

Peter and the Prophetic Word: The Theology of Prophecy Traced through Peter's Sermons and Epistles

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While much work has been done on the theology of individual books in the Bible, very few have attempted to develop a Petrine theology that utilizes both 1 and 2 Peter as well as Peter's speeches in Acts. If, however, both the epistles and the discourse material in Acts stem from a common source, it stands to reason that one should be able to trace certain theological themes throughout and that these themes, when viewed in light of the Petrine material as a whole, would form a coherent theology. This essay examines the theme of prophecy in the two public sermons of Peter in Acts 2 and 3 and the two Petrine epistles. After examining the four units individually, this essay attempts to mold them into a "Petrine theology of prophecy" while also noting how this could potentially affect other areas of theology.

Key Words: Peter, Petrine theology, prophecy, theology of prophecy, Acts, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, Peter's sermons

While extensive work has been done on the theology of 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Acts as distinct units, very few have attempted to link the two major Petrine sermons from Acts with the two epistles in order to develop a coherent Petrine theology. Indeed, even those who argue that 1 and 2 Peter should be studied together see no reason to integrate the sermons in Acts into the equation, and the most comprehensive study to date of Peter's discourses in Acts does not even view them as truly Petrine.¹

But if the apostle Peter truly is behind the two epistles bearing his name as well as the sermons in Acts 2 and 3, as many evangelicals believe, one should be able to notice common themes in those works that can lead

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1. Namely, Richard F. Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse: Tradition and Lukan Reinterpretation in Peter's Speeches of Acts 2 and 3* (ed. Robert A. Kraft; SBLMS; Nashville: Abingdon, 1971). Zehnle claims on p. 14 that Henry Cadbury "decisively refutes the assumption that the discourses were actually given by the speakers and on the occasions indicated by the Acts."

to the development of a coherent Petrine theology.² An examination of the epistles and sermons reveals that this is indeed the case. Acts 2, Acts 3, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter all evidence a common emphasis on the role and nature of prophecy, and this article will attempt to synthesize that material into a coherent "Petrine theology of prophecy." The first section of this article will look at each source in turn and attempt to trace the theme of prophecy therein. The second section will attempt to mold all the prophetic material into a Petrine theology and discuss any corollary doctrines potentially affected by a theology of this sort.

PROPHECY IN THE PETRINE MATERIAL OF SCRIPTURE

Before a Petrine theology of prophecy can take form, one must first examine each of the relevant sources in turn. While a *prima facie* approach to Petrine theology cannot limit Peter to only the two epistles and his two sermons in Acts 2 and 3, nevertheless the two sermons in Acts, due to their public and apologetic nature (in contrast to Peter's other speeches), provide the most substantial area in which to begin.

This is not to say, however, that the sermons in Acts are necessarily the *ipsissima verba* of Peter rather than the *ipsissima vox*. On the one hand, one is not forced to accept Martin Dibelius's view that the author of Acts could not have cared less concerning the accuracy of the speeches he recorded or invented.³ But on the other hand, it is likely that Peter was not

2. This article per se is not an argument for Petrine authorship, but it is possible that its conclusions may contribute to arguments for authenticity (though, in theory, this article's thesis might work just as well if one replaced "Petrine theology" with "theology of the Petrine community"). The reader should, however, note Michael J. Kruger's cogent observation on the difficulty of actually pinning down a Petrine "style" ("The Authenticity of 2 Peter," *JETS* 42 [1999]: 645–71, esp. p. 658). Interestingly, Kruger does state that "both epistles are concerned with prophecy" (p. 660), though unfortunately for me Kruger does not develop that thought further.

3. Martin Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (ed. Heinrich Greeven; trans. Mary Ling; London: SCM, 1956), 144–46. Dibelius seems to make a false dichotomy when he argues, "What seems to the author his most important obligation is not what seems to us the most important one, that of establishing what speech was actually made; to him, it is rather that of introducing speeches into the structure in a way which will be relevant to his purpose. Even if he can remember, discover or read somewhere the text of the speech which was made, the author will not feel obliged to make use of it" (p. 144). Obviously, any historian who includes speeches in his or her work will make certain that those speeches fit the context regardless of whether or not they are genuine (note Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, vol. 2: *The Acts of the Apostles* [Minneapolis, Fortress, 1990], 27 and 54 for a discussion of how Peter's sermons are connected to the context). One is forced to ask, however, why the author of Acts could not have taken genuine speeches and fit them to the theme rather than inventing them wholesale. The apologetic force of his book may have suffered had the author relied on fabricated material. Furthermore, Dibelius's argument seems unfalsifiable—because many of the major Greco-Roman historians include speeches in their works and because obviously those speeches are made to fit the context (how could it be otherwise?), the reader is left wondering whether or not, according to Dibelius, it is even conceptually possible for a Greco-Roman historian to record an authentic speech. This, of course, must also be considered in light of the Greco-Roman historians' self-attested concern for accuracy (e.g.,

speaking Greek in Acts 2 and 3, and thus Luke would have been relying on sources that had already translated Peter's words or, quite possibly, he would have translated them himself. Either way, Luke must be given some liberty as a redactor to focus on particular vocabulary or themes and to summarize the speeches. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that a proper representation of Peter's sermons would have been conducive to Luke's overall apologetic purpose. The theology, then, may be viewed as genuinely Petrine, although the final form of the sermons may possess a certain amount of Lukan redaction.

Peter's Pentecost Sermon (Acts 2:14–40)

Richard F. Zehnle is certainly correct when he states that Acts 1–2 may be viewed as “a sort of theological prologue” and that Acts 2 is the “keynote address” of the prologue, part of the “careful statement by Luke of the ultimate reality underlying the mission . . . which enables the reader to understand the material that follows.”⁴ On the one hand, this prologue to Acts continues to develop the theology of fulfillment that began in Luke.⁵ On the other hand, it sets the stage for the rest of Acts by heralding the start of the eschaton (via the Holy Spirit's activity and the appropriation of OT promises by Christ's followers).⁶

Gregory V. Trull provides the following outline for Peter's Pentecost sermon: vv. 14–21 are Peter's defense against the accusation of drunkenness and his explanation of the Spirit's work; vv. 22–36 develop Peter's Christology; and vv. 37–39 provide Peter's invitation.⁷ Each part of Peter's speech relies heavily on the concept of prophecy for its argument. Immediately after Peter's defense against the accusation of drunkenness, he delves into the heart of his message: someone has already prophesied about what is happening at Pentecost. Peter cites Joel 2:28–32, specifically referring to Joel as a *προφήτης*, and, as Darrell Bock notes, uses “the preposition *διὰ* (*dia*) to make the point that God speaks ‘through’ the intermediate agent,

Polybius, *The Histories* 1.5.3–5; Tacitus, *Historia* 1.1). The reader should also note the discussion by Arnold Erhardt (“The Construction and Purpose of the Acts of the Apostle,” *ST* 12 [1958]: 45–79, esp. pp. 50–51), where Ehrhardt portrays Luke as “being an accomplished artist in the field of history” in his portrayal of Peter.

4. Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse*, 128 and 95, respectively.

5. D. G. Peterson, “Acts,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 287.

6. Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 140.

7. Gregory V. Trull, “Peter's Interpretation of Psalm 16:8–11 in Acts 2:25–32,” *BibSac* (2004): 433. Marion L. Soards provides an outline that draws more from rhetorical analysis. In *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 31, he argues, “The first continuous portion of the speech is *judicial* rhetoric, combining *refutation* (vv. 14–21) and *indictment* (vv. 22–36). The final two brief remarks (vv. 38–39, 40b) are *deliberative* rhetoric” (emphasis is Soards's).

the prophet.”⁸ With his citation of Joel, “the eschatological and fulfillment frame of Pentecost is affirmed from the start.”⁹ Within the citation, it is affirmed that the Spirit will be distributed to all kinds of people (πᾶσαν σάρκα), great wonders will be seen, and salvation will be open to all who call on the Lord. Ben Witherington argues that, through Peter’s contemporary application, the Holy Spirit’s activity in Joel “is seen as the sign that the eschatological age has begun, and the promises of the OT era are being fulfilled in the lives of those who follow Jesus.”¹⁰ Yet Peter, as recorded by Luke, is hardly creating new doctrine at this point; as C. K. Barrett notes, Judaism had already come to view Joel’s prophecy here as a reference to a future time of “the outpouring of the Spirit . . . when prophecy would cease to be confined to a few.”¹¹

Thus, Peter cites a prophet in order to point out that the gift of prophecy will be appropriated to all kinds of people. Bock points out the three parallels in 2:17–18 that cover all classes of humanity: sons/daughters, young/old, and male/female servants. The third parallel shows that “even the lowest of classes will be blessed across both genders. Two often-ignored groups of people, servants and women, will be included.”¹² In this way, Peter makes the following key points with his citation of Joel: the prophesying occurring at that moment is a sign of the eschaton, and the gift of prophecy is distributed regardless of class or gender.

After this citation, Peter delves into the work of Christ on earth, arguing that his death was both preordained and foreknown by God. Furthermore, not only was Christ’s death and resurrection foreknown by God, it was also foreknown by David, himself a prophet (2:30—προφήτης οὖν ὑπάρχων). Peter specifically refers to David in citing Ps 16:8–11, calling him, like Joel, a προφήτης and arguing that he “saw ahead of time” (προϊδὼν) the resurrection of Christ. For Peter, David’s death logically ruled out David as the referent of his own prophecy. Furthermore, because David himself did not ascend into heaven, his prophecy in Ps 110:1 likewise could not have been about himself but must be a reference to Christ.

David, then, is placed on an equal standing with Joel, and the fact that both prophesied about Peter’s day forms the backbone for Peter’s argument. As Bock points out, “This reference to David as a prophet is uniquely

8. Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 111. The Greek text, unless otherwise noted, is taken from the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (ed. E. Nestle, B. Aland, and K. Aland; 27th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1995).

9. *Ibid.*, 111. Note also that Soards (*The Speeches in Acts*) sees this citation as “a freely cited version of the Septuagint tailored to fit the act of Christian proclamation at Pentecost” (p. 32). For a discussion of how this citation of Joel differs from both the MT and the LXX, see Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte* (EKKNT; 2 vols; Zürich: Benziger, 1986), 1:117.

10. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 140.

11. C. K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ICC; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 1:137.

12. Bock, *Acts*, 113–14.

expressed.”¹³ But the perception of David as a prophet was already prevalent in first-century Judaism, and even though the OT never calls him a prophet *per se*, its description of David’s anointing at least implies that he might be one.¹⁴ Whatever the case, Peter clearly believed that David possessed prophetic knowledge.¹⁵

Trull further observes,

Peter’s argument was not that David’s language allowed *Peter* to assert knowledge of the covenant implications, but that David’s personal covenantal and prophetic knowledge allowed *him* to speak of the supreme implication of God’s promise. Peter then proclaimed that this supreme implication, the resurrection of the Messiah, had been fulfilled in Jesus . . . David’s awareness of the messianic implications of the Davidic Covenant contributed to his prophesying of the Messiah’s resurrection.¹⁶

Indeed, Luke’s portrayal of Peter’s argument falls apart if David’s prophetic role is not acknowledged. Peter’s Christology is predicated on fulfilled prophecy regarding the Messiah’s death, resurrection, and ascension. Trull declares, “If David had no foresight related to the Messiah’s resurrection, the inclusion of the modifying *προϊδὼν* is superfluous. Therefore . . . one may conclude that David had sufficient insight into the future to allow him to tell of the resurrection of the Messiah.”¹⁷ Had David not truly been a prophet and possessed foreknowledge of Christ, Peter would have had to look elsewhere for the cornerstone to his Christology. Thus, both David and Joel, in their role as prophets, significantly bolster Peter’s argument.

In summary, Luke portrays Peter as relying on *past* prophecy (Joel and David) to explain *present* prophecy (the occurrences at Pentecost) and to call for repentance.¹⁸ As Peterson points out, “The linking of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension with the pouring out of the promised Spirit indicates that Joel’s prophecy has been fulfilled and that Jesus is ‘the Lord’ on whom Israel is to call for salvation.”¹⁹ This provides the foundation for Peter both to confront his audience about their sin and to offer them the opportunity to appropriate “the promise” (2:39—apparently the gift of the Holy Spirit). Thus, what was prophesied ages ago, salvation and the opportunity to

13. *Ibid.*, 127.

14. Trull, “Peter’s Interpretation of Psalm 16:8–11,” 441–42.

15. *Ibid.*, 444. Cf. Soards (*The Speeches in Acts*, 35), who also notes that “David is cast as an authority on the Messiah here.”

16. Trull, “Peter’s Interpretation of Psalm 16:8–11,” 444 (emphasis is Trull’s).

17. *Ibid.*, 446.

18. Note also what Bock (*Acts*, 181) says regarding Peter’s use of the old to establish the new (3:25): “The appeal to the old promises is important. It shows that although this community is a seemingly new entity, it is rooted in old promises. . . . Peter’s appeal to the past is a form of legitimization for the new community.”

19. Peterson, “Acts,” 288.

prophesy through the Holy Spirit, is waiting to be grasped by the present generation.

Peter's Second Sermon (Acts 3:12–26)

Peter's second public sermon, stemming from the healing of the lame man, has been viewed by some as inferior to his first.²⁰ Yet regardless of literary quality, these two speeches are inseparable, together forming an integral part of the theology of Acts. As Ernst Haenchen aptly argues,

Let Acts be read in continuity, but omitting the speeches. Then the reader will notice to how great an extent these speeches give the book its intellectual and spiritual weight. Without them Acts would be like a gospel consisting only of miracle-stories, without any sayings of Jesus. The speeches in Acts, different as they are in provenance and value, correspond in some way to the discourse material in the gospels.²¹

Indeed, as both Witherington and Rudolf Pesch note, the second speech moves along the argument begun in the first speech, further developing Christology and eschatology.²²

Witherington outlines Peter's sermon as follows: vv. 12–18 begin the sermon with a "forensic or judicial speech that involves defense and attack," vv. 19–21 "offer the basic proposition the speaker wishes to emphasize," vv. 22–25 constitute the "proof based on prophecy," and v. 26 concludes.²³ Peter begins his sermon by declaring that God's power, not his own, was responsible for the lame man walking (v. 12). Furthermore, the same God who possessed the power to make a lame man walk had already done a greater work, namely glorifying Christ and raising Him from the dead, the very same Christ whom Peter's audience had crucified (vv. 13–15). It is this Christ who has given health to the blind man (v. 16).

At this point, having confronted his audience concerning their sin, Peter offers them hope. He speaks of their ignorance in v. 17 and then contrasts the ignorance of his audience (and their rulers) with the mantic insight of the past prophets whom God has used to declare these things (vv. 18, 21). Moses, in a sense, acts as the prototype prophet, one who initiates the long line of prophets that includes Samuel and those following him (vv. 22–24). Furthermore, not only does Moses speak specifically of a special prophet that is to follow him, he also describes the consequences of

20. E.g., Zehnle, *Peter's Pentecost Discourse*, 41, 54. This would seem to argue against the idea that Luke invented these sermons. Zehnle himself [p. 54], contra Dibelius, seems to think that Luke used sources here, although, against what I say, he suggests that Luke "preserved a more primitive and more open stance on the part of the new community."

21. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (ed. R. M. Wilson; trans. Bernard Noble and Gerald Shinn; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 212.

22. Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 177; Pesch, *Apostelgeschichte*, 158 ("Die heilsgeschichtliche Theologie und die Christologie der ersten Predigt des Petrus, der Pfingstpredigt, werden in der zweiten ergänzt").

23. Witherington, *Acts*, 176.

those who reject the coming prophet (vv. 22–23). Zehnle notes that Jewish tradition had already given Moses the position of “intermediary of God’s revelation” (e.g., the Assumption of Moses 11:16), and that the rabbis had traditionally subscribed to the axiom “as the first savior (Moses), so the last (messiah).”²⁴ Indeed, according to Bock, Moses’ statements in Deut 18:15, 18–19 had come to be viewed “as a typological promise of the prophet of the Mosaic leader-deliverer pattern who was part of the eschaton.”²⁵

While Samuel did not specifically prophecy of Christ, he is closely linked to David and thus may be portrayed as “pointing to a messianic allusion as part of a ‘son of David Christology.’”²⁶ Furthermore, in Barrett’s words, he functions as “the representative of all those who followed.”²⁷ At this point, Luke has Peter closing his sermon with an appeal to the crowd, offering them the opportunity to partake of the promises that had been prophesied. As Barrett notes, Peter’s description of the audience as “the children of those prophets” (3:25, NLT) would have been both literal (due to their genealogy) and metaphorical, “the sense that they are heirs of the prophets, potentially the recipients of what the prophets foretold.”²⁸ As “children of those prophets” (NLT), each member of Peter’s audience has the potential to become an instrument of God’s promise to Abraham in Gen 22:18 (3:25) if they allow themselves to be turned from their sins by God’s Servant (3:26).

Luke’s record of Peter’s speech in Acts 3 argues from prophecy, specifically Christological prophecy, that his audience has crucified the Messiah. Whereas the prophets (with Moses and Samuel as representatives) possessed foresight of what was to happen, Peter’s audience remained ignorant and thus sinned against God’s servant. Yet the same prophecy that condemns also offers hope, and Peter’s audience is given the great opportunity to become the recipients of the blessings inherent in those prophecies.²⁹

1 Peter

The theme of prophecy, especially Christological prophecy, continues on through the Petrine epistles. Joel B. Green aptly notes that Peter’s “agenda”

24. Zehnle, *Peter’s Pentecost Discourse*, 80–81; note also his discussion of Moses as a type of Christ (pp. 75–89).

25. Bock, *Acts*, 178.

26. *Ibid.*, 179.

27. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 210.

28. *Ibid.*, 211.

29. One must, of course, give heed to Soards’s warning that “a prophecy-and-fulfillment interpretation of the scripture quotations is too restricted a perspective for understanding the role of the past, especially the Scripture quotations, in the speeches” in light of “the function of the past in the speeches.” Indeed, the Scriptural citations function to “illuminate” rather than prove (*The Speeches in Acts*, 201, emphasis is Soards’s). This may be granted; nevertheless, the prophetic theme in Acts cannot be denied, even if it should not be viewed apart from the role the “past” plays in the arguments of the various speeches in Acts.

in the two epistles “had to do with putting into play the words of the prophets and the commandment of the Lord, mediated through the prophets.”³⁰ Furthermore, Peter “finds an essential unity in the outworking of God’s purpose, from the prophets to Christ to the apostles and thus to the community of Christ’s followers.” The focus is on “remembrance” and staying faithful to what God has revealed through the prophets.³¹ Throughout both epistles, Peter “employs what we might recognize as a literary device known as ‘backshadowing,’” with the result that “although the narrative ‘Peter’ shapes is a linear one, it emphasizes Israel’s past and God’s promised future in order to shape perspective on the present, and it formulates the Christ event as the ground for Christian life and godliness.”³² Thus, Peter naturally continues to develop a theology of prophecy throughout both his epistles in order to define faithful conduct for the present.

The first epistle addresses those who are desperately in need of hope, those who “are suffering and have suffered, especially verbally.”³³ Furthermore, they were a “community [that] questions the desirability of remaining firm in times of crisis” and “is faced with the problem of finding an appropriate conduct during its life in exile.”³⁴ William Kirkpatrick is certainly correct when he argues, “Specifically, the theology [of 1 Peter] may not be understood apart from the problems of discrimination and oppression suffered by the early Christian congregations in the ‘troublesome environment’ of the northern provinces of Asia Minor.”³⁵ As Lapham states, “Unless we are prepared to interpret the passage [4:16–17] as mere hyperbole, we must accept that the sufferings of the Christians in Asia Minor at this time were so extreme, and so widespread, as to give rise to

30. Joel B. Green, “Narrating the Gospel in 1 and 2 Peter,” *Int* 60 (2006): 268.

31. *Ibid.*, 268; note that Green’s article seems to be unique in that he devotes it entirely to the development of a “narrative theology” that runs through *both* 1 and 2 Peter. Indeed, even “the distinctions between these two books do not detract from but rather enhance our appreciation of their fecundity as a coordinated ‘Petrine’ witness within the biblical canon” (p. 263). Green’s article remains an essential source for any attempt to study the Petrine Epistles as a single unit, though the reader should also note Robert Wall, “The Canonical Function of 2 Peter,” *BibInt* 9 (2001): 64–81, esp. pp. 64–68.

32. Joel B. Green, “Narrating the Gospel,” 268–69. For Green, “backshadowing” can be defined as a hermeneutical method which “posits that the pattern of history is revealed, the nature of the end is known, and the present can be evaluated accordingly” (pp. 273–74).

33. Scot McKnight, “Aliens and Exiles: Social Location and Christian Vocation,” *WW* 24 (2004): 380.

34. James W. Thompson, “The Rhetoric of 1 Peter,” *ResQ* 36 (1994): 243. Note that Robert W. Thurson, in “1 Peter 3:21: The Clue to the Literary Structure of the Epistle,” *NovT* 16 (1974): 290–305, esp. p. 304, argues that 1 Peter is essentially a “baptismal instructional sermon.” But Victor Paul Furnish, in “Elect Sojourners in Christ: An Approach to the Theology of 1 Peter,” *PSTJ* (1975): 11, brings up an important point against this: “It is surely significant that in the salutation the image of Christ’s sprinkled blood is assimilated to the covenant rite of Exodus 24 and not to the baptismal rite of Christian worship. Moreover, it is in relation to the covenant promises and demands, not to the subject of baptism, that the writer’s appeal to the Old Testament prophets makes the most sense.”

35. William David Kirkpatrick, “The Theology of First Peter,” *SwJT* 25 (1982): 59.

the belief that the time of judgment had finally arrived.”³⁶ Indeed, this suffering is “the most prominent and repeatedly emphasized feature of the addressees’ situation.”³⁷

It is in light of this setting that a theology of prophecy can offer the most hope. Despite their hardships, Peter’s audience can nevertheless take joy in their future salvation (1:9), a salvation that had already been foretold (1:10). In fact, the prophets were specifically prophesying of Christ in order to serve Peter’s audience *instead of* themselves (1:11–12), and this fact should stir the Christian to action (1:13). Having established the prophetic foundation for his soteriology, Peter then goes on to develop his Christology by quoting the ancient Jewish prophets (see esp. 1 Pet 2:6–8); he also uses his Christology to establish his audience as the true people of God (2:9–10) and then proceeds to examine the ethical ramifications of his audience’s position in Christ (2:11 through the end of the epistle). In this way, Peter’s discussion of prophecy provides a key element in laying the foundation for both his Christology and his parenesis.

Yet in order to understand 1 Peter’s view of prophecy more fully, the following issue must be discussed: do the προφῆται of 1:10 refer to ancient or to contemporary prophets? Julian Love argues for the latter, stating, “It would seem unnatural to think of the prophets of the Old Testament as ‘searching and inquiring about salvation . . . it seems rather farfetched to think of the messages of the ancient prophets as things into which ‘angels long to look.’”³⁸

Duane Warden concurs, arguing for a reference to contemporary prophets based on the absence of the article before προφῆται in 1:10 (“we would have expected Peter to use the article if he had specific reference to Old Testament prophets”) and on the use of the first-person plural in 1:3 in contrast to the second-person usage elsewhere. He states, “If the prophets of 1:10 were Old Testament prophets, we might have expected the author to refer to their message for ‘us.’” Consequently, the phrase τὰ εἰς Χριστὸν παθήματα would refer to suffering *for* Christ rather than the suffering *of* Christ, for “the verbal force inherent in the word ‘suffering’ is considerably stronger than it is in ‘grace’” (comparing its usage in 1:10 to 1:11) and because Peter often uses εἰς to mean “for” or “for the sake of” or “in consideration of” (for example, 1:25).³⁹ Furthermore, Warden contends that 1:12 would be difficult to understand if OT prophets were in view, but “the evidence is clear that Christian prophets understood their role to minister to, upbuild, and strengthen the church through the message they proclaimed.”⁴⁰

36. Fred Lapham, *Peter: The Myth, the Man, and the Writings* (JSNTSup 239; London: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 137.

37. John H. Elliott, *1 Peter* (AB 37B; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 97. Note esp. pp. 97–103 for an extensive discussion of the addressees and the nature of their suffering.

38. Julian Price Love, “The First Epistle of Peter,” *Int* 8 (1954), 69.

39. Duane Warden, “The Prophets of 1 Peter 1:10–12,” *ResQ* 31 (1989): 5–6.

40. *Ibid.*, 11.

Nevertheless, good reasons exist for seeing the prophets in question as ancient Jewish prophets. To begin with, Warden's point regarding the article is greatly overstated. Whereas generally in the NT, references to the Jewish prophets include the article and references to contemporary prophets do not (for example, Acts 10:43, Rom 11:3 as compared to Acts 11:27, 1 Cor 12:28), it is odd that in 1 Peter the participle προφητεύσαντες *does* possess the article (οἱ immediately following the noun προφῆται). Furthermore, simply because OT prophets were generally referred to collectively with an article does not then logically dictate that all references to OT prophets must include the article while all references to contemporary prophets do not (Eph 4:11, for example, has the article but is clearly a reference to contemporary prophets). Indeed, Warden fails to give a reason why OT prophets, as a class, would *require* the article, but contemporary prophets, as a class, would not.

More importantly, the entire sense of 1:10–12 seems to indicate a temporal disjunction between the prophets and Peter's audience (for example, temporal indicators such as προμαρτυρούμενον in 1:11 and νῦν in 1:12), a disjunction that would seem odd if contemporary prophets were in view.

In response to Love, it is difficult to understand why it is such a stretch to speak of angels desiring to look into the matter of ancient prophecy any more than contemporary prophecy. Either way, the angels are curious about *something*. Nor is it clear what exactly is "unnatural" about ancient prophets inquiring about salvation. Would it not be more odd if the reference were to NT prophets?⁴¹ In response to both Warden and Love, it must be pointed out that Christ himself declared that many prophets desired to see what his disciples saw, but they were denied the opportunity (Matt 13:17). The point, then, is that Peter's generation was uniquely privileged in experiencing this fulfillment of prophecy.

Karen Jobes adds to the discussion by pointing out that εἰς, *contra* Warden, is often used in the NT to denote the recipient of something (for example, 2 Cor 1:11, 11:3; Acts 20:21; 26:6, and so on), that "the parallel syntax of two somewhat unusual adjectival expressions in such close proximity [1 Pet 1:10 and 11] should be understood to have a parallel sense," and that each time πάθημα occurs in 1 Peter it refers to Christ's suffering.⁴² Thus, in 1 Pet 1:10–11,

Both general NT usage and evidence specific to the letter indicate that in 1:11 Peter does indeed have in mind the sufferings that Jesus Christ endured. He chooses a prepositional phrase with εἰς rather than the

41. At one point, Love argues that the term "predicting" [προμαρτυροῦμαι] occurs nowhere else and may just as well mean 'publicly proclaiming'" (Love, "The First Epistle of Peter," 69). This is indeed correct. A search of the *Thesaurus linguae graecae* database (Irvine: University of California, 2009). Cited 12 July 2010. Online: www.tlg.uci.edu reveals that 1 Peter possesses the only occurrence of that word until the fourth century A.D.! Nevertheless, it is rather careless of Love to declare that the word "may just as well mean 'publicly proclaiming'" ("The First Epistle of Peter," 69) without any attempt to justify that statement.

42. Karen Jobes, *1 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 100.

genitive because of the prophetic perspective of the immediate context. In other words, the prophets in view were speaking long before the sufferings occurred, but they knew that sufferings would come to the Messiah. In the parallel syntax of verse 10, those prophets also foresaw the grace that would come and, in Peter's opinion, had come *eis hymas*, 'to you,' the Christians to whom Peter writes. Just as the Messiah would be the recipient of sufferings, God's people, among whom the Christians of Asia Minor now find themselves remarkably included, will be the recipients of grace.⁴³

Along with that may be taken Everett Harrison's note that 1 Pet 1:11, especially through the usage of ἐδήλου, seems to indicate "a gradual clarification of Messianic prophecy with the passing of time."⁴⁴ Indeed, there is nothing unusual in OT writers searching for the meaning of future prophecy, and Norbert Brox points out that past Jewish prophets did indeed, of their own accord, ascertain facts concerning the moment and circumstances of future prophecy.⁴⁵ Finally, John H. Elliott argues that the contrast between the prophets and the believers, as well as the subsequent discussion of the prophetic "prior witness," makes a reference to contemporary prophets unlikely.⁴⁶

In this way, 1 Pet 1 teaches that the ancient prophets foretold of Christ's suffering and thus ministered on behalf of contemporary believers. Peter's audience can rejoice that, just as they are partakers of the suffering spoken of in prophecy (as Christ was), so they are also heirs of the grace spoken of in prophecy. All has been foreknown and planned out by the Lord, and the fact that ancient prophets foretold of the culmination of this plan provides one of the main stepping-stones in Peter's epistle. As Gene Green points out, God's grace in 1 Peter "reflects the nature of God (5:10) and is expressed by his saving activity predicted by the prophets (1:10)"; furthermore, the prophets themselves see their work as proving helpful to Christians contemporary to Peter's time.⁴⁷ Thus, for Peter, predictive prophecy is the very basis of assurance, the foundation of the Christian's hope.⁴⁸

2 Peter

2 Peter continues many of the themes discussed so far. Gene L. Green is correct in noting that one of the purposes behind this second epistle was to strengthen the recipients' faith in God's Word while defending against

43. *Ibid.*

44. Everett F. Harrison, "Exegetical Studies in 1 Peter," *BibSac* 98 (1941): 73.

45. Cf. Norbert Brox, *Der Erste Petrusbrief* (EKKNT; Zurich: Benziger, 1979), 69: "Der Zeitpunkt und die Zeitumstände (sc. Die Erkennungszeichen des Termins) wurden von den Propheten in der Manier des Apokalyptikers erfragt und erforscht (vgl. Dan 9,2.23–27; 12,6–13; Hen 65, 10; 4Esr 4,33)."

46. Elliott, *1 Peter*, 346.

47. G. L. Green, "1 Peter," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 347.

48. See also the discussion on 1 Peter's eschatology in *idem*, "1 Peter," 347.

the accusations of the heretics.⁴⁹ To this end, Peter reminds his readers of the nature of the prophetic word.

2 Peter as a whole is concerned with “knowledge,” not knowledge simply as “principles and systems but rather the formal aspects of our faith that cannot be segregated from but actually find their meaning within the narrative and context of God’s revelation to us.”⁵⁰ But the false teachers attack the very source of that knowledge, and they must be countered. Consequently, in 2 Pet 1:16, Peter is quick to declare that he did not follow myths when declaring to his audience the gospel; rather, his knowledge and conviction stemmed from both direct revelation of which Peter himself was an eyewitness (1:17–19) and the “prophetic word.”⁵¹ Furthermore, this “prophetic word” did not come about simply through man; rather, it has God as the ultimate source. In contrast to this divine source for Peter’s gospel, the “false teachers” (who, H. C. C. Cavallin argues, are the counterparts of the past “false prophets”) bring destruction and ruin (2:1) and, like Balaam, are in continual danger of truly reaping what they sow (2:4–22).⁵² In 3:2, Peter calls his listeners to action, giving a “call to remember” that in Green’s words “presupposes that these believers have received the fundamentals of Christian instruction,” instruction that included the prophetic Scriptures.⁵³ Peter here mentions τῶν ἁγίων προφητῶν, and Green aptly notes that “in light of Peter’s previous teaching about the veracity of the prophetic message of the OT (1:19–21), which the false teachers have cast in doubt, we should understand these ‘holy prophets’ as messengers known to us through the OT (Luke 1:70; Acts 3:21; Wis 11:1).”⁵⁴ Finally, in 2 Pet 3:13–14, the prophetic ἐπάγγελμα of Christ’s *parousia* becomes the basis for proper living.

In one sense, then, 2 Peter can be viewed as a defense of the veracity of the prophecy spoken of in Acts 2–3 and 1 Peter. Thus, Peter’s discussion of prophecy in 2 Peter is apologetic, representing a conflict between the false teachers and true revelation.⁵⁵ Green notes, “A contrast is set up between the prophet undertaking his own interpretation of the divine will (1:20) over against this prophecy being a result of the activity of God, who has moved him (1:21).”⁵⁶ Concerning the latter verse, Cavallin declares, “The

49. Idem, *Jude and 2 Peter* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 226.

50. Joel B. Green, “Narrating the Gospel,” 267.

51. Note that Green (*Jude and 2 Peter*, 226) argues that βεβαιότερον, though technically a comparative, is actually used as a superlative that parallels the eyewitness testimony.

52. H. C. C. Cavallin, “The False Teachers of 2 PT as Pseduo-Prophets,” *NovT* 21 (1979): 265–66.

53. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 312.

54. *Ibid.*, 312.

55. I am indebted to the following two articles for first bringing the apologetic nature of 2 Peter to my attention: idem, “‘As For Prophecies, They Will Come to an End’: 2 Peter, Paul and Plutarch on ‘the Obsolescence of Oracle,’” *JSNT* 82 (2001): 107–22, esp. p. 121; and Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Form and Background of the Polemic in 2 Peter,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 407–31, esp. pp. 416 and 430.

56. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 232.

author of 2 Pt wants to intimate that the adversaries, whom he is about to describe with the help of the material from Jude, interpret prophecy 'by themselves' and possibly also construct a prophecy 'by the will of man.'⁵⁷ Thus, Peter seems to stress that the very nature of prophecy is that it has a divine origin in contrast to his opponents' polemics, which possess only a human origin.

2 Pet 2:1, then, directly contrasts Spirit-filled prophets with pseudo-prophets.⁵⁸ One may further agree with Cavallin that the discussion of Balaam is telling; he is essentially included with the "false prophets" as a prototype, so to speak, the adversary par excellence to true prophecy.⁵⁹

Other scholars emphasize the apologetic tone of 2 Peter. Jerome H. Neyrey, drawing from examples such as Plutarch's *De Sera*, the Sadducees denial of the afterlife, and other attacks on theodicy, argues that 2 Peter was a response to a denial of providence and future judgment.⁶⁰ Gene Green concurs:

The argument from unfulfilled prophecy is one of the pillars of Epicurean skepticism. . . . the author of 2 Peter is careful to dismantle their arguments by his appeal to divine inspiration of the prophets (2 Pet. 1.20–21), the rehearsal of divine judgment in the past (3.5–7), and apologetic concerning God's mercy in delaying judgment.⁶¹

In the process of countering his opponents' attack, Peter builds up prophetic fulfillment "as verification of the validity of their faith and their prophetic tradition."⁶²

But prophecy functions as more than just an academic defense. Peter makes it clear (as seen by the "light" metaphor in 1:19) that prophecy is very much relevant to the contemporary hearer.⁶³ Prophecy functions not only as a defense against false teaching but also as a call to proper living (e.g., 3:1–2).

In summary, the following must be stressed. First of all, prophecy acts as a defense against heresy, the divine proof that the gospel is true in contrast to the strictly human teachings of Peter's opponents. Secondly, prophecy manifests truth, and by doing so it calls the believer to action; the believer is to "pay attention to" (προσέχοντες in 1:19) and "remember" (μνησθῆναι in 3:2) so that he or she can develop into a mature believer while continually looking for Christ's *parousia* (3:3–17).

57. Cavallin, "The False Teachers of 2 PT," 265.

58. *Ibid.*, 265–66.

59. *Ibid.*, 267.

60. Neyrey, "The Form and Background," 408–14, 430. The reader should also note the discussion by Richard J. Bauckham (*Jude, 2 Peter* [WBC 50; Waco, TX: Word, 1983], 156), where he points out the strong Hellenistic influence prevalent among Peter's opponents (although he argues that they were not Gnostics): "The opponents' charges in 1:16a and 1:20–21a also seem to belong to Hellenistic debate (involving Hellenistic Judaism) about prophecy and oracles."

61. Green, "As for Prophecies," 118.

62. *Ibid.*, 121.

63. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 228.

TOWARD A PETRINE THEOLOGY OF PROPHECY

Having dealt with each individual unit's discussion of prophecy, one can now attempt to mold these four units into a cohesive theology. At that point, the relationship between a Petrine theology of prophecy and other NT doctrines may be examined.

Viewing Peter's Speeches and Epistles Holistically

As noted above, Acts 2, 3, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter all have different emphasis and motivations. Yet they all contain essentially the same theology, and each one further develops the previous one. In other words, those four units show a logical progression of thought that never alters the initial premise of Peter's speech in Acts 2. The following paragraphs discuss three main aspects of a Petrine theology of prophecy.

First of all, the concept of *fulfillment* is prominent. The sermons in both Acts 2 and 3 are meant to confront unbelievers.⁶⁴ To this end, Peter asserts that OT prophecy *has been fulfilled* (and is continuing to be fulfilled).⁶⁵ Yet the same prophecies that are used to confront the unbelievers of Acts are used to encourage the believers of 1 Peter, and this is likewise only possible in light of the fulfillment of those prophecies. In 2 Peter the emphasis on fulfillment becomes the main line of argument against the opponents: fulfilled prophecy is a co-testament with eye-witnessed revelation concerning Christ. Otherwise there would hardly be any contrast between true prophecy and false prophecy. Furthermore, even prophecy which has not yet come to pass is certain eventually to occur (note especially 2 Peter 3 and the issue of the delayed *parousia*). Thus, a holistic look at Petrine theology reveals that the concept of *fulfillment* is a necessary part of prophecy. Indeed, prophecy without fulfillment is not true prophecy.⁶⁶

Second, a Petrine theology of prophecy posits both a *divine* and a *human* source. In Acts 2 and 3 God's word comes about through human means, and He can use whatever class or gender he chooses. Thus, on the one hand, God's gift of prophecy is an act of grace, but on the other hand, those who are chosen to prophecy are naturally the recipients of divine revelation of which others remain ignorant (Acts 3:17). However, Peter also emphasizes the sovereign act of God, both in prophecy and history, in his sermons. Both Petrine epistles likewise put a human and divine spin on the nature of prophecy. On the one hand, the prophets themselves were active participants in their prophesying (1 Pet 1:10–12; 2 Pet 1:21). But on the other

64. George Milford Harmon, in "Peter: The Man and the Epistle," *JBL* 17 (1898): 38, correctly notes that in Peter's speeches in Acts he "aims to convict his hearers of sin in assenting to the crucifixion of Jesus, and to secure their repentance for the act, and the consequent forgiveness of their sins."

65. Peterson, "Acts," 287.

66. This is not to say that elsewhere in Scripture "prophecy" may not refer simply to "proclamation." But this article is concerned strictly with Petrine theology, and for Peter it appears that "prophecy" is always mantic.

hand, the Lord himself, through the Spirit, is the originator and guarantee of that prophecy. The following statement by D. Edmond Hiebert, while specifically referring to 2 Peter, ultimately describes the state of prophecy in all the Petrine material:

Peter's statement recognized both the divine and the human element in the production of inspired Scripture. Any balanced doctrine of the origin of Scripture must recognize both. Peter accepts the fact of the divine inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, but he does not define the relationship between the divine and the human elements. The moving of the Holy Spirit on the speakers was the primary and indispensable element, but in using human beings as His spokesmen the Spirit worked in and through their varied personalities to produce the very result He desired. The prophets were treated as living men, not lifeless tools.⁶⁷

Harrison, after comparing the "most intense kind of mental activity" of 1 Pet 1:10–12 with the apparent "passivity" of 2 Pet 1:20–21, likewise makes a statement that is equally characteristic of all the Petrine material:

There is no conflict, provided we understand that the reflection of the prophets followed the revelation of the Spirit to them and did not enter into the prophetic message. It is not to be wondered at that they should be pricked into investigation, since they had been the chosen channels of revelation. Hence the prophets, though passive in the sense that they did not contribute the message apart from the Spirit's moving, yet were so far from being mechanical instruments that they had all their powers of thought aroused and taxed by the disclosures granted to them.⁶⁸

A Petrine theology of prophecy, then, affirms both the divine and human aspects of prophecy. The prophets in Acts and the epistles do not instigate revelation; nevertheless, they are active participants in it, not adding to the prophecy but rather eagerly transmitting it.

Finally, a Petrine theology of prophecy demands personal action. Prophecy is not something that can be viewed strictly with academic curiosity. The prophecies discussed in Acts 2 and 3 demand repentance from unbelievers, repentance that results in *new* prophesying by believers at Pentecost. The prophecies spoken of in 1 and 2 Peter demand proper living from believers (1 Pet 1:13–15, 2 Pet 3:14) and place false prophets in

67. D. Edmond Hiebert, "The Prophetic Foundation for the Christian Life: An Exposition of 2 Peter 1:19–21," *BibSac* 141 (1984): 166.

68. Harrison, "Exegetical Studies," 72. The reader should also note the interesting discussion by David P. Kuske, "Exegetical Brief: 2 Peter 1:17, 18, 21—Conveyed from Heaven," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 99 (2002): 55–57. Kuske argues that φερόμενοι in 2 Pet 1:21 should, like the earlier occurrences of the word, be translated "convey," indicating that "every time the prophets spoke a divine message by the Holy Spirit they were conveying a message from God to man in a way that was as directly from God as delivery of the message on the holy mount of the Transfiguration was" (p. 57).

a precarious position if they refuse to repent (2 Peter 3). In this way, all of the references to prophecy in the Petrine material demand a change in the hearer, either to repentance or to sanctification. A Petrine theology of prophecy is *practical*; a reverence for prophecy naturally produces a certain kind of outward conduct.

*The Implications of a Petrine Theology of Prophecy
for Other Theological Themes*

If the unity of a Petrine theology of prophecy is accepted, it could potentially affect other realms of theology. The most obvious area would be that of eschatology. Acts 2:17 seems to indicate that the *eschaton* was initiated with Pentecost (or possibly with Christ's ascension?), but 2 Peter 3 deals extensively with the concept of a future *parousia* of Christ. It might be informative, for example, to see if all of the Petrine material could be brought to bear on a unified Petrine theology of the *parousia*.⁶⁹

Second, Peter's theology of prophecy has great significance for theology proper, specifically the issue of God's foreknowledge in the open theism debate. J. Daryl Charles does an excellent job of using 2 Peter to raise objections to open theism, but his arguments would have been immeasurably stronger (in this writer's opinion) had he utilized the entire Petrine testimony.⁷⁰ Indeed, it is not without significance that Peter's sermons and epistles utilize four of the seven total occurrences of the noun and verb forms of "foreknowledge" (*πρόγνωσις* and *προγινώσκω*) in the entire NT.⁷¹ Peter's theology seems to *assume* a prescient God, for how could the prophets know the future if God Himself does not? According to Acts 2:23, Christ's crucifixion occurred both by the decision *and* foreknowledge of God, and 2 Peter's response to the opponents completely depends on the ability of God to fulfill his prophecies, an ability that would be nonexistent without extensive foreknowledge.⁷² Much more could certainly be said on this topic, but let it suffice to say that prophecy is no mere "guessing game."

A Petrine theology of prophecy is also closely tied to both Christology and pneumatology. In three out the four sources, prophecy is specifically linked to the revelation of Jesus Christ (2 Peter is the exception). Further-

69. For a discussion of eschatology in 2 Peter, see P. H. Davids, "2 Peter," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner; Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 350, and Terrance Callan, "A Note on 2 Peter 1:19–20," *JBL* 125 (2006): 143–50.

70. J. Daryl Charles, "The Language of Providence in 2 Peter: Some Considerations for the 'Open Theism' Debate," *Presb* 29 (Fall 2003): 85–93.

71. Acts 2:23; 1 Pet 1:2, 1:20; and 2 Pet 3:17 (though the last usage is nontheological). This writer is fully aware that the consensus regarding "foreknowledge" in the NT views it as either "foreordination" or "knowing intimately/loving beforehand." Yet the evidence for renderings of this sort seems sparse, if not nonexistent, in Koine Greek (for a mantic sense, see, for example, Wis 6:13, 8:8, 18:6; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.311, 8.234, 13.300; *Jewish War* 2.159; *Contra Apionem* 1.232).

72. For more discussion on prophecy and divine fulfillment, see Charles, "The Language of Providence," 88, where he discusses the nature of the prophetic word in relation to time.

more, the Holy Spirit plays an obviously significant role in the events of Acts 2 and in Peter's Joel citation, and in both 1 Pet 1:11 and 2 Pet 1:21 the Spirit instigates the work of prophecy among God's servants.⁷³

Finally, a Petrine theology of prophecy could help clarify the doctrine of inspiration. Too often, 2 Pet 1:20–21 has been taken in isolation from the other texts, but in reality the entirety of the Petrine material could potentially contribute to this doctrine. While the interplay of divine and human roles has already been discussed above, a renewed emphasis on the ramifications of the divine origin of Scripture might well be in order. Indeed, Peter's emphasis on prophecy is tightly linked to the concept of inspiration, for the prophets only spoke because they were inspired. While Peter does not use the technical term that 2 Tim 3:16 does, it is surely significant that Peter nevertheless links inspiration closely to the role of the Holy Spirit.

No doubt other areas of theology exist where a Petrine theology of prophecy would prove illuminating. At the very least, one must acknowledge that a comprehensive Petrine theology (what goes beyond just one or both of the epistles) possesses an untapped wealth of material for future studies.

CONCLUSION

When viewed as a whole, Peter's two public sermons in Acts and his two epistles form a unified and coherent theology of prophecy, a truly *Petrine* theology of prophecy. A Petrine theology of prophecy of this sort confronts both believers and unbelievers (demanding action on their part), emphasizes both the divine and human roles in revelation, and assumes fulfillment. It is internally consistent throughout all the Petrine material, and each unit of material builds on the other. Thus, Peter's theology of prophecy in Acts 2, designed to confront unbelievers and offer them hope, is further enhanced by Acts 3 and then applied to believers in 1 Peter. 2 Peter then utilizes prophecy as an apologetic against unbelievers while simultaneously presenting it as the basis for the proper conduct of believers. From Acts 2 through 2 Peter, the theology remains consistent. Whereas this is not an argument for Petrine authorship per se, I hope that these four Petrine units will be viewed more closely together in the future.

Very little work has been done that treats all four Petrine units as a whole. Yet a detailed examination of the Petrine material in Scripture yields the conclusion that perhaps they are closer in theme and substance than previously thought. The future development of a comprehensive "Petrine theology," then, remains a distinct possibility, and, if this article's treatment of prophecy has been accurate, this development will not prove fruitless.

73. See *ibid.*; and Hiebert, "The Prophetic Foundation," 166.