

THEOLOGY

One Bite at a Time



Biblical Imagery

A Study in II Peter

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Introduction

*“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed,
which you do well to heed, as a light shines in a dark place,
until the day dawns, and the morning star rises in your hearts” II Peter 1:19*

“The Bible is more than a book of ideas: it is a book of symbols, images and motifs. Everywhere we turn we find concrete pictures and recurrent patterns.”¹ Accepting the truth of this statement, and its implied approach to studying the Bible, has been growing in my heart and practice for a number of years. As one spends time studying the Scriptures, employing the accepted methods and techniques of Textual Criticism and Systematic Theology, there is, I now believe, the danger of falling into a kind of hermeneutic trap. Leland Ryken puts it this way;

“Because of the predominately theological and devotional purposes to which Christians put the Bible, it is almost impossible not to slip into the error of looking upon the Bible as a theological outline with prooftexts attached. Yet the Bible is much more a book of images and motifs than of abstractions and propositions. This is obscured by the way in which preachers and theologians gravitate so naturally to the epistles”²

On the surface, Ryken’s assertion may be considered merely a matter of a “preferred” or an alternative method of Biblical interpretation among many – such as the grammatical-historical method. Yet, at its heart, Ryken has made a critical point, stating that the primary method of communication found in the Bible is one of “linguistics” presented in concert with “imagery.” He states that like the Bible, humans communicate with imagery at the most intimate level. Linguistics conveys ideas whereas images give rise to the emotional and the sensual.

Linguistics and imagery are vital, both are necessary. To exclude one in favor of the other is to present only “half a loaf.” What are the implications for the pastor or theologian who is committed to a rigorous “scientific presentation” of the “correct” transliteration of Hebrew and Greek texts but ignores or diminishes the use of Biblical imagery?

¹ Leland Ryken ed. *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill, Intervarsity, 1998), xiii.

² *Ibid.*, xiii.

It means that there may exist a communications gap between the teacher and the one who is being taught. This can occur when a teacher or pastor mistakenly assumes his students or congregation knows the Biblical imagery presented in the Bible, when in fact they do not.

In this introduction I have already used a number of images; “at its heart,” “half a loaf” “scientific presentation.” In each of these cases the text assumes that the reader is familiar with these images and the mental pictures they convey. However, if the reader is not familiar with the image of “half a loaf,” the meaning and especially the intended impact is lost.

The argument for a balanced hermeneutic approach, blending both language skills and Biblical imagery, is well documented and defended. However this paper will not seek to engage in that discussion since scholars and evangelists the likes of F.F. Bruce, C.H. Spurgeon, Leland Ryken, Patrick Fairbairn, CH Wright, and not to forget the Apostles and the Lord Jesus Himself, all make extensive use of Biblical imagery in communicating their thoughts.

This paper will explore the feasibility of a doing an expositional commentary that is focused upon developing and blending Biblical images in concert with the *lingua franca* of the Book to be studied – specifically the Book of II Peter.³

The above quotation from II Peter 1:19 is pregnant with Biblical images; “*the prophetic word,*” “*as a light shines in a dark place,*” “*until the day dawns*”, “*the morning star,*” and “*risers in your hearts.*” These “God-breathed” words no doubt held great and powerful significance to a Jew like Peter who received training in Hebraic imagery from his early youth.

This paper will attempt to better understand some of these Biblical images and what they meant to Peter and his readers. It will also seek to trace those NT images and patterns back to the OT Scriptures and explore what they may have to say about our theology and faith.⁴

³ The received language of II Peter is no doubt Greek. However it must be maintained that Peter was in fact a Jew and his religious training and “mother tongue” was Hebrew / Aramaic. Thus Peter was of a Hebraic culture and mindset, as such his use and understanding of Biblical imagery would be Hebraic and not Hellenistic.

A Jewish Book

“It should be emphasized that the Bible (both Old and New Testaments) is, in its entirety, highly Hebraic. In spite of the fact that portions of the New Testament were communicated in Greek, the background is thoroughly Hebrew. The writers are Hebrew, the culture is Hebrew, the religion is Hebrew, the traditions are Hebrew, and the concepts are Hebrew.”⁵

Bivin and Blizzard’s words, at first glance appear almost condescending. Of course we know that the Bible is a Jewish book! However, the implications of these words can escape us. They bear repeating; “the background is thoroughly Hebrew. The *writers* are Hebrew... and the *concepts* are Hebrew.” In their book, *Understanding the difficult words of Jesus*, Bivin and Blizzard argue that in order to better understand the Bible, one must accept the fact that the Bible is Hebraic and not Hellenistic. Therefore the serious student should become familiar with Hebraisms and Hebraic imagery in order to explore the full meanings of the Biblical texts. This call for a Hebraic perspective would accept and anticipate that the author of a particular book would use phrases, idioms and imagery grounded in the Old Testament and the Hebrew religion.

If Bivin and Blizzard’s thesis is accurate it should be possible to identify and develop a sizable body of Hebraic imagery in the Book of II Peter. As one reads II Peter with this mindset it becomes very clear that there is indeed a great deal of Biblical imagery to be explored in Peter’s writings. This is an exciting proposition because it opens a window into some of the more difficult passages in II Peter. It also helps us better understand Peter the man, and how the extraordinary events he participated in must have impacted his life. Peter was a Hebraic Jew, not a Hellenistic Jew. As such his religious training would be based upon Torah and the Prophets. His mind and heart would be filled the images of that training. He would hold vivid images of his life on the Galilee shores, the Temple sacrifices, Synagogue, and the city of David. His letters (I & II Peter) would also therefore be Jewish and rich in Biblical imagery.

⁴ This paper will not deal with the ongoing debate as to the authorship of II Peter. Rather we will side with scholars like Michael Green who hold that II Peter was written by Simon Peter. *2 Peter and Jude an Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1987), 39.

⁵ David Bivin, Roy Blizzard, *Understanding the difficult words of Jesus* (Shippensburg, PA, Destiny Image, 1984), 22.

Peter was a Jew

“Above all we pride ourselves on the education of our children” - Josephus⁶

“Peter was a poor, uneducated fisherman and therefore would not have been schooled in the religious practices or the theology of his day.” This sums up a common accusation made against several of the Apostles by modern critics. But this does not square with the NT account or experts familiar with the Jewish education, traditions or culture in the first century. According to these experts, Peter, as a common, poor child living in Galilee would still have received a comprehensive education.⁷ Marvin Wilson makes this comment about first century education:

“Up to the start of their teen years youths attended elementary school, an institution attached to the synagogue. The earliest years were spent in the *bet sepher*, where the reading of the written Law was taught. The next state of schooling was the *bet Talmud*, “house of learning,” where by the age of ten study of the Oral Law (later codified in the Mishnah) began...”⁸

Wilson goes on to explain that the curriculum in the earliest phases emphasized the Levitical Laws, followed by the *Shema* (Deut, 6:4-9), the laws of Numbers 15:37-4, the Psalms 113-118 and later the Creation account in Genesis. The emphasis on the Levitical Laws of Temple sacrifices was very deliberate; “because young children are pure, and the sacrifices are pure; so let the pure come and engage in the study of the pure” (Leviticus Rabbah 7:3).⁹

Peter made it clear that his knowledge of the OT Law and Prophets was extensive. His grasp of Scripture and the Law is shown in passages such as: Acts 2:14-36; his leadership at the Jerusalem Council (14:25), and many others make it obvious that Peter was a man who knew and lived a “life of Torah” and the imagery it produced. To claim otherwise or equivocate about this point is not defensible. Thus a study of the imagery found in II Peter is valid and defensible.

⁶ Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.12.

⁷ The case for Jewish education of all children in 1st Century Palestine is well documented. A. Cohen cites numerous sources in his book, (*Everyman's Talmud*, NY, Schocken, 1949, 173), but he stresses that for Jews, “The principle responsibility that rested upon parents was to train their children for their life as members of the Community of Israel.” He then goes on to cite the Biblical commands to train the young, (e.g. Deut. 6:7, 5:9).

⁸ Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1989), 298.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 299.

Controlling the Hermeneutic Approach

It should be stated that this paper is not a study of Biblical Types.¹⁰ While imagery, symbols, patterns and motifs can share typical elements, the study of this paper will not focus on or seek to impose the classification of Biblical Types with regard to the imagery of II Peter. The goal will not be to find the “New Testament in the Old,” but rather to simply identify and trace the origins of particular words, images and symbols employed by Peter in his epistle. The goal therefore is to better understand II Peter, not to develop or defend Biblical Types. What was Peter thinking – what images did he see – and what was he trying to tell us? This then, will be our guiding principle.

Does the study of Biblical imagery and symbols mean that we must abandon the grammatical-historical method of interpretation which has served the study of the Bible so well? The answer to that question is a resounding no.

The need for a systematic approach of Biblical interpretation, like Textual Criticism cannot be understated, it is vital to the study of imagery and symbols. The need to correctly translate and then interpret what the text says is crucial in order to identify those key words and phrases that indicate the author is employing an idiom, image or motif. The study of Biblical imagery is not a competing hermeneutic – rather the study of Biblical imagery is made possible by accurate interpretive methods and results.

When speaking about a controlling principle for the study of imagery, F.F. Bruce states:

“The controlling principle which governs the selection of images is that they arise ‘in the recorded encounter between God and man where a response of faith and surrender to the divine purpose takes place.’ It is the establishment and maintenance of this controlling principle that exercises the necessary check on typological fancy.” ... Thus the pattern is traced throughout both Testaments, ending with the exposition of the divine glory disclosed in Christ.¹¹

¹⁰ For a study of Biblical Types see Ken Emilio, *Biblical Typology*, LBU, December 2008.

¹¹ F. F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1968), 19. Here in his quote, Professor Bruce also cites S.H. Hooke, *Alpha and Omega* (London, 1961), 3f.

Professor Bruce sets a foundation for the methods that should be employed to study Biblical images and motifs. He says that by standing back and looking at the whole picture of the Bible and by paying particular attention to reoccurring motifs, patterns and images, we can “bind the two Testaments together.”¹²

This process of drawing out images in the NT and then tracing them back to the OT corpus and the Israelite religion is what Professor Bruce calls “basic and indispensable.”¹³ He goes on to state:

“We may, for example trace the Paradise motif from its introduction in primeval narrative of Genesis to the picture of Paradise Regained in the last vision of the Apocalypse...We may trace the bread of life, the water of life, the light of life, from their earliest appearance to their utilization as symbols for the saving word of Christ in the Fourth Gospel.”¹⁴

Dr. Bruce’s controlling principle is that the image or symbol under examination must have significance and add insight to the continuing body of divine revelation that is showing us what God is doing in redemptive history and specifically by way of Christ.

By applying this principle to the study of II Peter imagery, we are free to explore and develop the many images, patterns, motifs and symbols which the Apostle Peter wrote about.

This paper will not attempt to study all of the Biblical imagery found in II Peter as it is numerous and would fill a large volume of research. The paper will however look at specific examples of Biblical imagery that would hold special significance to Peter, especially where it concerns the person or words of Jesus Christ, the Hebrew Scriptures and the Israelite religion.

¹² Ibid., 18.

¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

The Casting of Lots

*“Simon, Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ,
to those who have obtained like precious faith with us
by the righteousness of God and Savior Jesus Christ ” II Peter 1:1*

I have had the honor to sit in a meeting and hear a dear brother give thanks “for men of like precious faith.” His statement was an acknowledgement of having received or obtained something in common that joins and binds believers together. For those who possess it, practice it and then share it, this faith is truly is a thing most precious.

It is important at the outset to note that Peter says the obtaining of his precious faith is made possible by “*the righteousness of God and Savior Jesus Christ.*” In other words Peter tells us this faith is obtained by the providential goodness of God and the Cross at Calvary.

Peter uses the Greek word translated into English as “precious” numerous times in his writing revealing the value he placed upon his faith. His first use of the word, precious, in this example, is actually a compound word “*isotimos.*” It is a combination of “iso,” meaning like, similar, i.e., to hold an equivalent position that does not fluctuate. The second word is “*timos,*” which means, dear and that which is the highest of value. With the combination of the two words “like-precious” (*isotimos*), Peter is stating that the faith which he and his brethren share is of the same kind of faith – faith that is of a value most high.

Peter points out that this “like-precious” faith has been “obtained”. I believe this word and the images it recalls has not been given the scrutiny that it deserves. Upon investigation we find that Peter’s use of this word “obtained” (GK; *lagchanō*), denotes something of the highest value (i.e. *isotimos*) which has been acquired by the “casting of lots”.¹⁵

¹⁵ *lagchanō* is found in only four places in the NT; Lk 1:9, Jn 19:24, Acts 1:17, II Pet 1:1. In each instance the image presented describes the Hebraic concept of casting lots; i.e. the outcome which is determined by God.

It is not surprising that a Greek word used by Peter (a Jew), would denote Hebraic imagery, and not Greek. The Biblical image of the casting of lots is seldom seen in the New Testament,¹⁶ but it is a common theme in the Old Testament. It was a revered practice by the Children of God to show them the will or the choices of God in specific matters of great importance. It was by no means the heathen practice of resorting to random luck or chance to determine an outcome, such as the flipping of a coin or the rolling of dice. Casting lots by the Hebrews was serious business and God commanded the practice to make His will known.

God commanded the casting of lots for decisions of great importance, such as the dividing the lands of inheritance (Josh 14:1-2). God identified Jonah to the mariners who cast lots (Jonah 1:7). But the most relevant OT example of this imagery is when God commanded the casting of lots by Aaron to determine which animal would be the scapegoat – that goat which was released into the wilderness. The second goat which would be the “Lord’s” (sacrificial), goat during the Holy Day of Atonement, (Yom Kippur) here God did the choosing and it was not left to the judgment of men or chance (Lev 16:7-10).

The casting of lots was by no means foreign to Peter. In Acts 1:15-26, Peter recounts the experience of Judas and describes his treachery. Peter goes on to say that Judas “*obtained a part in this ministry*” (1:17b). Here Peter, in his choice of the word “obtained,” again used *lagchanō*. Peter acknowledged God’s voice in the choice of Judas, spoken through the “*mouth of David*” i.e. Psalms 41:9. Peter goes on to command that a successor to Judas needed to be appointed and instead of asking for a vote of the elders, the choice was made by the casting of lots. “*And they prayed and said “You O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen...”*” (1:24). Thus, the early Church, under the direction of the Apostle Peter, left this crucial decision to the casting of lots in order to learn the choice of God.

¹⁶ The Crucifixion: (Mt 27:35, Mk 15:24, Lk23:34, Jn 19:24). The choosing of Mathias: Acts 1:26. These passages give factual accounts of casting lots. And Peter would have had personal experience with each occurrence.

Without doubt, the most powerful NT imagery regarding the casting of lots is found in the Gospel of John 19:24, “*For my vesture they cast lots.*” Be it intentional or otherwise, Peter’s choice of words draws the reader to the vivid imagery of the Crucifixion, where we see the Roman soldiers fulfill the prophecy of Psalms 22:18 by casting lots for the robe of Jesus at the foot of the cross. This connection between the OT sacrifices and the crucifixion is hard to ignore.

By employing this imagery, Peter confirms the teaching of salvation by grace; i.e., that the precious faith which he holds so dear is not gained by an individual’s efforts but the providence of God. Thus our “obtaining” that same precious faith can be likened to the Roman soldier obtaining the robe, or covering (Atonement?), by the decretive will of God. We, like the Romans, are at the foot of the Cross, having received the precious gift of faith and “*that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest anyone should boast*” (Eph 2:9).

Through the imagery of casting lots, Peter by virtue of his Hebraic lifestyle, knowledge of Biblical imagery and the leading of the Holy Spirit, employs an intricate and subtle use of two languages and three cultures which spans thousands of years. The reader is placed upon a trail of images leading from the doctrine of God given faith, by way of undeserved grace at the foot of the Cross, the fulfillment of the Psalmist’s prophecy and at last to the Levitical selection of the goats on the Day of Atonement. Peter, supervised by the Holy Spirit, presents these images with the use of only four crucial words “*Obtained like-precious faith.*”

Here, we must ask the question; have we taken this imagery too far, employing a fanciful connection? Consider that Peter used a word imaging the casting of lots. Is this accidental? Are Peter’s words to be taken in a Hellenistic sense – an appeal to pagan god’s or chance? ¹⁷ This is unlikely for a Jew like Peter. Our only logical choice must be that Peter was deliberate in referring to the Hebraic method of casting lots when telling us of how we become believers.

¹⁷ C. Missler states “Every passage, every word, every number and every place name is there for a specific reason.” i.e. with the Bible “chance” is not an option. *Learn the Bible in 24 Hours* (Nashville, TN, Nelson, 2002), 1.

A Clustering of Images

“For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” II Peter 1:16

In chapter one verses 12-19, the Apostle Peter gives what can be described as a clustering of biblical imagery. The number of images Peter used with their allusions to OT prophecies and their fulfillment by the events recorded in the NT is remarkable. In these verses Peter demonstrates his understanding of prophetic scripture and the divinity of Jesus Christ. Some of the words and phrases (bold) below show examples of Biblical imagery that Peter employed. On the following pages a number of these examples in II Peter, along with others will be explored.

^{1:13} Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this **tent**, to stir you up by reminding you, ^{1:14} knowing that shortly I must **put off my tent**, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. ^{1:15} Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after **my decease**. ^{1:16} For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. ^{1:17} For He received from God the Father honor and glory when **such a voice** came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” ^{1:18} And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. ^{1:19} And so we have the prophetic word confirmed,¹⁸ which you do well to heed as a **light that shines in a dark place**, until the **day dawns** and the **morning star rises in your hearts**.” (NKJV)

In the above verses Peter employs many images which he clusters together. This clustering brings to mind OT images and motifs blended with Peter’s NT experiences.

¹⁸ The NASB translates this phrase “*So we have the prophetic word made more sure.*” The ESV “*And we have something more sure, the prophetic word.*” At issue is the question of a doctrinal interpretation which contends that Peter is stating that prophecies of Scripture are more reliable (re: the divinity of Jesus), than his eyewitness account of the Transfiguration. Another interpretation holds that Peter is claiming the Transfiguration, described in his eyewitness account, confirms the prophecy of Deut. 18:15-19 has been fulfilled.

A careful reading of Deut 18:1-15, Luke 9:28-31 and II Peter 1:12-19 reveals imagery, phrases and allusions which correspond to each other remarkable well. This corresponding imagery includes; God will raise up a Prophet like Moses from one of their brethren – Him you shall hear – the voice of God spoken which came down from heaven, out of the fire, the cloud, (i.e. Shekinah Glory), and these with the command to heed His voice.

In categorizing these images, three historical events are brought strikingly in view. The first is the experience of Israel in the wilderness, the second is the promise of God to provide a Prophet “like Moses,” and the third is the Transfiguration of Jesus. Peter uses the images of these events almost interchangeably moving back and forth as he presents them.

“Tent” Peter compares his body to a tent or tabernacle (KJV) (Gk *skēnōma*). This is a temporary structure which Peter must soon “put off” (1:14). This “putting off” is a metaphor drawn from “the putting off of a garment.” According to Wuest this denotes a brief duration, frail or something, (i.e. a dwelling), erected for the night.¹⁹ This is a rapid or sudden “striking of a tent.” Peter is saying that this life is one in which the earthly body is rapidly spent. This calls to mind the sudden “striking of camp” wherein the nomadic travelers in the wilderness would not have a permanent rest until they had reached the Promised Land.

The imagery of the wilderness journey out of Egypt is indeed brought to mind with the imagery of the “tent.” And Peter would not have to reach far into his past learning to capture the image of the Exodus like we would today. Every year Peter and his family would celebrate the Festival of the Sukkos, Tabernacles or Booths. Every year in the seventh month (i.e., Tishrei), Peter would construct a temporary hut from branches and then live in that hut with his family for seven days. This in keeping with God’s commands of Leviticus 23:33-43. The imagery of tents and Exodus would also bring to mind the Holy Tabernacle, wherein the presence of God dwelt.

Peter’s main subject in II Peter 1:13-19 is about the Transfiguration. Thus the imagery of tents would recall his asking Jesus if he should build tabernacles (*skēnōma*) for Jesus, Moses and Elijah (Mt 17:4). This same word is used both in II Peter and Matthew 17:4 and as such the image of tents would evoke definite pictures in Peter mind and his epistles.

¹⁹ K. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Co., 1973), 29.

“Decease” Peter refers to his “decease,” (*exodos*), “the road out” (1:15). This is not the common NT term used for dying or death which is *thanatos* (death) or *thantoō* (to be put to death). Rather, Peter’s clustering of the words decease (*exodos*) and tabernacle, (*skēnōma*) logically brings to mind the Exodus from Egypt and the wealth of imagery it conveys.

Wuest states;

“The word [exodos] is used only three times in the Greek N.T.: Luke 9:31, where the heavenly visitors speak of our Lord’s decease, his road out of this earth to heaven; Hebrews 11:22, where the reference is to the departing children of Israel: and this passage [II Peter 1:15]. Alford says: ‘It is at least remarkable that, with the recollection of the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration floating in his mind, the apostle should use so close together the words which were there also associated, tabernacle and decease. The coincidence should not be forgotten in treating of the question of the genuineness of the epistle.’”²⁰

This subtle combination of vivid images, i.e. tent and exodus, and how they would hold personal significance to Peter when speaking of the transfiguration, is not lost on other commentators of II Peter. Michael Green points to this combination of critical imagery as a validation for the authorship of II Peter. “It is interesting that the roots of both *skēnōma* (tent) and *exodos* (departure) should occur in the Lucan account of the transfiguration, to which Peter goes on to refer. If 2 Peter is a pseudepigraph, its author must have been sophisticated in the extreme to produce so delicate a touch.”²¹

What might be seen by some as coincidence or a clever use of Biblical imagery by the author of II Peter, is in fact a perfectly natural use of words by one whose entire life was immersed in the imagery of the OT and his experience on the mount of Transfiguration. Peter, in speaking to his audience, used imagery that he knew would hold significance to them as well. It was a way of saying a great deal with few words.

²⁰ K. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Co., 1973), 31.

²¹ M. Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Co., 1987), 89.

“The Voice of God”

Peter gave an eyewitness testimony that the voice of God came from the “Excellent Glory” (1:17) and that this voice came from heaven (1:18). The Voice of God is a major motif in the Bible appearing over three dozen times in the OT. It is used in OT and NT books to identify the presence of God where a divine / human encounter has occurred.²²

Moses reminded the people of Israel that they heard the voice of God (Deut 5:24). Peter’s testimony closely parallels the words of Moses; “*And we heard this voice from heaven when we were with Him on the Holy Mountain*” (1:18). This voice of God according to Peter came from the “Excellent Glory” which is best described as the “Shekinah Glory” of the OT (i.e. cloud and fire). And this is held to be the very same “Excellent Glory” of the Transfiguration of Jesus. This is the very presence of God veiled only to protect the people in attendance. The voice of God is a voice which is unmistakable and irresistible in its command to be heard and obeyed.

The book of Deuteronomy in the days of Jesus was the most widely circulated and popular book of the Pentateuch according to Marvin Wilson:

“We know that Deuteronomy carried this broad influence for two main reasons: (1) The New Testament has more quotations from Deuteronomy than from any other book of Moses (2) Among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, more separate copies of the scroll of Deuteronomy were found than of any other Mosaic writing.”²³

This supports the contention that Peter was well acquainted with this book. In it contains the “Shema” of Deuteronomy 6:4 with its command to “*Hear O Israel*”. The Shema was to be recited twice a day in the morning and the evening (Deut 6:7). Everyday of Peter’s life was a constant remembrance of the command to *hear the voice of God*.

The voice of God motif gives rise to another powerful OT image; that of the “Prophet like Moses” in Deuteronomy 18:15-19. This was God’s promise to send a prophet like Moses who was understood even in OT times to be the Messiah. The biblical image of this expected prophet would be in Peter’s mind during the Transfiguration, and is discussed next.

²² Leland Ryken ed. *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill, Intervarsity, 1998), 918.

²³ Marvin Wilson, *Our Father Abraham* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1989), 125.

“A Prophet like Moses”

“I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.” Deut 18:18-19

What would a 1st century Jew like Peter expect from this “Prophet like Moses”? To be like Moses, the greatest of God’s OT Prophets, the “expected one” would have to do the things that Moses did and more. He would have to rescue his kindred, He would have to command the oceans and the wind, He would have to heal the sick and provide food in a miraculous way.

Most importantly, like Moses, He would have to have public validation from the very voice of God, coming from heaven, with the physical manifestation of the Shekinah Glory upon a Holy Mountain. And it is this that Peter testifies to and documents in his book regarding Jesus.

The anticipated arrival of this “second Moses” during the times of Jesus, like the Transfiguration itself has been too often ignored or understated by modern theologians and teacher of the Bible. David Bivin makes the case that anticipation for the one “Greater than Moses” who would be the Messiah, was a Jewish tradition before the 1st century; “Even a century or more before the time of Jesus there was the expectation among the people that God would send this ‘trustworthy prophet.’”²⁴ Bivin goes on to state that “Some of the strongest evidence for the existence of the early Jewish belief that the Messiah would be ‘the prophet’ promised by Moses comes from the New Testament.”²⁵ In Acts 3:22, Peter cites Deut 18:15-19 when commanding the nascent church repent and “hear” God and His Messiah. Indeed the “Prophet like Moses” is a most compelling and appropriate image in Peter’s second letter.

²⁴ D Bivin, *New Light on the Difficult Words of Jesus* (Holland, MI, En-Gedi Center, 2007), 135.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

“A Light that Shines”

“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.” II Peter 1:19b

Peter uses the Greek word “*luchanos*” which gives rise to the image of a light which has the power to enlighten and guide a person in a dark and desolate place. This same word is used to describe the light of the body, which is the eye (Matt. 6:22, Lk 11:34). And when Jesus speaking of John the Baptist said; “*He was the burning and shining lamp [luchanos], and you were willing for a time to rejoice in his light*” (Jn 5:35). This lamp of enlightenment and illumination is a well known metaphor in Scripture. Michael Green states that this kind of light is the same as that of Psalms 119:105 “*Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*”²⁶ Green also introduces an additional image to Peter’s use of *luchanos*; “The thought is that the light shows up the dirt, and makes possible its removal.”²⁷ This raises an exciting Jewish image that Peter would most likely hold dear. The removal of the leaven prior to the Passover meal is done, in part, by the use of a candle which is used to search the cupboards and small dark corners of the room to illuminate the leaven and then remove it.

It should be noted that the lamp of II Peter which shines in a murky place is not a light which removes or destroys the darkness. It is merely a temporary guide to aid one in seeking the correct path. This then is Peter’s view of prophetic scripture – prophecy is a lamp which shows the path and illuminates the believer until the light of the new dawn comes. This is the day which dawns; it announces the arrival of the Morning Star who will remove the need for the lamp of the Prophets because He will write the truth of His Word on the hearts of men (Jer 24:7).

²⁶ M. Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Co., 1987), 98.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

“A Dark Place” *Auchmēros* is Peter’s description of this present world wherein he speaks of how the prophecy of Scripture lights the way for believers. Peter’s use of *auchmēros* speaks of a world which is “murky, dry, parched and squalid.”²⁸ This is more than just a place that is devoid of light. It is a place which is neglected and desolate. It is in this world that prophecy is the “more-sure” guide for those who would know the truth. This dark and murky world in which we inhabit is, according to Peter, “time-conditional” that is to say that this world of darkness and squalor is temporary. It is waiting “until the day dawns” i.e. the Parousia - the return of Christ. This is reminiscent of Romans 8:19-22 where the creation “groans” in uncomfortable anticipation of its redemption. To be sure the day will come when there will be no need for the guidebook of prophecy, but until that time, we continue to look through a glass darkly and would be well advised to do as Peter suggests regarding prophecy, that we “*do well to heed.*”

“The Day Dawns” It is interesting that Peter uses the Greek word *diaugazū* (dawn), meaning to “shine through” instead of *epiphōskū* (cf Mt. 28:1), “*as it began to dawn toward the first day.*”). Peter continues the imagery of the light of illumination. This dawning is a light which shines through the murkiness of this world. Shining through, with its close proximity to the other imagery of chapter one recalls the personages revealed in the Transfiguration. The great OT prophets – Moses and Elijah, are now joined by the greatest of all prophets – Jesus. The radiance which goes forth from Jesus can easily be described as piercing and shining through the darkness. Jesus is the source of illumination which has now transcended the illumination of the “lamp” (*luchanos*) of OT prophecy.²⁹

²⁸ K. Wuest, Wuest’s *Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Co., 1973), 32.

²⁹ Ibid., 34. Quoting Thayer, Wuest writes, “To a lamp is likened the prophecies of the O.T. inasmuch as they afforded at least some knowledge relative to the glorious return of Jesus from heaven down even to the time when by the Holy Spirit that same light, like the day and the day-star, shone upon the hearts of men, the light by which the prophets themselves had been enlightened and which was necessary to the full perception of the true meaning of their prophecies.”

“The Morning Star Rises in Your Heart”

*“Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person...
sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Hebrews 1:2*

It is fascinating that the images presented by the author of Hebrews so closely parallel those of Peter. The Biblical imagery of “brightness, glory and Majesty,” all speak of the Messiah in Hebraic imagery and are descriptive of the arrival of a great ruler and king in Greek imagery.³⁰

It is compelling that in II Peter 2:15-17, the author would make reference to Balaam, for it was Balaam who gave the most direct OT prediction of the coming Messiah – the star of Jacob. *“I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; A Star shall come out of Jacob, a Scepter shall rise out of Israel...”* (Num 24:17a). That Peter would use imagery of Balaam’s prediction and Balaam himself as an image in the next few verses is, in this author’s opinion, no coincidence. Peter weaves OT imagery with NT occurrences and produces a complete tapestry.

The Morning Star is Jesus. The Star symbolism and imagery found in Revelation leaves no doubt, *“I will give him the morning star”* (Rev 2:28) and *“I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star”* (Rev 22:16a). The rising (coming) of the Morning Star is nothing less than the Parousia. The hope of Peter is in his Lord’s return. This event will end the revelation of prophetic Scripture and usher in the new heavens and the new earth. The rising of the Star in the hearts of men will be the new covenant of Jeremiah (24:7). This, when God promises He will give men a heart to know Him. Green makes the point that the rising of the Morning Star may be more a matter of transformation than illumination. And Peter is anticipating more than knowledge – he is seeking to become like Christ! (1 Jn 3:2)³¹

³⁰ Michael Green makes interesting connections between the Hebraic imagery of the Messiah and Greek imagery of the morning star. (i.e. Venus). In discussing “star imagery” he also draws upon extra-biblical writings such as the Messianic Anthology of the Dead Sea Scrolls. M. Green, *2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Co., 1987), 99.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

“Make Merchandise of You”

*“And through covetousness shall they with feigned words
will make merchandise of you.” (KJV) II Peter 2:3*

It is interesting that the King James Version uses the English word “merchandise” in its translation whereas the majority of modern translations use “exploit”.³² The American Standard Version however also renders the Greek Text as “merchandise.”

The Greek word used by Peter is *emporeuomai*, “make merchandise.” This word combination can also be rendered as “to go trading” or “to traffic.”³³ The root *emporion* is our word emporium. This is a place where goods are bought and sold. The overwhelming image is one of monetary exchange for products and services.

It is unfortunate that use of “exploit” by many translators does not clearly picture the commercial aspect of the situation as does the idea of turning people into products. They are of course exploited, however, exploit is more non-descript and less personal than what Peter is expressing as he writes directly to the people of the Church; *“And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you.”*

In using this phrase “make merchandise of you” Peter appears to be using the imagery of Deuteronomy 21:14. *“but thou shalt not make her at all for money, thou shalt not make merchandise of her, because thou hast humbled her.”* This same phrase is also found in Deuteronomy 24:7 *“If a man be found stealing any of his brethren of the children of Israel, and make merchandise of him, or selleth him; then that thief shall die.”* The implication here is clear; people become impersonal merchandise or product if you will, of an abusive and dishonest person. It is in fact the reduction of a human being to a mere asset – an asset to be bought or sold.

³² The large majority of translations use “exploit” for this passage, e.g. NKJV, NASB, NIV, ESV.

³³ K. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Co., 1973), 48.

The Septuagint renders this passage... “*and if a man be caught stealing on of his brethren of the children of Israel, and having overcome him he should sell him, that man shall die.*” (Sep 21:9). The Septuagint paints an even more sinister picture – one of kidnapping, and deliberately overpowering a fellow human so as to sell him. The English Standard Version uses the word “slave” when bringing forth this image; “*...and if he treats him as a slave or sells him, then that thief shall die.*” (ESV).

In short the images evoked are those of one who overpowers a weaker brother or sister and then turns them into a product to be bought or sold – a slave. And it is this image of a brutal and unlawful abuse of power which Peter is trying to convey when speaking of the false teachers. This is a much harsher image to deal with and it is a situation that to the modern Bible student may seem odd. However Peter in his use of this forceful and dark image focuses on the seriousness of the abuse of the false teachers and the danger they pose to the nascent Church.

Peter also states the manner in which the false teacher overpowers his victim; through feign or deceptive words (II Pet 2:3), by appealing to the fleshly desires and sensuality of the congregation (2:18), and by promising them freedom (2:19).

Peter regularly cited and or alluded to Deuteronomy in his works. It is highly unlikely that this law concerning abusive and illegal trafficking in slavery escaped his notice. It is more than likely that the Laws of Moses as set down in Deuteronomy influenced Peter’s thinking and writing more so than did Greek word usage or Hellenistic influence.

While the practice of capture and profiteering in humans is foreign to our modern day ears and experience, the images evoked by these practices would not be foreign to Peter or his readers. It would be a vivid and all too familiar image that would strike in the hearts of those who lived under Roman tyranny and 1st Century Palestine – be they Jew or Gentile.

“Wells Without Water”

“These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.” II Peter 2:17

“Wells in the Biblical world must be understood in context of the aridity of the land.”³⁴

Riken points out that the “well” holds great Biblical significance both spiritually and physically.

“Wells” as used by Peter is *pēgē* or “spring.” Peter’s use of this word evokes the image of a bubbling “ever-upleaping living fountain.”³⁵ This is a spring that in the desert would have significant vegetation surrounding it and would be obvious from a distance. The image produced is that of a thirsty traveler who upon seeing the vegetation, eagerly approaches the spring expecting to drink in its life saving properties – only to experience the disappointment and disaster of a “well without water.” Understood in this context the image can be taken as that of a deception (i.e. the surrounding vegetation), which causes the death of the traveler. This image merges Peter’s image of “false teachers” – “wells without water” with the prophet Balaam. This joining of negative images paints the disturbing picture of a false teacher who deliberately deceives the congregation with great sounding words of the Church in order to destroy them.

Martin Luther has strong input regarding the false teachers of II Peter.

“They make great show, and have nothing beside. They are like the dry, false and exhausted wells. For Scripture calls those who teach, wells, as the ones from whom should flow that wholesome doctrine by which souls are quickened. To this office they are anointed and set apart. But what do they do? Nothing. For everywhere there is nothing more than the bare name, just as they are called shepherds, and yet are wolves.”³⁶

The image of a dry well or spring is a familiar one and we could stop here. However there exists a deep and rich addition to this Biblical imagery that warrants further investigation.

This will be discussed on the following page.

³⁴ Leland Ryken ed. *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, Ill, Intervarsity, 1998), 940.

³⁵ K. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Co., 1973), 58.

³⁶ M. Luther, *Commentary on Peter & Jude*, ed. J. Lenker (Grand Rapids, MI, Kregel, 1990), 273.

On a practical level, wells and springs are scarce in the desert. As such wells in both OT and NT were considered extremely valuable. Wells were places around which people met and lived out their lives. People congregated at wells, they did business, found a mate, received spiritual insights and epiphanies. Biblically, wells were places where the human would, at times, encounter the Divine. Hence from both the practical and the spiritual perspective the “well” could be viewed as the Church, This is the place where the Bride of Christ could be washed with the water of the Word (Eph 5:26).

The audience of II Peter was most likely a Jewish-Gentile church community.³⁷ Like other NT Church communities, they held love feasts (II Pet 2:13b) and most likely were a close nit community of believers on an interpersonal level. This was common in the nascent Church and of churches today. From the perspective of the false teacher, such a church would be an ideal setting to take advantage of God’s people. The Church was a place where the false teacher could prey upon the flock – for financial gain (II Pet 2:15) and lustful pleasures. This by taking advantage of the respect and admiration paid to teachers of the Word. The false teacher would no doubt be a charismatic leader, perhaps a pastor or elder of a church. This person would be sought after for approval and as a source of information concerning day to day issues. He could in fact be a spiritual counselor to the flock and in a position to take full advantage of his power.

The “well” of II Peter can also therefore be viewed as a church that is home to a false teacher. It is to this church that the people come to follow the path of God which leads to eternal life and are instead lead down a path which leads to deception and destruction.

Did Peter have this degree of imagery in mind when he penned his epistle? When the epistle of II Peter is examined from the perspective of its wealth of Biblical imagery, this author holds that indeed Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit knew exactly what images to project.

³⁷ Donald Guthrie gives an insightful discussion about the likely audience of II Peter. D. Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Ill., IVP, 1990), 842-848.

“Out of Water and In the Water”

“For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.” II Peter 3:5

II Peter 3:5-13 is a good example of where the study of Biblical imagery maybe helpful in exegeting difficult passages. The images that Peter evokes in 3:5-13 are centered in Peter’s views of cosmology and the Biblical account of creation. In writing 3:5, Peter is disputing the scoffers of 3:3. In doing so he recalls the Genesis account and uses the phrase *“by the word of God the heavens were of old and the earth standing out of water and in the water... (3:5b).*

The common interpretation of this phrase is that the verse is making reference to the position of the water in relationship to the earth or landmass. *“Out of water,”* i.e. the water is in juxtaposition to the land. However Alford, Vincent, Wuest and Thayer point out that by coupling this term with the next phrase *“in the water,”* Peter renders the meaning not to be that of the position of water to land mass, but rather an illusion to the origin of the earth itself.³⁸ Wuest cites Alford; *“Out of water denoting not the position of the earth, but the materials or mediating element in the creation; the waters being gathered together in one place, the dry land appearing... by means of water ...”* Alford continues; *“thus water was the material out of which the earth was made.”*³⁹ This unusual combination of Greek words leads Wuest to comment *“The Greek text back of the words “the earth standing out of water and in the water, is most difficult”* Wuest quotes other scholars... *“Robertson says that it is not plain what is meant by ‘by means of water,’ and Strachan states that the meaning is obscure.”*⁴⁰

³⁸ K. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Co., 1973), 68.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 68. Thus, Wuest in quoting a number of scholars, concedes that the interpretation of this passage to one of difficulty. These scholars seem to rely on their expertise of the Greek language and hence appear to be stymied. I believe that the passage yields to further investigation when the exegete employs 1st century rabbinic imagery with which Peter would most likely be familiar. (see below).

It is here where a study of Hebraic imagery may lend insight to this passage. The imagery describing “*by means of water*” and “*out of water*” was cause for a critical debate in the 1st century rabbinic academies. The two principle academies centered in Jerusalem were the schools of Hillel and Shammai.⁴¹ The well known controversy in question dealt with the basic materials used by God to create the universe. In brief, the question was; what were the primal elements, (*stoicheia*), of the creation?

The school of Hillel held that there were three primal elements, heaven, earth and water; whereas the school of Shammai claimed that there were only two primal elements – heaven and earth. Some claimed that water was the ultimate origin of all the elements; “in the beginning the universe consisted of water within water; as it is written ‘The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water’ (Gen 1:2).” The debate involved numerous rabbinic scholars with many nuanced interpretations of Scriptural passages.⁴²

Peter used the images of “The earth standing out of water and in water” coupled with the word *stoicheia* as a descriptor of the elements (i.e. heaven and earth) which will be dissolved and then created anew (II Pet 10-13). It is by means of this imagery starting with verse 5 and ending with verse 13 that Peter presented his defense of the Genesis account of creation and the final consummation and its promised restoration.

In offering comfort and encouragement to his fellow believers, Peter employed the most vivid of images – the creation of the universe as described in Genesis chapter one. Peter’s knowledge and use of Biblical imagery in his second epistle is most profound and compelling.

⁴¹ A. Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud* (New York, NY., Schocken Books, 1949), 34-36.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 35. Cohen does an excellent job of citing a number of early 1st century scholars who joined the debate. It is important to connect the fact that Peter used many of the same phrases and words in 3:10-15 as the Jerusalem academics of his day. It is logical to assume that Peter was familiar with Hebraic and rabbinic views of cosmology expressed in Scripture interpreted in the early Church era. In fact it is illogical to assume otherwise.

Practical Application – Teaching Bible Studies

It follows that what was good for Peter as a method of teaching, must also be good for teachers of the Bible today. In this spirit, this author set out to study specific images evoked by Peter and then present them to a selected group of students in a chapel or Bible study setting. This was done during Chapel services at the local Gospel Rescue Mission where both “churched and un-churched” men meet regularly. The results have been very exciting.

The method developed focused on the particular image that Peter referred to such as the “casting of lots.” The classic method of doing a Greek word study was used only as a brief introduction but the main presentation was to trace the Hebraic imagery from Peter and other NT usage to OT imagery as has been done in this paper.

Where ever possible, visual aids such as a pair of dice were employed. In the case of the “casting of lots,” the physical imagery prompted a theological discussion of “randomness or chance” contrasted with the Christian Worldview which holds to the Providence of God.

The next topic evoked by using the dice was a discussion of the soldiers at the foot of the cross imaging unmerited grace. This image was followed by teaching about the “Scapegoat” and methods of Temple sacrifice. Here the teaching of God’s redemptive history and the necessity of Jesus’ journey to Calvary illustrated the connectedness of Scripture as one message – the Gospel.

It soon became obvious that the goal, to at first evoke and then discuss such vivid images was actually easier to teach than presenting a modern grammatical – historical Bible study.

It was fun and most rewarding to see forty men thumbing back and forth between the OT and NT once the image was planted and then explained. The feedback has been very positive and encouraging.

CONCLUSION

The stated purpose of this research paper was to explore the idea of doing Bible studies and writing commentaries using Biblical imagery as the primary medium. The book of II Peter was chosen because it is filled with many such images and was apparently written to a mixed community of Christian Jews and Gentiles.

By evoking these images, Peter anticipated that his audience was familiar with the stories he presented, *“though you know and are established in this present truth”* (II Pet 1:12). Despite this fact Peter would be diligent to remind them as long as he lived, (1:13) and he did this using Biblical and contemporary of his day imagery to get his message across.

It is also apparent that for those who were not familiar with the OT Biblical images, this letter would encourage the uninformed, (new converts, i.e. Gentiles) to study the OT Scriptures, (cf II Pet 1:10, 15-18). In essence Peter used Biblical imagery as a teaching tool in keeping with the Hebraic tradition of education.

Modern presentations of the Gospel from the pulpits and classrooms all too often become laborious and systematic recitations of Greek word studies using a lexicon or concordance. Pastors and teachers seem at times to focus more on their own linguistic acumen while leaving many less educated congregants in the theological dust.

Peter did not present Hebrew or Greek word studies in his writings. He did not discuss the subtle nuances of textual criticism to determine the correct word usage in the Septuagint. What Peter did do was to present the truths of the Bible and its theological insights by using Biblical images. It is the opinion of this author that Biblical imagery as a primary teaching tool should be a vital part of presenting the Gospel to congregants and the unsaved.

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