”⁹ Stibbs calls it “milk for the mind rather than the stomach.”¹⁰ Beare, who rejects the consensus view that the milk is the word of God, nevertheless considers “spiritual” the best English word with which to translate λογικόν as “that which is proper to the Logos, and the life which is mediated through the Logos (διὰ λόγου—1:23); thus it is virtually equivalent to πνευματικός.”¹¹ In response to the thought that λογικός is synonymous with πνευματικός, it should be noted that Peter employs the adjective πνευματικός just a few sentences later to describe the “spiritual house” and “spiritual sacrifices” of the believing community (2:5).¹² Because λογικός is not found elsewhere in the biblical corpus as a stylistic variation of πνευματικός, we must at least consider it possible that Peter wishes to distinguish in some way the quality and character of the milk from that of the house and sacrifices he subsequently mentions.

A related sense of the word λογικός is found in clearly metaphorical contexts to mean “spiritual” but in a non-literal sense. BDAG cites the phrase “the bishop is the shepherd” τῶν λογικῶν πρόβατων τοῦ χριστοῦ from *Pelagia-Legenden* (5th c.), along with a phrase from Eusebius (4th c.), and categorizes 1 Pet 2:2 as another occurrence of this sense. Grudem, who argues that the word of God is the referent of the milk metaphor also takes λογικός here to mean “spiritual” in the sense of the figurative, “long for pure figurative (not literal) milk.”¹³ Although Michaels rejects the understanding that the milk is the word of God, he agrees that the purpose of λογικόν is simply to clue the reader that milk is not to be taken literally. He writes,

The purpose of λογικόν not to interpret and thereby dissolve the metaphor, but simply to underscore the fact that it is a metaphor (i.e., that Peter is speaking not of literal milk but of a more excellent, although undefined, “spiritual milk”).¹⁴

⁸ Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 132.

⁹ Jean Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles* (trans. J. Owen; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 62.

¹⁰ Alan M. Stibbs, *The First Epistle General of Peter* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 96.

¹¹ Beare, *Peter*, 89.

¹² A similar distinction seems to be found in Romans where λογικός appears once (12:1) and πνευματικός three times (1:11; 7:14; 15:27).

¹³ Grudem, *1 Peter*, 95.

¹⁴ J. Ramsay Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1988), 87.

McCartney objects that to take λογικός as simply meaning metaphorical here is rather otiose:

The author does not have to tell his readers that they are *metaphorically* infants, or that the seed of 1:23 is a metaphorical seed, or that the tasting of 2:3 is metaphorical tasting. Certainly the fact that “milk” is a metaphor in this context is no less obvious than that the other terms are metaphors. (emphasis original)¹⁵

However, it should be noted that the example from *Pelagia-Legenden* has the same syntactical structure as 1 Pet 2:2. Compare:

the bishop is the shepherd τῶν λογικόν πρόβατων τοῦ χριστοῦ
as newborn infants crave λογικόν γάλα.

“Shepherd” metaphorically refers to the bishop, as “newborn infants” refers to Christians, and yet it is nevertheless followed by the attributive adjective λογικόν modifying the corresponding (and obvious) metaphor “sheep” (πρόβατων). This example supports taking λογικός γάλα to mean nothing more than metaphorical rather than literal milk, though even so the actual referent must still be considered. On the other hand, *Pelagia-Legenden* is quite late and one should question whether λογικός had the sense of *metaphorical* at the time 1 Peter was written.

“Rational” or “reasonable” is another sense of λογικός given by the lexicons that is often found in Stoic writings. McCartney makes a compelling case that in the first century some occurrences of λογικός previously understood as “rational” should be taken as “having to do with verbal communication” on the basis that rationality and verbal articulation were congruent concepts in the ancient world.¹⁶ He concludes that this data permits 1 Pet 2:2 to be understood as the “pure milk of the Word” in a context that “seems to expect something more along the lines of ‘having to do with the Word’ than either ‘spiritual’ or ‘rational’” or that “begs for something like ‘having to do with the Word of God’.”¹⁷ For McCartney the word-theology so prominent in the preceding verses demands that λογικός must pertain to verbal communication, which is then taken to be the verbal communication of the word of God previously mentioned in verses 1:23-25. But is this the most immediate interpretive context?

McCartney finds a very close relationship between 2:1-3 and 1:22-23 by pairing (1) ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν . . . (putting off all evil) 2:1 with τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν ἡγνικότες (having purified yourselves) in 1:22 and (2) ὡς ἀρτι-γέννητα βρέφη (newborn infants) in 2: with ἀναγεγεννημένοι (having been re-born) in 1:23.¹⁸ And so he infers further that (3) ἄδολον γάλα (pure milk) pairs with σπορᾶς . . . ἀφθρτου (imperishable seed), further specified respectively by (4) λογικόν corresponding to διὰ λόγου. He concludes, “If λογικόν is

¹⁵ Dan G. McCartney, “λογικός in 1 Peter 2,2,” *ZNW* 82 (1991): 128-32. Agreeing with Edward G. Selwyn, *First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 155.

¹⁶ McCartney, “λογικός,” 131, 132.

¹⁷ Ibid., 130, 132, respectively.

¹⁸ Ibid., 130.

parallel to διὰ λόγου, it must mean ‘having to do with λόγος,’ which in this context is the Word of God” (emphasis added).¹⁹ While these correspondences appear attractive at first glance, they actually assume his conclusion by assuming that λογικόν here pertains to *verbal* speech and that it is in fact semantically and logically parallel to διὰ λόγου. However, only the first two pairs are semantically and logically equivalent. The third pair does not correspond because ἐκ σπορᾶς . . . ἀφθάρτου is in a prepositional phrase that modifies the agency of the participle ἀναγεγεννημένοι (having been born again), whereas ἄδολον γάλα is the direct object of the verb ἐπιποθήσατε (crave). Therefore, pair 4 can be formed only by *assuming* that λογικός indeed corresponds to λόγος. But the correspondence is artificial, though morphologically attractive, because λογικός is an adjective modifying the direct object of ἐπιποθήσατε while διὰ λόγου modifies the participle ἀναγεγεννημένοι indicating the source of the new birth, which are not corresponding concepts. In other words, apart from the morphological similarity between λόγος and λογικός there is no functional, logical, or semantic correspondence between the two phrases in this discourse.

Moreover, McCartney’s conclusion that λογικός means “pertaining to speech” does not work in Rom 12:1, the only other New Testament occurrence of this word. While the sense of the word need not be the same in both of its New Testament occurrences, the rarity of its use in early Christian writings suggests that the same sense might be intended when it does occur. Nevertheless, McCartney’s argument that λογικός refers to a rationality that is expressed verbally does move in the direction of Peter’s overall argument and avoids a simple etymological fallacy of assuming that λογικός is the adjectival cognate of λόγος simply because they share the same root.

The question still remains, if Peter meant the referent of the milk metaphor to be a direct reference back to 1:23, why did he not simply say τὸ γάλα τοῦ λογοῦ? Moreover, is the immediate context in fact controlled by a “word” theology to the extent that it demands “milk” to refer to the word of God?

Although most commentators take 1:23-25 to be the immediate context of 2:1-3, the referent of the milk metaphor must first be logically related to the rest of the sentence in which it occurs, which in the Greek spans verses 2:1-3:

¹Ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν καὶ πάντα δόλον καὶ ὑποκρίσεις καὶ φθόνους καὶ πάσας καταλαλίαις, ²ὥς ἀρτιγάννητα βρέφη τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιποθήσατε, ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ αὐξηθῆτε εἰς σωτηρίαν, ³εἰ ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστός ὁ κύριος.

(Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. [NIV])

The imperative translated “crave” (ἐπιποθήσατε) is modified by the participial phrase Ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν, etc. This participial phrase can be taken as temporal (“after putting off . . . crave”) or as an attendant circumstance which gains an imperatival force by the imperative mood of the main verb (“put off . . .

¹⁹ Ibid.

crave”). Furthermore, the sentence begun in verse 2 is completed in verse 3 with another perceptual metaphor of taste in the direct allusion to LXX Ps 33:9. Thus, LXX Ps 33 contributes to the interpretive context within which Peter’s command to crave milk should be understood, just as his use of LXX Isa 40:6-8 supports his command in 1:22, also in the imperative mood, to love one another earnestly.

The consensus of modern interpreters seem to have overlooked Calvin, who found in this metaphor of the pure λογικός milk a referent more general than the word of God yet integrally related to it:

After having taught the faithful that they had been regenerated by the word of God, he now exhorts them to lead a life *corresponding with their birth*. . . . Infancy is here set by Peter in opposition to the ancientness of the flesh, which leads to corruption; and under the word *milk*, he includes all the feelings of the spiritual life. . . . He then compares the vices, in which the oldness of the flesh indulges, to strong food; and milk is called that *way of living* suitable to innocent nature and simple infancy. (emphasis added)²⁰

Calvin’s interpretation has the strength of making a strong logical connection between the participial phrase listing the vices and the imperative to crave λογικόν milk. (The epistle of James makes a similar connection between ethical transformation and the word of new life using terms that echo phrases also found in 1 Pet 2:1; 1:23; and 2:2: “Therefore get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you,” Jas 1:21, TNIV.) The sense of λογικός as it is used in the New Testament, as the Louw and Nida Greek lexicon defines it, is “true to real nature,” which fits nicely with Calvin’s understanding that those re-birthed into the family of God need food that “correspond to the reality of their new life.”

The Stoics could use the word λογικός to mean “rational” or “reasonable” in sense of being true to the ultimate reality, which in Stoic thought was ordered by the divine rationality of the *Logos*. Although rejecting Stoic theology, Peter (and probably Paul) plundered the Egyptians, so to speak, by using the same word to describe what is true to the ultimate reality of the new creation that the resurrection of Jesus Christ had established. Paul tells Christians that presenting their bodies as living sacrifices is their λογικός worship (Rom 12:1), i.e., worship that is true to the new reality in which they now exist.²¹ Peter writes that life in this new reality requires sustenance that is true to the nature of the new reality in which they now exist. This interpretation is congenial to McCartney’s finding that rationality and verbal articulation were congruent concepts in the ancient world. The Christian apostles knew that the reality into which Christians were reborn was defined not by the *Logos* of the Stoics but by the eternal word of God. Therefore, the verbal revelation of God preached by Isaiah and the

²⁰ Calvin, *Catholic Epistles*, 61.

²¹ And so Douglas Moo translates Rom 12:1 as “your true worship” (*The Epistle to the Romans* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 748).

prophets, by apostolic tradition, and now inscripturated in the Bible articulates the reality to which God's people are to conform their lives.

The λογικός milk of 2:2 is also described by a second adjective, ἄδολον ("pure," when used of food to mean "unadulterated" or "uncontaminated"). Those who take the referent of the milk metaphor to be the word of God either in the form of Scripture or apostolic teaching take this adjective to mean truth unmixed with false doctrine or inerrant.²² However, if λογικόν is allowed to mean more generally sustenance that is true to the new life in Christ, then as Hort points out, it is

unlikely that St Peter means to contrast ἄδολον γάλα with other milk which *is* adulterated. He is thinking only of the child at its mother's breast, and to him milk is, as such, *the* kind of food which by the nature of the case cannot be adulterated. This, he implies, is the characteristic of the spiritual sustenance which proceeds directly from God himself. (emphasis original)²³

Hort takes the milk to refer to divine grace on which all re-born must depend for on-going life in Christ.

Michaels, who like Hort, rejects the word of God as the referent of milk, observes it is doubtful "that the full significance of 'pure spiritual milk' for Peter can be summed up in just one word or concept."²⁴ He writes, "In light of 1:25 there can be no doubt that the medium by which the milk is received is the proclaimed message of the gospel, but the milk itself is more appropriately interpreted as the sustaining life of God given in mercy to his children."²⁵ Therefore, while it is not incorrect to direct Christians to the word of God in Scripture for sustaining grace throughout life, it is doubtful that Peter meant to limit the milk metaphor to the written word of God, especially at a time before the gospel of Jesus Christ was inscripturated in the New Testament.

This broader interpretation of the milk metaphor is confirmed when the contribution of LXX Ps 33 to the interpretive context is considered. The very bold perceptual metaphor of taste in 1 Pet 2:3, "since you have tasted that the Lord is good," is a more immediate exegetical control on how the milk metaphor was intended than the more distant verses in 1:22-25. The predicate adjective, χρηστός (good), is found frequently in the Septuagint Greek of Psalms in reference to God (LXX Ps 24:8; 33:9; 85:5; 99:5; 105:1; 106:1; 118:68; 135:1; 144:9), to God's name (LXX Ps 51:11), to God's mercy (LXX Ps 68:17; 108:21), and to God's Law (LXX Ps 118:39). First Peter 2:3 is itself a direct allusion to LXX Ps 33:9 (Eng. and Heb., Ps 34:8) adapted for Peter's new historical moment. Interpreters through the ages have noted the possible word play between χρηστός (good) and χρίστος (Christ) in 2:3. The difference between "the Lord is good" and the "Lord is Christ" is but one vowel.

²² E.g., Clowney, *1 Peter*, 79; and Grudem, *1 Peter*, 95, respectively.

²³ Hort, *First Epistle*, 101.

²⁴ Michaels, *1 Peter*, 89.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

Psalms 33 in its entirety is in Peter's mind, as he later quotes it more extensively in 3:10-12 as the grounds for his exhortations. Moreover the language and thoughts throughout 1 Pet 1-3 echo the language of LXX Ps 33 in several places. Peter has already explained in 1:10-12 that it was Christ who spoke through the prophets (in this case the Psalmist) whose words serve the Christians of his own generation. First Peter 2:3 is the second example of Peter's bringing the words of the prophets to the ears of his readers as if the prophets were addressing the specific situation of the Asian Christians (the first example being the quotation of Isa 40:6-8 in 1:24-25).

The superscription to Ps 33 (Heb. and Eng., Ps 34) indicates that the Psalm is of David, when he feigned madness before Abimelech and was released. It is an acrostic psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance from affliction. Although written centuries before 1 Peter, its words of encouragement are uncannily appropriate for the historical situation faced by the first-century Christians of Asia Minor, whom Peter instructs to bear up through suffering by being faithful to the Lord who will deliver them. When the Hebrew text of Ps 34 is compared to its Greek translation in LXX Ps 33, there are no major omissions or additions, but there are some rephrasings that contextualize the Psalm for the Diaspora setting. For instance, in Ps 34:5 the Hebrew reads that the psalmist sought the Lord and the Lord delivered "from all my *fears*" (וּמִכָּל־מִגִּדְרוֹתַי). The Greek version reflects a different pointing, reading *ἡμεῖς* (sojourning; the participle of *ἡμεῖς*) and thus translates with *τῶν παροικιῶν* (sojournings), a cognate of the Greek word that Peter uses to address his readers in 2:11 (ὡς ταπείνους). The LXX translator understood David to have been delivered from the afflictions he experienced while sojourning away from "home" and outside his place of safety. It is impossible to tell if the translator understood the consonantal text to mean "fear" and deliberately created a pun by repointing it in such a way to contextualize it to his Diaspora setting, or whether that setting so colored his thought that "sojourning" was the only reading that occurred to him. In either case, the LXX rendering was congenial to Peter's later use as he framed his epistle in Diaspora language (1 Pet 1:1 and 5:12) and claimed deliverance for his readers from the afflictions of their sojourn, just as David had previously experienced.

When Peter alludes to LXX Ps 33:9 in 2:3, he changes the mood of the verb from the imperative mood (*γεύσασθε*, [you, pl.] taste) to the indicative (*ἔγεύσασθε*, you have tasted), and he omits the second verb *καὶ ἴδετε* (and see). His omission of the second verb is probably governed by his use of the milk metaphor in v. 2, since the verb "see" does not have metaphorical coherence with "milk" and is unnecessary for his point. His change of verbal form from imperative to indicative reflects his understanding that his readers have already tasted the goodness of the Lord. The first class conditional clause (*εἰ*, if) implies a condition taken as fact for the point the author is making and is equivalent to "since you have tasted that the Lord is good." The logic of vv. 2 and 3 then is, "since you have tasted that the Lord is good, crave . . .," making the implied

referent of the milk metaphor their experience of the Lord himself. As Best observes, the direct object of tasting in v. 3 is Christ himself. For the Christian, “there can be no food beyond Christ.”²⁶ Selwyn takes the milk to be “the divinely-given nourishment supplied by the Gospel.”²⁷ Hort describes the milk as “a Divine grace or spirit coming directly from above.”²⁸

Kelly suggests that the power of the perceptual metaphor is best served by translating, “since you have tasted that the Lord is delicious.”²⁹ Of all the sensory metaphors, tasting is the most intimate and the only one that involves ingestion. Seeing God, hearing God, even touching God, does not carry the powerful connotations that “tasting” implies—making the experience internal to oneself.³⁰

This interpretation that the milk in view is not specifically limited to the word of God is supported by a further look at how the perceptual metaphor of taste functions in LXX Ps 33:9. Peter quotes only the first colon of two:

O taste and see that the Lord is good;
Happy is the one who hopes in him.
(Heb., who takes refuge in him)

The tasting of the Lord’s goodness is related to putting hope in him, which in the context of Ps 33 is hope for deliverance from shame (v. 6), affliction (v. 7), and want (vv. 10, 11). These were the very things being experienced by the Asian Christians because of their profession of faith in Christ. In this situation, Peter tells them in 1 Pet 1:13 to set their hope fully on God’s grace in Christ. Thus the LXX quotation in 2:3 forms a conceptual inclusio with Peter’s exhortation in 1:13.

In addition to the two direct references to LXX Ps 33 in verses 2:3 and 3:10-12, the language of Ps 33 echoes throughout the first half of Peter’s letter:

1. Both start with blessing God:

Ps 33:2 εὐλογήσω τὸν κύριον ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ
 I will bless the Lord at all times
cf. 1 Pet 1:3 Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

2. The psalmist claims to have earnestly sought the Lord, placing him among those prophets of whom Peter speaks in 1:10:

Ps 33:5 ἐξεζήτησα τὸν κύριον καὶ ἐπήκουσάν μου
 I sought the Lord and he answered me

²⁶ Ernest Best, *1 Peter* (NCB; Greenwood, S.C.: Attic Press, 1971), 97.

²⁷ Selwyn, *First Epistle*, 154.

²⁸ Hort, *First Epistle*, 101-2.

²⁹ Kelly, *The Epistle of Peter*, 86.

³⁰ For a discussion of the idea that God is not a subject to be studied but a banquet to be enjoyed, see Daniel B. Stevick, “A Matter of Taste: 1 Peter 2:3,” *Review for Religious* [sic] 47 (1988): 707-17.

cf. 1 Pet 1:10 ἐξεζητήσαν . . . προφήται οἱ περὶ τῆς εἰς ὑμᾶς χάριτος προφητεύσαντες,
The prophets who prophesied concerning the grace that has come to
you . . . sought out

3. The result of seeking the Lord was deliverance from all David's *sojournings*
(παροικία):

Ps 33:5 καὶ ἐκ πασῶν τῶν παροικιῶν μου ἐρρύσατό με
and from all my sojournings he delivered me
cf. 1 Pet 1:17 ἐν φόβῳ τὸν τῆς παροικίας ὑμῶν χρόνον ἀναστράφητε
in fear[of God] live out your time of sojourning

4. The absence of shame, highly valued in ancient society, is found both in Ps 33
and 1 Peter:

Ps 33:6 προσάλατε πρὸς αὐτὸν . . . καὶ τὰ πρόσωπα ὑμῶν οὐ μὴ καταισχυθῇ
come to him [the Lord] and your faces shall never be put to shame
cf. 1 Pet 2:6 ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ' αὐτῷ οὐ μὴ καταισχυθῇ
the one who trusts in him [the Lord] shall never be put to shame
(Here Peter is actually quoting from Isa 28:16, which shares with Ps
33 the theme of no shame for the righteous.

5. The benefits to those who fear the Lord is found in both:

Ps 33:8 παρεμβαλεῖ ἄγγελος κυρίου κύκλῳ τῶν φοβουμένων αὐτὸν καὶ ῥύσεται
αὐτούς
the angel of the Lord camps around those who fear him and he will
deliver them
Ps 33:10 φοβήθητε τὸν κύριον οἱ ἅγιοι αὐτοῦ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ὑστέρημα τοῖς φοβου-
μένοις αὐτόν
fear the Lord, you his holy ones, because those who fear him have no
want
Ps 33:12 φόβον κυρίου διδάξω ὑμᾶς
I will teach you the fear of the Lord
cf. 1 Pet 1:17 ἐν φόβῳ τὸν τῆς παροικίας ὑμῶν χρόνον ἀναστράφητε
in fear [of God] live out your time of sojourning
1 Pet 2:17 τὸν θεὸν φοβεῖσθε
fear God

6. The responsiveness of God to the suffering of the righteous:

Ps 33:18 ἐκάκραξαν οἱ δίκαιοι καὶ ὁ κύριος εἰσήκουσεν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκ πασῶν τῶν
θλίψεων αὐτῶν ἐρρύσατο αὐτούς
the righteous cried out and the Lord heard them and from all their
affliction he delivered them
cf. 1 Pet 3:12 οφθαλμοὶ κυρίου ἐπὶ δικαίους καὶ ὦτα αὐτοῦ εἰς δάησιν αὐτῶν,
the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous and his ears [are turned]
toward their prayer

7. The many afflictions from which the righteous are delivered:

- Ps 33:20 πολλὰ αἱ θλίψεις τῶν δικαίων καὶ ἐκ πασῶν αὐτῶν ῥύσεται αὐτούς
many are the afflictions of the righteous and from all of them he will
rescue them
- cf. 1 Pet 1:6 ὀλίγον ἄρτι εἰ δέοον [ἐστὶν] λυπηθάντες ἐν ποικίλοις πειρασμοῖς,
. . . though it is necessary for a little while to suffer many kinds of trials

8. The redemption of the servants of the Lord:

- Ps 33:23 λυτρώσεται κύριος ψυχὰς δούλων αὐτοῦ
the Lord will redeem the lives of his servants
- cf. 1 Pet 1:18 οὐ φθαρτοῖς, ἀργυρίῳ ἢ χρυσίῳ, ἐλυτρώθητε
not with perishable things—silver or gold—you have been redeemed)
- 1 Pet 2:16 ὡς θεοῦ δούλοι.
[live] as servants of God

As these several echoes demonstrate, Peter is not proof-texting from Ps 33 but uses the original context and sense of the OT quotation to ground his point. Peter directly applies the concepts of Ps 33 to his contemporary readers. Just as God delivered David from his sojourn among the Philistines, he will deliver the Asian Christians from the afflictions caused by faith in Christ, because they are no less God’s covenant people than was David. Peter’s extensive application of the concepts, theology, and language of Ps 33 to his Christian readers is an example of what he has claimed in 1:24: the Word of the Lord abides forever—it defines reality anew for each generation.

What does this extensive comparison of LXX Ps 33 and 1 Peter reveal that may help with the exegesis of 2:1-3? Firstly, the theme of the Word of God is not mentioned even once in LXX Ps 33, in sharp comparison to his previous quotation of Isa 40, where the Word of the Lord is a major thought in that OT passage. Had Peter been quoting the psalmist in order to clarify and reinforce the identification of the word of God as the referent of the milk metaphor, he could have chosen a quotation that had metaphorical coherence with the perceptual metaphor of taste. For instance he could have quoted Ps 119:103, “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” Given that Peter relates the concepts of both Isa 40:6-8 and Ps 33:9 to his readers, and that they are two different concepts, it is likely that in 2:1-3 his thought has moved on beyond his concern with the word of the Lord as the seed of new life in 1:23-25 to the sustenance of that new life amidst times of trouble in 2:1-3.

The word preached to Peter’s readers mediated their experience of God (1:25), giving them their initial taste of the Lord. But when Peter exhorts them to crave spiritual milk, he is not telling them to crave the word of God, as if to listen to more sermons or to read more Scripture, as good and even necessary as those activities may be. He is saying that God in Christ alone both conceives and sustains the life of the new birth. It is the Lord God they are to crave for spiritual nourishment. They have tasted the goodness of the Lord in their conversion, but there is more to be had. The more-of-the-Lord-to-be-had by Peter’s readers involves putting off all evil and all deceit and hypocrisies and jealousies, and all back-biting (2:1), which refusal to do so will stunt their growth in the new life which they have entered through the new birth.

Secondly, this interpretation allows the participle in 2:1, ἀποθᾶμενοι (putting off), to be expressing the mode in which craving for the pure milk is expressed. The participial phrase claims an imperative force by virtue of its subordination to the imperative form ἐπιποθήσατε in v. 2. Peter's readers are to crave the Lord by adopting the attitudes and behaviors that will sustain the new life they have begun by faith in Christ. This ethical exhortation is consistent with the content of LXX Ps 33, where those who seek the Lord for deliverance must stop speaking deceit and evil (v. 14), must turn away from evil and pursue peace (v. 15). Thus it is ethical transformation that qualifies them to be the people whom the Lord will deliver, the *righteous* sufferer.

In light of the contribution LXX Ps 33 makes to Peter's thought, reading λογικός as *pertaining to the Word* is too narrow and can be discarded, but without denying the role of inscripturated verbal revelation in the life of the Christian or the relationship of verses 2:1-3 to 1:22-25. Peter has both explained in 1:10-12 and amply demonstrated by his use of Isa 40 in chapter 1 and LXX Ps 33 in this pericope that the written Scriptures are essentially relevant to the new life of his Christian readers. However, λογικός milk does not mean the word-milk, but the milk that is true to the nature of the new eschatological reality established by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and into which Peter's readers have been re-born (1:3). This understanding of λογικός also works well in Rom 12:1, where Paul instructs Christians to λογικός worship; that is, worship that corresponds to the new eschatological reality in which they are living in Christ (as opposed to their former ways of worship) by ethical and moral transformation.

Peter joins theology to ethics in 2:1-3, forming a transition between his teaching on the eternal, imperishable seed that has made his readers children of God (1:22-25) and his subsequent teaching in verses 2:9-11 on the nature of the people of God that they have become. Christians crave the Lord by shedding destructive vices so that "you might grow up into salvation" (2:2). Michaels puts it well when he writes that for Peter, "Salvation is seen not as a last-minute rescue operation from the outside but as the fitting consummation of a process already at work in and among Christian believers."³¹

Peter therefore merges the perceptual metaphor of Ps 33 ("taste and see that the Lord is good") with his concept of the new birth to yield the metaphor of milk as that which is tasted and craved by new-borns. The thought-world of the Greek Psalm in light of Peter's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is sufficient to explain the milk metaphor, eliminating any need to find here influence from the mystery religions (contra Perdelwitz who even denies that Peter employs a quotation from the Psalms here).³² Given the fact that milk is a potent symbol of sustenance, it is not surprising that it may have been used in the rituals of many religions. However, Goppelt has shown that "in no way has the terminology of Gnosticism or of the mystery religions been appropriated" here by Peter.³³ First Peter 2:1-3 may explain how the later second-century use of milk

³¹ Michaels, *1 Peter*, 91.

³² R. Perdelwitz, *Die Mysterienreligion und das Problem des I. Petrusbriefes. Ein literarischer und religions-geschichtlicher Versuch* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1911).

³³ Goppelt, *1 Peter*, 130. See also Selwyn, *First Epistle*, 305-9.

in some Christian baptisms arose,³⁴ but that subsequent use does not imply that this text was written as liturgy for that purpose, nor does it suggest a second-century date for the book.

The widespread consensus among modern interpreters that the pure spiritual milk of 2:2 is the word of God may seem too strong to question, much less abandon. However, going back at least as far as Calvin, a few dissenters have seen in the metaphor a wider view of God's life-sustaining grace in Christ.³⁵ This wider view is appropriate to Peter's goal of redefining his reader's self-identity in light of the new reality into which they have come through the new birth. Hearing or reading the word of God is a vital part of this new life, but Christians have not truly ingested God's life-transforming grace until they have put off attitudes and behaviors that are inconsistent with the new life, thereby instinctively, eagerly, and incessantly craving the grace of God.

³⁴ Selwyn, *First Epistle*, 308.

³⁵ Calvin, *Catholic Epistles*, 62; Hort, *St. Peter*, 100; Selwyn, *First Epistle*, 154; Beare, *First Epistle*, 89; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 87.