

“THE END OF ALL THINGS IS NEAR”: ESCHATOLOGY AND MOTIVATION IN FIRST PETER

by
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It could be argued that Peter dwells so frequently on eschatology that his readers would be, as the old phrase goes, “too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly good.” A better reading is that Peter’s letter demonstrates that the old-fashioned wisdom is wrong. In Peter’s readers’ situation, they needed to focus their attention on eschatology to live faithful Christian lives. This is represented well in one of the central motivating passages in 1 Peter, where Peter tells the readers to “Set their hope fully on the grace that will be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the way Peter uses eschatology as a motivation for transformed living. My argument is that Peter is a master weaver, threading seven eschatologically laden themes together with careful intentionality. Each of these strands serves a different dimension of motivation. Together, the threads create a weave symbolizing a well-integrated vision that holds strong against the strains of suffering and hardship. Stated simply, Peter believed that the readers had to focus on the future to live faithfully in the present.

Eschatological Identity

Peter calls his readers to consider eschatology from the very first words of his epistle: “Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ to those who are elect-exiles.”² These two datives (ἐκλεκτοῖς παρεπιδήμοις) juxtaposed without a conjunction suggests unity and equality. Though some have suggested that one or the other is primary, it is better to read them together.³ The readers are at one and the same time elect of God and yet

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²All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

³Michaels reads “elect” as primary, while Williams and Horrell take “exiles” as primary. Jobes agrees with the assessment of this paper that the two are equal substantives

exiles in their world. They did not use to be such. At one time, they lived according to the ways of the Gentiles (4:3). These are likely converts in Asia Minor, who abandoned their former way of life to embrace the Way of Christianity.

Peter's concept of exilic identity derives chiefly from the OT.⁴ This fact is further confirmed in 1 Peter 2:11, where he calls the readers sojourners and exiles (παροίκος καὶ παρεπιδήμος). This combination of words is not accidental. The combination of these two words occurs in the Septuagint translation in reference to Abraham, who, at the death of his wife, noted that he was a παροίκος καὶ παρεπιδήμος who did not have land to bury his wife (Gen 23:4).⁵ These same two words reappear in Psalm 39:12 (LXX 38:13), where David reflects on his experience as one who is yet without a homeland.

What Abraham meant literally, David meant metaphorically. Abraham meant that he had no place in the Promised Land; David meant that despite being in the Promised Land, the ultimate homeland had not yet been realized. This is what is picked up in the book of Hebrews, where, speaking of the saints of faith, the author notes that "These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth" (11:13). Though the author of Hebrews uses only one of the two Greek words discussed above (παρεπιδήμος), the second term is replaced with an analogous term (ξένος).⁶ Nevertheless, it is clear that the author of Hebrews is reflecting on the same OT imagery.⁷

With this background in mind, we see that Peter is grounding his audience's identity within the identity of the people of God from all

(J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco, TX: Nelson, 1988], 7; David G. Horrell and Travis B. Williams, *1 Peter: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Graham I. Davies and Christopher M. Tuckett [London: T&T Clark, 2023], 1:308–9; Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022], 67).

⁴Peter continually grounds his arguments in the OT (e.g., 1:16, 24; 2:3, 4–10, 24–25; 3:6, 10–12, 14–15; 4:8; 5:5), making a grounding here more likely. Cf. Dan G. McCartney, "The Use of the Old Testament the First Epistle of Peter" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989); Karen H. Jobes, "'O Taste and See': Septuagint Psalm 33 in 1 Peter," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 18 (Sept 2015): 241–51; Susan Ann Woan, "The Use of the Old Testament in 1 Peter, with Especial Focus on the Role of Psalm 34" (PhD diss., University of Exeter, 2008).

⁵Achtemeier rightly points out that when Peter refers to the OT, "it is the LXX rather than the MT" which he cites (Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 6).

⁶Ellingworth notes that Ξένοι, παρεπιδήμοι, and πάροικοι are "used interchangeably." He suggests that the author of Hebrews may have selected a different term than the OT text because he had already used a verbal cognate of πάροικοι in verse 9 (Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 594).

⁷Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 550–51.

ages. This is confirmed a final time at the end of the letter, when he says that “She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings” (5:13a). Notice the repeated theme of election (“chosen”) and exile (“Babylon”), which bookends the beginning and ending of the letter. Peter and the church are not actually in the literal city of Babylon.⁸ Rather, this language is used to unite Peter’s readers with the church in Rome, who are also in exile.

All of this confirms that Peter began his letter with an eschatological thrust. The people must think of themselves as people out of their homeland, waiting for the opportunity to enter the eschatological Promised Land. This is their destiny as those chosen by God. In fact, their suffering and persecution are grounded in their identity as elect-exiles. This can be seen from two vantage points. First, the word picture of foreigner suggests tension with the citizens who call this present world home.⁹

Second, when Peter transitions from his development of the readers’ identity, which crescendos in 2:4–10, to the statement of how they ought to live, he says, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.” In other words, he tells them to consider their identity as those who are not yet home. They are yet in enemy territory and thus must be careful. Beyond this, the readers are not merely looking out for their own souls: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” Stated simply, their identity as exiles motivated them to eschatological living both for their own sake and for the hope that they might effectively invite others on their journey.

In sum, the identity of the readers as elect-exiles is the central theme of the book. It structures all that Peter does, and it is shot through with eschatology.

Eschatological Birth

If the main theme of 1 Peter resides in the identity of the readers as elect-exiles, there is nevertheless an undercurrent theme in the identity of the readers as those having experienced a new birth. The new birth is first hinted at in 1:2 with the statement that the readers are elect-exiles “through the sanctification of the Spirit.” This does not refer to progressive sanctification; it refers to definitive sanctification, which occurs at the new birth. Here then is the link between the two images (elect-exile and new birth); the new birth is the entrance into an exilic identity. Because of the transformation of the Spirit, they are no longer at home in this world.

⁸Craig S. Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 403–6.

⁹Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 15.

The importance of the theme of new birth is demonstrated in that it is the first thing mentioned in the exordium, which immediately follows the opening of the letter. This is where Peter is seeking to win a hearing from his audience.¹⁰ Verse 3 opens the exordium: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

This theme of new birth orients the readers to the eschaton as much as the theme of elect-exile. It does so in numerous ways. First, notice that Peter grounds the new birth in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In other words, Jesus’s new life is the foundation for the believer’s new life. And the life that Jesus now has is not susceptible to the weaknesses of the life in the present flesh.

Second, Peter follows the consideration of the new birth with a statement concerning the inheritance they have been granted through this new life: “to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.” The first and last of these descriptions—imperishable and unfading—refer to the enduring nature of the inheritance. Unstated but clearly implied is that the new life associated with that inheritance is likewise imperishable and unfading, for an eternal inheritance is wasted on a temporal being.

This leads to the third way Peter uses the new birth theme to orient the readers eschatologically. At the end of chapter 1, Peter appears to mix metaphors. At the beginning of the chapter, he used the metaphor of new life, which suggests an analogy to human seed (i.e., sperm). In verses 23–25 he adjusts the metaphor to agricultural seed. Peter is following Jesus on both accounts. Jesus speaks of new birth not being the will of man, implying an analogy to human seed (John 1:13), and Jesus speaks of the agricultural seed that is planted in soil as an analogy to the word of God working in the hearts of humanity (Matt 13). The core similarity between these two images is that both refer to a seed that produces new life.

As Peter transitions from the human seed analogy to the agricultural, he quotes Isaiah 40:6, 8. “All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever.” Peter draws the implication that his readers were born again “not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” In other words, since the seed that brought life was the Word of God (likely derived from Jesus’s parable of the soils), then the life they receive from that word is consistent with that word.¹¹

Peter’s point is that since the readers gained new birth from an eternal seed, that new birth bears an eternal life in them. It is for this

¹⁰Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 91, n. 13.

¹¹For an argument for the connection between these passages, see, Timothy Miller, *Echoes of Jesus in the First Epistle of Peter* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022), 119–21.

reason that the contrastive analogy of grass is used, for humanity passes away as the seasonal grass. Alternatively, those born to new life will, like the seed of the Word that brought them life, “remain forever.”

In 2:1–3 Peter connects this eschatological word picture to sanctification, arguing that the readers must long for the pure spiritual milk that by it the readers may grow into salvation. Stated differently, since they were born again by the word, they must drink deeply of the word, which will help them grow into the new birth.¹² Peter is not arguing that the believers must be sanctified to be saved; rather, he is saying that those who are saved must grow into their sanctification.¹³ They have been made partakers of the world to come through the Spirit, and their lives must now conform to their identity.

Eschatological Imitation

We now turn from considering the two major metaphors of 1 Peter to another literary device: analogy. Throughout this text, Peter highlights the analogical nature of Jesus’s life to that of his followers.¹⁴ The analogy works like this: “Something happened to Jesus, and therefore it will happen to you.” Or “Something is happening to you and notice that it already happened to Jesus.” This theme is made explicit in Peter’s comment that “Jesus suffered for you, leaving you an example that you might follow in his footsteps” (2:21). The adverbial participial clause indicates one of the purposes of Jesus’s suffering, namely, that Christians will walk the path of suffering like Jesus walked.

This strand of Peter’s teaching is thoroughly eschatological. Peter suggests that since Jesus was “a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious” (2:4), so also, the readers may be designated as “you yourselves are like living stones....” Peter’s point is that believers’ lives are modeled after the life of Jesus. He was chosen by God, hewn as the perfect stone for God’s purposes, and now these readers are, in the same way, stones chosen and hewn by God. In addition, Jesus was rejected by men, and these readers are feeling the same rejection. God’s eschatological purposes for Jesus are shared with the other stones he is crafting to build his temple.

In chapter 3:18–22 Peter affirms that they do not merely imitate Jesus’s suffering; they imitate his vindication as well.¹⁵ This is

¹²For an argument about the milk being the Word, see, Timothy Miller, “The Meaning of ‘Milk’ in 1 Peter 2:1–3,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 24 (2019): 63–80.

¹³Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2024), 112.

¹⁴Jobes rightly recognizes that “English words such as ‘example,’ ‘model,’ or ‘pattern’ are too weak, for Jesus’ suffering is not simply *an* example or pattern or model, as if one of many; he is *the* paradigm by which Christians write large the letters of his gospel in their lives.... Jesus Christ left us this pattern over which we are to trace out our lives in order that we might follow in his footsteps” (Jobes, *1 Peter*, 195–96).

¹⁵“The theme of the passage [i.e., 3:18–22]...is vindication. The vindication of

demonstrated in the conjunction that begins 3:18–22 (ὅτι), which shows that all of 3:18–22 grounds the claim that “it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will than for doing evil.” Though the passage is debated, the overall conclusion is not; namely, though Jesus suffered and died, he gained ultimate victory over his foes. In the same way, Peter is tying the believer’s experience of suffering to Jesus’s experience, so that he can tie their victory to his. Since Jesus suffered and was victorious, so the readers will find victory after suffering.

This point is reaffirmed with the comparison in 4:13: “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” To the degree that the readers imitate the Messiah in suffering, to that same degree they will experience vindicative glory. Or, to state it differently, the level of sharing in Christ’s sufferings leads to the level of sharing in Christ’s glory.

Finally, Peter notes that the readers’ resurrection is an imitation of Jesus’s resurrection. Though it is easy to miss, this is the clear implication of 1 Peter 1:21: “Jesus was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.” Why did God raise Jesus from the dead and give him glory? So that the readers’ faith and hope might be in God. In other words, they became believers in God because of his power in raising Jesus from the dead, and this provides them hope for the future, for as Jesus was raised, so they too will be raised.¹⁶

In sum, Peter provides an imitative theology, whereby the readers mirror the experiences of Jesus. They were chosen, just like Jesus. They are rejected, just like Jesus. They will be persecuted, just like Jesus. They will be resurrected, just like Jesus. And they will be rewarded, just like Jesus. The whole life of Jesus, then, presents a path they must follow, and though the cross looms large, the glory that follows is greater still.

Eschatological Nearness

Frequent reminders of the nearness of the eschaton are an additional way Peter motivates his readers with eschatological realities. He initially draws the readers’ attention to this in the exordium with the language of readiness (ἐτοιμὴν) in 1:5: “This inheritance is kept...for you, ...until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” Though Peter situates the coming salvation “at the last

Christ lays the basis for the vindication of the Christian believer, and Christ’s vindication is total” (Michaels, *1 Peter*, 220–21).

¹⁶It appears the same argument is being made in the exordium, where Peter says that the readers are “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Though often read merely as the means of giving new birth, it must be noticed that Peter grounds their hope in this resurrection, showing once more that Jesus’s resurrection is the ground for their own resurrection.

time,” he notes that that moment is “ready to be revealed.” Nothing stands in its way, for all the prerequisites for the return have been met. As Jobes says, Peter’s words make “the eschatological future a present reality.”¹⁷

Peter repeats the readiness language in 4:5, when he speaks of sinners who “will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” If in 1:5 the readiness focused on the positive side of the eschatological end and the salvation of the saints, this passage focuses on the negative side, with the judgment of the unregenerate. The word picture is of a judge anxious to begin the work. The net effect of the imagery is, according to Schreiner, to “turn the readers’ eyes toward the eschaton.”¹⁸

A second way Peter drew the readers’ attention to the nearness of the eschatological end was through reminders that they lived in the final days. For instance, in 1:20, Peter says that though Jesus “was foreknown before the foundation of the world,” he “was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.” Though Peter’s larger point is to highlight the privileged position of the readers, his comment concerning the last times was not unintentional. By means of this he notes that history is coming to a climax and that the readers are living at the cusp of the final transformation. How long the last times will last is unknown, but knowing the trumpet may blow at any moment builds eschatological tension and draws the readers’ attention forward to the coming day.

Peter repeats the same concept with different words in 4:7, when he proclaims that “the end of all things is near.” Contextually, Peter is encouraging the readers to live chaste lives in light of the proximity of the end of the age. Directly preceding this bold statement, Peter had been considering the coming judgment of sinners and the purpose for preaching the gospel. This transition from a consideration of judgment to a consideration of how the readers ought to live is consistent with Peter’s second letter (2 Pet 3:11–12). As Peter addresses current ethics, he tells the readers they must not miss their eschatological situation. They are in the last days, and this must affect every element of their lives.

Peter additionally highlights the nearness of the end by commenting on the shortness of human life. Consideration of the brevity of life naturally turns one’s eyes to that which is to come and what one can do now to prepare. Earlier in this essay, there was consideration of Peter’s comparison of the regenerate life with human life, likening the latter to the lifespan of a single season of grass. At other times Peter suggests the shortness of life with more terse comments. For example, Peter speaks of the readers spending “the rest of the time in the flesh for the will of

¹⁷Jobes, *1 Peter*, 91.

¹⁸Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude*, Christian Standard Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 2020), 233.

God" (4:2). The implication is that there is a limited timeframe. In addition, the reference to the "now dead" reminded the readers of those they had already lost to death (4:6).¹⁹

A final reflection on the nearness of the end comes with Peter's consideration of the trials of his readers. Here we find Peter once more using a bookend strategy to focus the readers' attention on centrally important claims. This time, it concerns the temporal frame for their suffering. In the exordium, directly following consideration of the blessing of the new birth, Peter recognizes that "now, for a *little while*" they may have to suffer (1:6). In confirmation of the importance of the temporal frame, Peter concludes the main exhortation of the letter this way: "And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a *little while*, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (5:10).

The bookending of the letter with the word "little while" (ὀλίγον) directs the readers' attention to eternity. Their suffering, while grievous and varied, is temporary. Even if it lasts seventy years, it is but the life of a blade of grass compared to the eternal life that is promised. In addition, the word served as a reminder of the return of their Lord, for since the readers lived in the last days, their lives may be cut short by the revelation of a greater life.

The various ways that Peter drew his readers' attention to the nearness of the end served a solitary purpose: orient the readers to the age to come so that they can live faithfully in the present. As 4:7 discloses, the nearness of the end has large implications for the present.

Eschatological Reward

A particularly powerful way Peter motivates his readers is by highlighting the eschatological reward of their suffering. In this way, he turns them from a consideration of the temporal, which is accompanied by suffering, to the eternal, which is accompanied by glory. Unsurprisingly this theme is also seeded in the exordium.

After drawing the readers' attention to the brief time of suffering they must endure, Peter provides the divine reason for such suffering in the exordium; namely, it proves their faith and results in "praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:7). Though some debate the recipient of praise, honor, and especially glory, Peter elsewhere in the letter attributes each of these to believers (cf. praise, 2:14; honor, 2:7; and glory, 5:1).²⁰ Peter's point is that an experience of suffering

¹⁹There are different views concerning the significance of 4:6. The position of the majority of scholars today is that Peter refers to those who had heard the gospel and had died. These individuals will be vindicated by the gospel, which they heard and believed (Keener, *1 Peter*, 309–10).

²⁰Elliott, in his comments on this passage, rightly recognizes this theme: "The believers' loyalty will be the basis of their share (2:7; 4:13; 5:1) in the 'praise' (*epainon*), 'glory' (*doxan*), and 'honor' (*timēn*) already ascribed to God (4:11; 5:11; cf. 2:12) and Jesus Christ (1:11, 21; 2:4, 6; 5:1)" (John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, Anchor Yale Bible [New

and trial in the present will be worth more than its weight in gold in the age to come.

The second consideration of rewards occurs in the narrow context of slaves working righteously under unjust masters (2:18–21). Peter argues that such slaves, when being beaten for righteous actions, receive “credit” and “commendation” in the sight of God. Despite the narrow confines of the initial exhortation, Peter’s last clause expands the referents to include any of his audience who have acted righteously and suffered for it.²¹ In a surprising turn, Peter tells the readers, “to this you were called.” In other words, their experience of suffering for righteousness is a part of their calling as elect-exiles. And, by logical extension, so is their receiving an eternal reward.

The next reward passage confirms that suffering temporally to receive eternal rewards is central to the readers’ new identity. This confirmation comes in Peter’s admonition to “not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless” (3:9). The significance of this passage concerns the ground given for the command: “for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.” Though some have suggested “this” is cataphoric,²² stating that the readers were called to obtain a blessing, the indefinite pronoun more likely points backward, revealing that the readers’ reward is based on their blessing those who curse them.²³

The fourth consideration of reward has been touched on above when we considered the imitation of Christ. Nevertheless, the centrality of reward in 4:13–14 leads to a reconsideration of the passage. Peter says, “rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. Earlier, it was argued that the rate of reward is based on the rate of suffering. The more Peter’s readers suffered, the greater should be their expectation of the age to come.

Finally, Peter draws the attention of the readers forward to eternal reward as he discusses the crown given to faithful elders: “when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (5:4). A few themes intermingle here. The focus on the unfadingness of the crown subtly reminds them of the brevity of present life. That they

Haven: Yale University Press, 2001], 342).

²¹Jobs helpfully comments on the significance in how Peter transitions from slaves to all believers (Jobs, *1 Peter*, 192–95).

²²Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 234, n. 15; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 2nd ed, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 126–27; J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: A. & C. Black, 1969), 137.

²³Michaels, *1 Peter*, 178; Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 224; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 609; John Piper, “Hope as the Motivation of Love: 1 Peter 3:9–12,” *New Testament Studies* 26 (1980): 212–30.

receive a crown of glory—best read as epexegetical,²⁴ a crown which is glory—once more highlights the reception of glory for faithfulness in this life.

In conclusion to the consideration of reward, Peter masterfully uses reward as a motivation. Their suffering in the present is purposeful and will result in astonishing riches. To the degree that his readers believe him, they will be compelled to live faithful lives, rejoicing in suffering, the gateway to incalculable reward.

Eschatological Judgment

Unsurprisingly, Peter also motivates his readers to faithfulness through consideration of eternal judgment. This is suggested throughout the exordium (salvation ready to be revealed, guarded for salvation, etc.), though stated more explicitly throughout the rest of the text. Peter highlights this theme in three ways: (1) future warning for all, (2) coming judgment for unbelievers, and (3) future vindication for saints.

Regarding future warning, Peter speaks to his readers as a mixed audience. While he opened his letter with the designation “elect-exile,” Peter, following Jesus, recognizes that some of the readers may represent those who seem to have life but bear no fruit (Matt 13:22). They may be the goats among the sheep (Matt 25:31–46) or like the man invited to the wedding feast who did not have wedding garments (Matt 22:11–13). For this reason, he warns them, “if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile” (1:17).

The incongruity of the mixed metaphor is striking, for Peter presents God as both Father and judge. Peter has a dual intent in this passage. For those who are obedient, they should see their calling on the Father as genuine, while those whose lives are inconsistent with their calling should fear the coming judgment. Their calling God Father is akin to the Jews who said they had Abraham as Father (Matt 3:9) or to those at the final judgment who say “Lord, Lord.” The final words of the Lord to such people are “I never knew you, depart from me, workers of lawlessness” (Matt 7:21–23).

Regarding unbelievers, Peter speaks of their judgment in two ways. First, he holds out hope that the believer’s life may lead to their conversion and therefore to their escape from eternal judgment: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation” (2:12).²⁵

²⁴Horrell and Williams, *1 Peter 1–2*, 537–38.

²⁵There is debate concerning the nature of the visitation, whether it refers to God’s presence in judgment or salvation. See Jobes for a solid argument that the day of visitation is “a reference to the future final judgment, by which time Peter hopes that unbelievers who have observed the good works of the Christians they have slandered will have come to faith in Christ” (Jobes, *1 Peter*, 172).

The second way Peter speaks to the judgment of unbelievers makes clear that unbelievers who slander Christians “will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (4:5). Indeed, according to 4:17, Peter contrasts the judgment believers experience in this life (governed by the “little while” that begins and ends the text) with that of unbelievers: “For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” Peter’s rhetorical question is followed by another, and the combination strengthens the reality that the temporal judgment that believers face in trials is not to be compared to the judgment that will be faced by those who disobey the word and thus trip over the foundation stone.²⁶

Taken together, these passages direct the readers’ attention forward in two distinct ways. On the one hand, they remind the readers that their current lives, lived appropriately, are evangelistic, helping others escape the pollution of the world. Even their suffering is used by God to bring others to faith. On the other hand, they are reminded that their treatment in this life is not the final word. Their suffering is not to be compared to the suffering that unbelievers will face at the final day.

This latter point leads us to consider Peter’s final eschatological judgment theme: vindication for believers. In two passages Peter highlights that believers must “entrust their souls to God.” The first, given in 2:23, shows the pattern of Christ, who “When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” Just a verse earlier, Peter mentioned that Jesus left the example with the explicit intention that believers would follow it. This is made more explicit with Peter’s command in 4:19: “Therefore let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” Taken together, Peter argues that the readers can trust the just judge and the faithful creator to vindicate them.

In sum, Peter addresses all people—professing Christians, explicit unbelievers, and persecuted Christians—pointing to the age to come and the just judgment of God. These were to inform their present. Professing believers were to look at their lives, determining whether their actions reflected the life of one who had been “born again through the sanctification of the Spirit” (1:2). If not, the judge would be impartial, despite their calling him father. Unbelievers were to see the life of believers today, repent, and glorify God. If not, their suffering would be far greater than the suffering they caused Christians. Finally, believers were called to consider the end, both in the motivation to draw unbelievers into God’s mercy through their gracious response to suffering, but also in their confidence that the just and faithful God would make all right in that eschatological day.

²⁶Davids, *First Epistle of Peter*, 171–72.

Eschatological Security

A final way Peter motivates his readers is through the security they have in Christ. This confidence serves as a motivation for endurance through difficulty in the present age. As Peter notes, the readers are hounded by Satan, the roaring lion, and their suffering may appear to be more than they can handle. Despite knowing the glories of the age to come, how could they remain faithful through this tumultuous life? Peter's answer comes early in the exordium, as he notes that those who are born again are "being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:5). That the power of God stands behind their endurance provides much comfort.

This eschatological certainty is reflected also in the question of 3:13: "now who is there to harm you, if you are zealous for what is good." Often this question is taken as a rhetorical question, namely, who wants to harm someone doing good?²⁷ But the fact that believers were being harmed militates against this view. More likely, Peter is saying something like what Jesus said, "do not fear the one who will harm the body, but the one who has power to cast both body and soul in hell" (Luke 12:4-5).²⁸

In other words, Peter is asking them to consider who can eschatologically harm them as they seek to do good. This reading is defended by the immediately preceding reference to Psalm 34:15-16: "the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ear is open to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against the one doing evil." The connection is obvious; since God's eye is on them, could anyone ultimately harm them? A final confirmation comes from Peter's subsequent consideration of fear, which reflects closely the ideology of Luke 12:4-5.²⁹ There, Jesus taught Peter and the disciples not to fear the ones who can harm the body but to fear him who has power over their eschatological judgment. Accordingly, Peter is teaching the believers not to fear unbelievers, for their reach, though painful, cannot touch eternity.

Finally, Peter begins and ends the letter with a declaration of God's choice of the readers. At the opening of the exordium (1:2), the readers are identified as the "chosen," and their election derives from the eternal foreknowledge of God the Father. At the end of the letter, Peter reminds them of this identity while multiplying objects in order to intensify the certainty of the Father's action: "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself *restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish* you" (5:10).

By orienting the readers to their security in Christ, Peter motivates

²⁷I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 114.

²⁸Michaels, *1 Peter*, 185.

²⁹Luke 12 is a chapter frequently alluded to in 1 Peter, making an allusion here more likely (Miller, *Echoes of Jesus in the First Epistle of Peter*, 256).

them to positive action. Though they must actively endure and maintain the faith, the strength they need is already supplied by the one who chose them and has promised them he will come for them. This knowledge frees believers to dedicate their energy to living faithfully for the age to come, despite the prowling enemy and the slandering opponent.

Conclusion

This paper was an exploration of the role of eschatology in the letter of 1 Peter. Examining the letter through this lens reveals that eschatology was at the core of Peter’s worldview, and he believed it had to be central to his readers as well. Their suffering, often viewed as the central theme of 1 Peter, was only properly understood within the context of their eschatological identity. Indeed, the whole of Peter’s motivation towards godly living is traced to the eschaton.

If, as I suggested at the beginning of this paper, Peter was a master weaver threading together multiple eschatological strands in the creation of this letter, then it is fair to say that pulling these strands out of the garment would unravel the whole. Stated without metaphor, 1 Peter is scrupulously and exhaustively eschatological.