

THE MEANING OF MILK IN 1 PETER 2:1–3

by
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That τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα (the pure spiritual milk)² in 1 Peter 2:2 refers to the word of God is the dominant position of scholarship.³ Nevertheless Karen Jobes questions whether interpreting the milk as the word is accurate.⁴ In her estimation, several misunderstandings

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²This is the *English Standard Version* translation of the metaphor. The paragraph in which the metaphor rests is 2:1–3: “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.”

³Jobes recognizes that “modern interpreters almost unanimously understand the referent of the pure spiritual milk metaphor to be the word of God” (Karen H. Jobes, “Got Milk? Septuagint Psalm 33 and the Interpretation of 1 Peter 2:1–3,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 [2002]: 2). Representative commentaries include the following: Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988); Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 2nd ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); Wayne A. Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007); Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistles of Peter and of the Epistle of Jude*, Baker New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); John H. Elliott, *1 Peter*, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Norman Hillyer, *1 and 2 Peter, Jude*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992); D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Peter* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991); Douglas Karel Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009); Hubert Frankemölle, *1 Petrusbrief, 2 Petrusbrief, und Judasbrief: Die Neue Echter-Bibel, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament mit Einheitsübersetzung*. (Würzburg: Echter, 1990); Ceslas Spicq, *Les Épîtres de Saint Pierre*, Sources bibliques (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1966); Martin Vahrenhorst, *Der Erste Brief Des Petrus*, Theologischer Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015).

⁴The original argument appeared in a *Westminster Theological Journal* article (Jobes, “Got Milk?”), and was advanced both in her commentary (Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 130–41.) and in a subsequent article (Karen H. Jobes, “‘Got Milk?’: A Petrine Metaphor in 1 Peter 2.1–3 Revisited,” *Leaven* 20 [2012]: 121–26).

have led to this misinterpretation. While recognizing her position as a minority one within scholarship,⁵ Jobes has put forth a substantial case for γάλα being a more general concept; namely, that which “is consistent with life in the new reality that Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension have created.”⁶ Since Jobes is the only one who has sought to offer a sustained defense of such a position, the following article focuses on her arguments.

It is important to note that Jobes is not against identifying the word of God as a *part* of the meaning of γάλα, but she argues that making the word of God central in the metaphor is not warranted by the biblical text.⁷ This article will argue for what I will call the traditional view: γάλα is used as a metaphor to refer to the word of God. To defend the traditional interpretation, I will first detail Jobes’s arguments against the word-view, showing that such arguments are insufficient for her case. Afterward, I will show how interpreting “milk” as primarily referring to the word of God makes the best sense of the passage lexically and contextually.

CONSIDERING JOBES’S ARGUMENTS

We will examine Jobes’s arguments for her position and against the word-view by categorizing them into two major groups: lexical arguments and contextual arguments. These arguments will, in the next major section, be countered by lexical and contextual arguments for the word-view.

Lexical Arguments

The two adjectives in the word-picture—λογικὸν and ἄδολον—are the source of lexical arguments for Jobes. As for the first, Jobes believes Peter’s word choice signals that he is not referring to the word. First,

⁵Jobes argues that a few commentators have taken alternate positions to the dominant one, some even taking positions close to her own. While she recognizes Harinck as a representative of a view like her own, I have included Harinck among those who primarily see λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα in reference to the word. This judgment is based on his agreement with Elliott that the Greek word-picture “clearly registers the connection of γάλα (‘milk’) to the *logos* at the center of the passage. Just as the children of God are born of the word, they are also continually fed by the word” (Harink, *1 & 2 Peter*, 64, n. 1). Nevertheless, the following do hold positions similar to Jobes’s: John Calvin, *Hebrews and 1 & 2 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The First Epistle of St. Peter: 1:1–2:17* (London: Macmillan, 1898); J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Nelson, 1988).

⁶Jobes, “Got Milk? Revisited,” 122.

⁷“To crave ‘pure spiritual milk’ means to crave what nurtures growth of spiritual life after rebirth into the new reality that Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension has created. This certainly includes the word of God in both its printed and preached forms as foundational, but is not limited to it” (ibid., 125).

λογικός is “not a very apt way of referring to the word of God.”⁸ Indeed, had Peter desired to refer to the word, “he surely could have used the exegetical genitive τὸ γάλα τοῦ λόγου (‘the milk of the word’).”⁹ While this argument appears initially persuasive, it is weakened by the flexibility of language and the imprecise science of determining how an author is likely to use language. Further, one need only explain why Peter would use the language he does to dull the sharp edge of Jobes’s argument, and there is an apt explanation. Peter elsewhere shows an attraction to similar sounding words (1:4, 10, 19; 2:12, 15, 16, 18–20, 21, 25; 3:2, 14, 16, 17, 18b; 4:4, 11, 12; 5:2, 3, 10, 12),¹⁰ and in this case, λογικὸν and ἄδολον agree in assonance. Further, it is possible, as will be argued below, that Peter chose λογικὸν for *both* its verbal similarity with λόγος and for its lexical meaning (see below on defining λογικός).

Second, Jobes agrees with Beare and Hort in her conclusion that λογικός “could never be equivalent for τοῦ λόγου, despite etymological similarity.”¹¹ This quote highlights one problem with defining λογικός by λόγος, for it is sometimes accomplished through etymology, often considered an exegetical fallacy.¹² Jobes notes, however, that “few modern interpreters would commit an etymological fallacy,” and so she suggests modern commentators derive the meaning of λογικός in other ways.¹³ Yet it is important to note that both scholars Jobes cites in reference to the exegetical fallacy (Donald Carson and Moises Silva) provide a major exception. Carson says, “I am far from suggesting that etymological study is useless. It is...especially [important] in attempts to understand the meanings of *hapax legomena*...Although etymology is a clumsy tool for discerning meaning, the lack of comparative material means we sometimes have no other choice.”¹⁴ Moises Silva agrees, indicating that the value of etymology “varies inversely with the quantity of material available for the language.”¹⁵

⁸Ibid., 122.

⁹Jobes, “Got Milk?” 3.

¹⁰Elliott, *1 Peter*, 65.

¹¹Jobes, “Got Milk?” 3; Francis Wright Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 115; Hort, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*, 100.

¹²An exegetical fallacy occurs when an exegete mishandles a text because of a false principle of interpretation. In this case, the fallacy is believing that the root elements of the word determine the meaning of the word. That this is a fallacy, at least in some cases, can be seen in the English word *butterfly*, for surely the insect is not the combination of a fly and butter!

¹³Jobes, “Got Milk?” 3.

¹⁴D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 33.

¹⁵Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 42.

In this case, we have a word that occurs only twice in all biblical literature (here and Rom 12:1), and its use outside biblical literature is complex.¹⁶ Therefore, etymology may be useful in this passage. Indeed, some modern commentators appeal to etymology to help decide the meaning of the adjective. Joel B. Green, for instance, says “the suffix –ικος (-ikos) suggests the sense of ‘belonging to’ or ‘pertaining to’—in this case, then, ‘pertaining to λόγος (logos)’ and so inviting the reading, ‘pertaining to verbal communication.’”¹⁷

In sum, Jobes rightly demurs etymology, for it does not always lead to positive results. Nevertheless, as Carson and Silva note, etymology’s value increases substantially as the number of uses of the word decreases. In this case, etymology may be one of the few ways modern scholars can determine the precise meaning of Peter’s lexical choice. Further, one should not underestimate the creative writing of Peter, who shows literary capability throughout the text.¹⁸ Accordingly, the similarity of λογικός by λόγος is likely intentional. Peter’s readers/listeners would be expected to recognize the wordplay, for the terms occur within four verses of one another. Unfortunately, modern chapter divisions tend to obscure the close proximity of the terms.

Jobes’s third argument against a word-interpretation pertains to the only other passage where the adjective λογικός occurs in biblical literature—Romans 12:1. She rightly claims that it is reasonable to expect that the two uses would be similar. But “word” seems unnatural in Romans 12:1, where the translation would be something like, “I appeal to you...to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,...which is your (λογικὴν) *wordly* worship.”¹⁹ In response, the meaning of λογικός in Romans 12:1 is far from clear, as any survey of commentaries on Romans will reveal. Further, as Jobes herself notes, “The sense of the word need not be the same in both [passages].”²⁰ The varied uses of the term in non-biblical Greek attest to its range of meaning, and this necessarily undercuts any suggestion that the two meanings must be the same.²¹ As such, while a harmony of use between Romans 12:1 and our passage in regard to λογικός would be convenient, the flexibility of language will not allow dogmatism here.

¹⁶See McCartney’s article for a summary of the disagreements among lexicons and theological dictionaries (Dan G. McCartney, “Λογικός in 1 Peter 2, 2,” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 82 [1991]: 128–32).

¹⁷Green, *1 Peter*, 53, n. 57. Cf. Hiebert, *First Peter*, 114; Marshall, *1 Peter*, 64; Vahrenhorst, *Der Erste Brief Des Petrus*, 99.

¹⁸See Elliott, who spends five pages highlighting various features in 1 Peter that “indicate the rhetorical competence and literary refinement of the author” (Elliott, *1 Peter*, 64–68).

¹⁹This translation broadly follows the NRSV.

²⁰Jobes, “Got Milk?” 6.

²¹See again the summary in McCartney, “Λογικός in 1 Peter 2, 2.”

The second adjective, ἄδολον, also provides evidence against the word-view, according to Jobes. While those “shaped by the modernist controversies about the inerrancy of the Bible, understand *adolon* to mean ‘unadulterated’ or ‘uncontaminated,’ that is, truth unmixed with false doctrine,”²² Jobes argues that Greco-Roman culture provides a better context in which this word is to be understood. Here Jobes cites favorably the work of Philip Tite in his insightful article concerning the Greco-Roman understanding of milk, mothers, and nursemaids.²³ Taking his cue from the use of γάλα, Tite argues that the “Petrine author has constructed a coherent metaphor revolving around the nursing-milk image. Consequently, it is necessary that all elements, including these two adjectives, are read as contributing to that image.”²⁴ It is in reference to Tite’s understanding of ἄδολον that Jobes finds common ground, for as Tite demonstrates, in the Roman world, a direct correlation was drawn between the moral *purity* of the milk (based on the moral nature of the nursemaid) and the moral development of the child.²⁵ Thus, Tite believes that with Peter’s use of this adjective, “the nursing-milk metaphor becomes an exhortation for *moral development*, to follow the path of virtue rather than vice.”²⁶ On this basis, Jobes claims that “the cultural significance of nursing a baby in the Greco-Roman world” moves one “toward understanding the [milk] metaphor more broadly than a reference to the word of God preached or inscripturated.”²⁷

While Tite’s work undoubtedly shows the moral nature of Peter’s exhortation, such a moral nature is not in dispute.²⁸ The intimate connection between the putting off in verse one and the craving in verse two are clearly contrasted, making it difficult to avoid interpreting the metaphor with a moral emphasis. Therefore, Tite’s understanding of ἄδολον does not necessarily move one towards Jobes’s position. In fact, Tite himself concludes that τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα is best understood as “high quality word-like milk.”²⁹ Such an understanding is clearly in line with the broader biblical theme that the word of God leads to

²²Jobes, “Got Milk? Revisited,” 123. It is important to note that Jobes affirms inerrancy; nevertheless, she does not find reference to it in this text (Jobes, *1 Peter*, 132).

²³Philip L. Tite, “Nurslings, Milk and Moral Development in the Greco-Roman Context: A Reappraisal of the Paraenetic Utilization of Metaphor 1 Peter 2.1–3,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (2009): 371–400.

²⁴Ibid., 388.

²⁵For the full development of the argument, see *ibid.*, 378–86.

²⁶Ibid., 389, emphasis added; Jobes, “Got Milk? Revisited,” 124.

²⁷Jobes, “Got Milk? Revisited,” 124.

²⁸Even Grudem, whom Jobes highlights as limiting the milk analogy to the word, connects the drinking of the milk to moral growth into holiness (Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 96).

²⁹Tite, “Nurslings, Milk and Moral Development,” 386.

moral growth (Ps 119:9; Acts 20:32; 2 Tim 3:16–17; Jas 1:21–22). Therefore, while the discussion concerning milk in the Greco-Roman historical-context is fascinating and at times eye-opening, it does not indicate that ἄδολον requires an interpretation different than the traditional interpretation; indeed, Tite finds the traditional, word-milk interpretation quite compatible with the historically informed word-picture.

Contextual Arguments

Alongside the lexical arguments listed above, Jobes supplies a few contextual arguments. First, Jobes claims there is a lack of “metaphorical coherence” between the analogy of the word as seed (bringing new life—1:23) and the word as milk (sustaining life—2:2).³⁰ In other words, if Peter means to use “word” with two different metaphorical senses, he has done so with an “abrupt and unaided shift.”³¹ This is unlikely, Jobes implies, and therefore, the reader ought to search for another interpretation of the contested word γάλα.

In response, Elliott has drawn attention to Peter’s fondness for merging metaphors: “Blending of images and traditions are typical of this letter and are found elsewhere in 1:13–21; 2:4–10, 21–25; 3:18–22; and 4:12–19.”³² For example, chapter 1:13–21 compares the reader to a loin-girder (1:13), a child (1:14), a sojourner (1:17), and to one who has been redeemed (1:18). Such images may lack “metaphorical coherence,” but they are nevertheless compatible and are fruitfully combined to accomplish Peter’s purpose. Second, Jobes herself recognizes that it is possible to understand “that the word of God, as both seed and milk, both initiates and sustains new life in Christ.”³³ Such a logical connection undermines her claim that the metaphors lack any coherence, for in both *life* is pictured. In fact, Grudem suggests that Peter’s description of the word as “living” (1:23) “suits not only the idea that it is life-generating but also the idea that it is life-giving and capable of nourishing and sustaining life.”³⁴ Finally, Peter’s soteriology highlights that salvation is not only an *event* (1:3, 18; 2:10), but is also a *process* (1:9; 2:2). For this reason, Green finds it theologically appropriate that there is a “melding of the human-biological and horticultural images of seed and growth.”³⁵

Jobes’s second contextual argument focuses on what she notes as a lack of explicit attention to the context of 2:1–3 as a distinct unit:

³⁰Jobes, “Got Milk?” 3–4.

³¹Ibid., 4.

³²Elliott, *1 Peter*, 405.

³³Jobes, “Got Milk?” 4.

³⁴Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 95.

³⁵Green, *1 Peter*, 50.

“Although most commentators take 1:23–25 to be the immediate context of 2:1–3, the referent of the milk metaphor must first be logically related to the rest of the sentence in which it occurs, which in the Greek spans verses 2:1–3.”³⁶ Jobes finds evidence for her view in both verse 1 and verse 3. As for verse 1, the participle ἀποθέμενοι is used six times in the New Testament, and in each case, the command to put off is associated with a command to do something morally virtuous instead (Rom 13:12; Eph 4:22, 25; Col 3:8; Heb 12:1; Jas 1:21).³⁷ In this case, γάλα stands in the place of the pursuit of moral virtues, and should therefore be interpreted most broadly as referencing the pursuit of moral virtues—not limited narrowly to the word of God.

Three responses can be made to Jobes’s argument from 2:1. First, as noted above, few interpreters doubt the passage has significant moral weight, and a strong case can be made that craving and ingesting the word are the very means by which moral transformation takes place. Second, the parallel with James 1:21 serves to undermine her case, for there, James calls his readers to δέξασθε τὸν ἐμφυτον λόγον (welcome the implanted *word*). More will be said about this verse below.

Finally, if 2:1–3 is part of the broader argument started in 1:22, which we will argue for below, then Peter has provided a positive moral injunction prior to the statement of putting off. In other words, in 1:22 Peter focuses on the *need for love* among the fellowship (a moral injunction), while 2:1 provides the alternative to love. As Green says, “The behaviors that Peter negates in 2:1 have their positive alternative in the deceptively simple directive in 1:22: ‘love one another.’”³⁸ Of course, this does not indicate that Peter did not mean for the milk to function as the “putting on” element. Nevertheless, the contrast between the positive moral virtue in 1:22 and the negative vices in 2:1 highlights that 2:1–3 is not an island on its own; its moral injunction to crave the milk makes best sense when the broader context of 1:22–2:3 is considered.

More important to Jobes’s contextual argument than 2:1, however, is the quotation of LXX Psalm 33 in 2:3. Jobes calls this a “more immediate exegetical control on how the milk metaphor was intended than the more distant verses in 1:22–25.”³⁹ How does the citation of this Psalm lead away from a word-milk interpretation? First, LXX Psalm 33 does not speak of the word of God, and Peter, as Jobes’s

³⁶Jobes, “Got Milk?” 6.

³⁷Jobes, “Got Milk? Revisited,” 124.

³⁸Green, *1 Peter*, 48. Helm shows how these vices work opposite of love: “The things we are to ‘put away’ have one thing in common. They all undo other people. They destroy relationships” (David R. Helm, *1 and 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ’s Sufferings*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008], 69). See also, Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 93.

³⁹Jobes, “Got Milk?” 8.

commentary argues, is careful to use his citations with a view towards their original context. Closely aligned with the first reason is a second; if Peter had desired to use a taste metaphor in reference to the word of God, he had a perfect alternative in Psalm 119:103: "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!"⁴⁰ Finally, Jobes implies that 2:3 connects the milk metaphor to Christ in a way more appropriate to a *general* moral exhortation than to the *specific* word of God.⁴¹

Despite the centrality of this argument in Jobes's case, I believe the LXX citation can be fruitfully understood within the framework of a word-view of the passage. I agree with Jobes that Peter uses Scripture in a way that is sensitive to the context, yet I am not sure that Peter's use of this citation provides the ultimate means of ascertaining the identity of the milk metaphor. And while Jobes is correct to note that the LXX passage does not reference the word of God, 2:3 itself identifies the item being tasted as the Lord Himself. Therefore, if one can establish that Peter believes engaging Scripture leads to an experience with the Lord, then Peter has used Psalm 33 appropriately. And, indeed, there is reason to believe that Peter would see such a connection.

In 1:10–12 Peter indicates that Jesus is both the *source* and the *content* of the prophecies that provided for the readers the good news. In 1:25 Peter cited Isaiah 40:6–7, in which he notably substituted the LXX's ῥῆμα τοῦ θεοῦ (word of God) for ῥῆμα κυρίου (word of the Lord), highlighting Jesus's connection to the word. And in 2:8 unbelievers stumble "because they do not obey the word," yet what they stumble over is actually Christ, "a stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." To be clear, I am not arguing that Peter *identifies* Jesus with the word; rather, I agree with I. Howard Marshall who argues that Peter turns from the milk metaphor to considering Jesus in 2:3, not because he turns away from the word, but rather because the result of pursuing the word is to receive Christ himself. In other words, Peter "reflects the common Christian belief that in the Word we meet with the Lord Himself."⁴²

If the above is accurate,⁴³ the logic of the passage is as follows: you

⁴⁰Jobes, "Got Milk? Revisited," 123–24.

⁴¹Jobes, "Got Milk?" 9–10.

⁴²In support, Marshall notes Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 3:17 and the overall Johannine theme that God, Christ, and the Word all "remain in" Christians (John 15:4; 1 John 2:14, 24; 4:12; Marshall, *1 Peter*, 65). See also Balz and Schrage, who note that "Dieser Appell an die Erfahrung bezieht sich nicht auf das Schmecken des Herrn im Abendmahl, sondern auf die Güte des Herrn in seinem Wort bei der Neuwerdung des Menschen" ["This appeal to experience does not refer to the taste of the Lord in the sacrament, but to the goodness of the Lord in his word in the regeneration of man.] (Horst Balz and Wolfgang Schrage, *Die "Katholischen" Briefe: die Briefe des Jakobus, Petrus, Johannes und Judas* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980], 83).

⁴³Further support for a close connection between Jesus and the word is possibly discerned in Peter's language in 2:3. He notes that his readers have tasted that the

have tasted the goodness of the Lord by experiencing him through the word, therefore, long after that same word.⁴⁴ Green comes to a similar conclusion, suggesting that Peter's use of both Isaiah 40 and Psalm 33 are intentional: "Having substituted 'Lord' for the LXX's 'God' in Isa. 40:8, he recalls his identification of Jesus as Lord in 2:3 and so opens this text to a reading in which the 'word' is the good news concerning Jesus (1:25), the Lord whose goodness has been tasted (2:3)."⁴⁵

As for why Peter chose to use this text rather than Psalm 119:103, at least two answers can be provided. First, as Jobes herself notes, "The language of Ps 33 echoes throughout the first half of Peter's letter."⁴⁶ Having this Psalm on his mind, a Psalm Jobes shows to be well-suited to address Peter's readers in "exile," Peter continues to allude to it for rhetorical effect.⁴⁷ Second, the Psalm matches nicely with Peter's concern that his readers love one another, particularly that they would avoid guile and inappropriate speech, two qualities referenced in both Psalm 33 and 1 Peter 2:1.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE WORD VIEW

While I have addressed some reasons to believe Peter is referencing the milk as the word of God while responding to Jobes's arguments above, this section will turn more specifically to providing argumentation for the word view. But before addressing those arguments, it is necessary to define what is meant by the "word of God." I believe a significant amount of Jobes's criticism of the word-view may result from a too limited view of what Peter would include under the rubric

Lord is good. Peter implies that their taste should bring forth a further appetite, and therefore, one ought to ask what the readers had tasted. Clearly, they have tasted the Lord, but how does this tasting of the Lord connect with the rest of the context? Perhaps the wordplay in the passage may help. Peter says they have tasted that *χρηστός ὁ κύριος* (the Lord is good). *χρηστός* differs from *χριστός* in only one vowel and the two words were possibly pronounced identically in the Koine period (Elliott, *1 Peter*, 404). Thus, Peter may be hinting that his readers have come to recognize that the Lord is Christ, particularly that Jesus is *the* Christ. How did they come to this knowledge? Through the word of God, which prophesied the person and timing of Christ (1:10–12).

⁴⁴Achtemeier, seeing the connection in this passage, concludes that it is "appropriate for Christians who were rebegotten by the word of God to yearn for that word" (Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 147).

⁴⁵Green, *1 Peter*, 50.

⁴⁶Jobes, "Got Milk?" 10.

⁴⁷Among Peter's many citations or allusions to LXX Psalm 33 (ibid., 10–12), a number do not seek to engage in the broader context of the Psalm, but are rather used by Peter for their more narrow truth-content. For example, Jobes believes Peter uses 33:2 in 1 Peter 1:3, and yet LXX Psalm 33:2 is not speaking directly about new birth. Thus, Peter may be using 33:9 in a similar way here; i.e., by using the language of the Psalm that while true to the idea contained in the words, does not seek to invoke the *entire* context of the Psalm.

of the “word of God.”

If, as I will argue below, the theme of 1:22–2:3 concerns the word of God, then a full orbed understanding of the word must be informed by 2:3, where the word is closely related to Christ. On such a basis, Clowney suggests that the word-milk is not simply the Scriptures, but is “the full gospel message that we find in this letter, grounded in the revelation of the Old Testament and expanded in the sweep of apostolic teaching.”⁴⁸ Such an extension is consistent with the authority given to the apostles in the early church. Additionally, Barbarick suggests that Jobes misses the emphasis on the milk-word as the “proclaimed gospel; that is, the narrative of Christ’s path through suffering and death into vindication and glorification, the parabolic pattern of his life.”⁴⁹ This pattern is a core element of 1 Peter, a pattern first prophesied in the Hebrew Scriptures, subsequently enacted by Christ, and now being replicated in the lives of Peter’s readers. In sum, the word of God during the apostolic period should not be limited to written documents but should also include apostolic teaching.⁵⁰

Lexical Arguments

Though Tite indicates that λογικόν is, for most Petrine scholars, the “exegetical crux for interpreting this passage,” a word-view is not dependent on a particular rendering of the adjective. For instance, Harinck defines λογικός as *rational* and yet finds the word-view most persuasive.⁵¹ Goppelt defines the adjective as spiritual, and subsequently identifies the milk as the word.⁵² Likewise, while Grudem prefers to see λογικός as indicating *metaphorical*, he has also embraced the word-view.⁵³ Thus, numerous definitions of λογικός may be embraced by those who defend a word-view.

Nevertheless, McCartney has made a persuasive case for the word-view through research that shows the adjective means “pertaining to verbal communication.”⁵⁴ His article demonstrates the substantial

⁴⁸Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*, 79.

⁴⁹Barbarick, “Craving the Milk in 1 Peter,” 135.

⁵⁰The same point can be made from a different angle. At this historical point, the NT canon was not compiled, and so Peter could not include it directly. Nevertheless, what we have today in the NT is the faithful record of apostolic teaching. For modern readers, then, the milk only refers to the Word of God, composed of the OT and the NT.

⁵¹Harinck, *1 & 2 Peter*, 65.

⁵²“In substance λογικός has the same meaning as πνευματικός in 2:5; it is used here because what one drinks is the Word” (Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, 131, n. 47).

⁵³Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 95.

⁵⁴McCartney, “Λογικός in 1 Peter 2, 2.”

disagreement among the major Greek lexicons and theological dictionaries concerning the proper definition of λογικός. Taking each of the options presented by these resources, McCartney shows how each of the definitions fails to make sense of the context of 1 Peter 2:2. There is one exception, however, and that is provided in Liddell Scott Jones, which offers a definition of the adjective as “of or for speaking or speech.”⁵⁵ McCartney then shows that while there is only one explicitly clear example of λογικός referring to speech, there is significant evidence that the ancients saw a substantial connection between *rationality* and *verbal articulation*.⁵⁶ McCartney’s conclusion is worth sharing in full:

My conclusion...is that the very common meaning of “rational” was often closely tied to the facility of speech. We tend to think of reason as an abstract, almost mathematical exercise or mental manipulation of “laws”, most basically the law of non-contradiction. But it appears the ancients thought of “reason” as closely associated with the power of verbal communication and persuasion. Ideation and locution were congruent. Hence the importance of rhetoric in the ancient educational curriculum.⁵⁷

Jobes admits that McCartney makes a “compelling case” for his conclusion that some uses of λογικός in ancient literature pertain to “verbal communication.”⁵⁸ Indeed, the quite recent *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* provides further evidence for this position, for it lists “concerning speech or speaking” as the primary definition of the term.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, Jobes believes—as does McCartney—that the context must decide what λογικός means in any particular use. It is there where Jobes and McCartney part ways, with McCartney suggesting a word-view is most contextually appropriate.

Perhaps, however, we do not need to look past the phrase τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα in order to give further evidence for McCartney’s “having to do with the word” translation of λογικόν. I believe Peter’s choice of ἄδολον strengthens McCartney’s argument. While ἄδολον generally means “without deceit” and is used in contexts speaking of

⁵⁵Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Roderick McKenzie, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. with rev. suppl., ed. Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), s.v. “Λοικεῖν/ομαι,” 1056.

⁵⁶Unfortunately, the limitations of the scope of this essay necessitate pointing the reader to see the sources in McCartney (McCartney, “Λογικός in 1 Peter 2, 2,” 131–32).

⁵⁷Ibid., 132.

⁵⁸Jobes, “Got Milk?” 5.

⁵⁹Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder, Bilingual ed. (Boston: Brill, 2015), 1247.

people's *actions*,⁶⁰ there is reason to believe Peter uses it differently here. Clearly there is a relationship between δόλος in 2:1 and ἄδολον in 2:2, and this connection is made clearer by the Psalm quoted in 2:3. Every time Peter uses δόλος he has in mind *verbal deceit*. In 2:22 Peter says that δόλος was not found in the *mouth* of Jesus. In 3:10, Peter cites LXX Psalm 33 to speak of the righteous who keep their *tongues* from evil and their lips from *speaking* δόλος. Of course, 2:3 cites the same Psalm, giving strength to the case that verbal deceit is being referenced by δόλος in 2:1. If so, ἄδολον in 2:2 should also be taken in reference to verbal deceit. Thus ἄδολον, in the phrase, τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, speaks of milk that can be described as a *non-deceptive word*.

Literary Contextual Arguments (1:22–25)

One of the more significant aspects of Jobes's argument is that the context of this passage must be central. She has argued that while most have seen the *broader* context as determinative (1:22–25), this is inappropriate in light of the *nearer* context (2:1–3). Here we will suggest that the broader context plays a more pivotal role than Jobes allows. In other words, the case for the broader context implying the word-view is stronger than Jobes's argument from the nearer context we detailed above.

Peter's use of οὖν in 2:1 suggests an inference from the teaching that has just been given, closely connecting the material in 1:22–25 to 2:1–3.⁶¹ But what is the nature of this connection? In her commentary on 1 Peter, Jobes treats 1:22–2:3 together, and while she does not specifically comment on οὖν, she implies the connection between the two passages concerns the relationship between the seed to new life image and the subsequent infant craving milk image.⁶² In response, Jobes is correct to see the fluidity of the metaphorical images Peter uses, but the consideration just prior to the οὖν is not the new birth, but is a careful consideration of the word of God. Therefore, the connection between them is likely the common theme of the word.

Joel. B. Green has provided further support for such a connection through a structural arrangement of the material.⁶³

⁶⁰Walter Bauer et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 21.

⁶¹Elliott draws further attention to the connection between 2:1–3 and 1:22–25 by showing that the phrase ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη is "technically redundant." Why the adjective? Elliott believes a purpose is found in that ἀρτιγέννητος is related to ἀναγεννάω from 1:23. Consequently, the use of ἀρτιγέννητος here signals that "the phrase as a whole resumes and extends the foregoing birth metaphor and serves as a further means of linking 2:1–3 with 1:22–25" (Elliott, *1 Peter*, 399).

⁶²Jobes, *1 Peter*, 131–32.

⁶³The following structural arrangement is slightly adapted from Green, *1 Peter*, 49.

1:22 a You have consecrated yourselves by obedience to the truth

 **1:22b So love one another!**

 **1:23 God has given you new birth**

1:24–25 The potency of the Word of God

2:1 You have set aside the toxic behaviors of your past life

 **2:2 So yearn for the pure milk of the Word**

 **2:3 You have tasted the kindness of the Lord**

It might be easy to miss the centrality of the word in both passages, but further reflection shows that Peter has placed consideration of the word central in this passage.⁶⁴ First, Peter places the word in the middle of the positive and negative commands we highlighted earlier. In other words, the word connects the putting off relational vices (2:1) and the putting on love (1:22). Second, yearning for milk is significantly related to pursuing love. This is because the love produced in the hearts of the newly born is a product of the rebirth through the word (1:22).⁶⁵ Thus, when the readers seek to put away non-loving behaviors, where else would they look than the word, which is the original source of the love in them?

Finally, Green's structure makes sense of the broader pattern, showing that both commands are surrounded on each side by statements that refer to conversion (1:22a, 23; 2:1, 3). And this conversion makes sense only in light of the power of the word, which is made central in the passage (1:24–25). In sum, the placement of the word in the structure shows its primacy in the whole section and shows that attempts to understand 2:1–3 without reference to the broader context of 1:22–25 must be considered incomplete.

Arguments from Traditional Material

First Peter is well known for its reliance on traditional material,

⁶⁴See also Green who says, "From a cursory perspective, reflection on 'the word' in 1:23b–25 appears parenthetical to the directives Peter puts forward in 1:22; 2:2. Closer examination moves 'the word' to center stage" (ibid., 53).

⁶⁵This requires taking ἀλήθεια as a reference to the word. From Peter's perspective, it is the word that revealed the truth about Jesus (1:10–12), and it is the word about Jesus that brought salvation (1:23, 25). Further, their obedience to this truth is contrasted to the disobedience of unbelievers, which is described as disobeying (ἁπειθέω) the word (2:8). It should be mentioned again that this word is not limited to the written scriptures, but also includes the apostolic teaching then current. This interpretation also requires the clause εἰς φιλαδελφίαν ἀνυπόκριτον to be understood as a result clause, which is reflected in many English translations (NRSV, NIV, TEV; David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Peter*, 2nd ed. [Dallas: SIL International, 2008], 52).

whether from the Old Testament or from then-current teaching.⁶⁶ Consequently, it would be unsurprising to find traditional material that likely plays a significant role in how we should interpret Peter’s milk metaphor. That is precisely what I will argue in this section of the paper. First, we will examine James 1:21, which is a close parallel to Peter’s statement in 2:2. Second, we will observe how milk language in early Christian literature was often associated with the word. Finally, we will look at the teaching of Jesus as recorded in Luke 8 and Mark 4, which likely provided rationale for Peter’s choice of words and metaphors.

The relationship between the book of James and 1 Peter is difficult to determine, but that there is commonality is difficult to deny (see chart below).⁶⁷ While some have suggested literary reliance, Achtemeier notes a “growing consensus” that the relationship is “probably best understood as independent use of common traditions.”⁶⁸ This use of common traditions may span the use of a single word (Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1), or span the course of an entire section (Jas 5:5–9; 1 Pet 4:6–10). Such extensive sharing of traditional material should not be surprising, argues Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, for “if the authors are James, the brother of Jesus, and Peter, the outspoken disciple and leader, there would be good reason for thematic overlap, given their years of working together.”⁶⁹ Therefore, there are both historical and literary reasons to believe Peter and James shared traditional material. With these thoughts in mind, we will examine James 1:21.

Parallels Between First Peter and James	
Peter	James
1:1	1:1
1:6–7	1:2–3
1:23–2:2	1:10–11
2:1–2	1:21
2:11	4:1
4:8	5:20
5:5–9	4:6–10

⁶⁶Moo and Carson note, “Probably no other letter in the New Testament is said to rely so much on traditional material as is 1 Peter” (D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* [New York: HarperCollins, 2009], 640).

⁶⁷Modified from Mark Allan Powell, *Introducing the New Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 467. Powell did not include 2:2 in his comparison with 1:21, though he did include 2:1.

⁶⁸While Achtemeier wrote these words in 1996, the situation does not appear to have changed since then (Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 20).

⁶⁹Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, “Endurance unto Salvation: The Witness of First Peter and James,” *Word & World* 35 (2015): 232.

James 1:21 says, “Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls.” James uses the same verb in 1:21a that Peter uses to refer to putting off evil characteristics in 2:1 (ἀποτίθημι). Further, both James and Peter suggest the positive alternative is to receive something that will lead to salvation. The two men disagree however on the word-picture they use to describe what will lead to moral change and ultimately salvation. For Peter, it is τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα, but for James it is the ἔμφυτον λόγον (implanted word; cf. Jam 1:18). Davids defines this implanted word within James as “the preaching of the gospel.”⁷⁰ But how can one receive what has been implanted? Davids indicates that this appears contradictory, but once one understands that the “gospel consists of both a word about Jesus and ethical content,” a more interpretive translation of the phrase could be supplied: “Act upon the word you accepted at conversion.”⁷¹ Such an interpretation works well in James, and it suggests a direct parallel with the language in 1 Peter, where the same *word* that brought conversion (new birth) is the same *word* that the reader must look to for continued growth into salvation.⁷² Further, that James invokes a term that can be understood agriculturally to reference the word (implying its seed-like quality) gives further evidence for common reliance on traditional material, since Peter also uses agricultural imagery.⁷³

If they used common traditional material, why did Peter use the metaphor of milk instead of the more explicit way James spoke? Of course, part of the answer is that the analogy from new birth to the need for milk fits human experience well. Additionally, however, Peter may be drawing upon another strand of traditional material. Elliott leads in this direction when he says, “The linking of nursing or milk metaphors with the word of the good news in 1 Thess 2:7; Hebrews 5:12–13/6:5; *Barn.* 6:17 suggests that this is the association implied here as well.”⁷⁴ For example, Hebrews 5:12 speaks of the need for Christians to have milk, because they need to be retaught the basic

⁷⁰Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 95.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Elliott also argues that “the milk metaphor (1 Cor 3:1–2; *Odes Sol.* 8:13–16; 19:1–2), like reference to the “implanted word that is able to save you” (Jas 1:21), probably belonged to the catechetical tradition upon which Christian authors drew” (Elliott, *1 Peter*, 404).

⁷³The word ἔμφυτος is a *hapax* and is generally used in non-biblical Greek to refer to something innate. A strong case can be made here that it invokes the agricultural image. This is how McCartney understands it when he says the seed “is already implanted in the believer and cannot fail (good seed that is received into the ground will always grow up and bear fruit)” (Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009], 118). See the discussion below for evidence that the traditional material being appealed to here and in 1 Peter is Jesus’s parable of the soils.

⁷⁴Elliott, *1 Peter*, 399.

elements of the λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ (oracles of God; 5:12). Those who continually need milk are those who are γάλακτος ἄπειρος λόγου δικαιοσύνης (unskilled in the word of righteousness; 5:13).⁷⁵ First Thessalonians 2:7 also uses milk-like language and refers to the word. In that passage, Paul refers to himself as a nurse caring for children, which naturally evokes the image of nursing in the ancient world. Part of his duty as a nurse, Paul indicates, is to share τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ (the gospel of God), and not to speak λόγῳ κολακείας (words of flattery; 2:5).

Finally, while the *Epistle of Barnabas* post-dates 1 Peter, it may nevertheless give some evidence to the usage of milk metaphors in traditional material. Barnabas 6:17 says, “What then is the milk and the honey? Because the child is first kept alive by honey, and then by milk. So in like manner we also, being kept alive by our faith in the promise and by the word, shall live and be lords of the earth.” In this passage, honey is paralleled with faith, while milk is paralleled with the word. Thus, while none of the above passages proves Peter referred to the word as milk, the frequent mention of the word alongside milk-language gives some evidence for the word-view.

The final argument from traditional material appeals to Peter’s use of Jesus’s teaching. Numerous scholars have noted a possible allusion to the parable of the soils here (Matt 13:1–23, Mark 4:1–20, and Luke 8:4–21).⁷⁶ The following will seek to flesh out that connection.⁷⁷ First, both passages speak about seed, identified as the word of God, that produces new life (Mark 4:14; 1 Pet 1:23). Clearly, there is some level of discontinuity in the images, for in 1 Peter the product of the seed is a newborn, while in the parable, the seed is compared to agricultural seed, producing fruit. Nevertheless, both uses of seed invoke the same word (σπόρος), and in relation to the topic at hand (seed that produces life), their similarities are significant.

Further, the agricultural metaphor is certainly present in 1:23. The quotation from Isaiah 40 makes best sense if the seed in 1:23 referred to agricultural seed. On this reading, Peter’s mind went to Isaiah 40

⁷⁵As even a cursory reading of the two passages will reveal, 1 Peter and Hebrews use the milk image differently. Hebrews relates it to the need of the immature, 1 Peter relates it to the need of all saints, regardless of maturity. Further, Peter never envisions a time when the milk will not be necessary, while Hebrews looks forward to a time when such milk will no longer be necessary. While both milk metaphors refer to the word, Hebrews uses the milk-word metaphor to speak of the elementary doctrines, while Peter speaks of the milk-word metaphor more expansively to refer to the teaching pertinent to the entire Christian walk.

⁷⁶Green, *1 Peter*, 52; Michaels, *1 Peter*, 76; Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, 2nd ed., International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 1902), 123; J. G. Gourbillon and F. M. Du Buit, *Première Épître de Saint Pierre*, *Évangile* 50 (Paris: Évangile, 1963), 29.

⁷⁷The text of Peter does not indicate literary reliance on any of the Gospels directly. It is likely that the text reflects oral tradition (Achtmeier, *1 Peter*, 21–23).

and its comparison with grass and flowers, because the product of God's imperishable seed of the word (imagined agriculturally) will not wither or fall. This reading requires a shift to take place between the images in 1:22–25 and 2:1–3, from agricultural fruit to new human life. Nevertheless, the shift is natural and in line with what Elliott elsewhere calls Peter's affinity for "blending" of metaphors.⁷⁸ Further, Peter's shift follows naturally from Jesus's parable, which suggests that there is an analogy between agricultural seed-bearing fruit and the new life that results from receiving what James calls the "implanted word."

A second connection between Jesus's parable of the soils and 1 Peter 1:22–2:3 is that in both the seed is designed to bring about growth that ends in salvation (Luke 8:12, 15; 1 Pet 2:2). Peter explicitly says that those who long for the milk will grow up (αὐξάνω) into salvation. Mark 4:8 speaks of the good soil that produced grain that growing up (αὐξάνω) produced much fruit. Those of the good soil, "hear the word and accept it and bear fruit" (Mark 4:20), while those soils that reject the word do not believe and are therefore ultimately condemned (Luke 8:12). Thus, Peter's merging of new birth and growth images toward the teleological vision of endurance in good works towards final salvation is not unique to him; rather, he learned the pattern from Jesus. And while Peter modifies Jesus's pure agricultural metaphor in order to introduce the milk metaphor, the underlying message remains the same: *one must both receive and continue in the word so that he or she can grow up into salvation.*⁷⁹

CONCLUSION

In summary, lexical and contextual considerations lean in favor of the milk being used as a metaphor for the word. While some have understood λογικόν purely in light of etymology, following McCartney's careful arguments, it is best to understand the word to mean "pertaining to verbal communication." The similarity between λογικόν and λογός, however, is probably intentional, used by the author *both* because of the author's penchant for literary connections as well as the term's lexical meaning. The addition of the adjective ἄδολον also highlights the verbal nature of the analogy, for everywhere Peter uses δόλος he speaks of verbal deceit. The combination of these two adjectives highlights the verbal aspect of the milk image, making it highly likely that he meant to refer to the word of God. Added to these lexical arguments, the context of 1:22–2:3 suggests the centrality of the word for the entire section. The broader context of first century teaching

⁷⁸Elliott, *1 Peter*, 405.

⁷⁹Green suggests that Luke 8:19–20 is suggestive as well. In that passage, Jesus indicates that it is those who hear and do the word that are in his true family. Peter definitely implies a familial connection throughout his text, yet such a connection is not as clear as the connections highlighted above (Green, *1 Peter*, 52).

provides further evidence, both in the way milk analogies were used during the period (usually associated with the word of God), and in the literary connections between this passage and other New Testament teaching (particularly Jesus's parable of the soils and James's consideration of the implanted word).