

# The expression λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα as the key to 1 Peter 2:1-3

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## Abstract

*This article argues that the author of 1 Peter uses the expression λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα not as a reference to the word of God as is suggested by many modern scholars (Achte-meier; Boring), but rather to the whole doctrine of Christ resulting in a new way of life (Jobes). The article consists of an overview of First Peter, its authorship and audience and the characteristics of the letter. It discusses the texts of both 1 Peter 2:1-3 and its influence by LXX Psalm 33.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In this paper it will be argued that the author's reference to the λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα is not about the word of God as is suggested by many modern scholars (cf Achte-meier 1996:146-147; Boring 1999:92), but rather the whole doctrine of Christ resulting in a new way of life (cf Jobes 2005:141). This will be done firstly through an overview of First Peter, the author, his audience, and the characteristics of the letter. Secondly the texts of both 1 Peter 2:1-3 and the LXX Psalm 33 will be discussed. Thirdly the context of LXX Psalm 33 will be discussed and it will be shown that this has had at least some influence on 1 Peter 2:1-3 (cf Terrien 2003:304; Jobes 2005:139). Fourthly a summary of the previous interpretations of this allusion will be given, while this will be followed by a discussion of the phrase λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα. Here each of these words' meanings and usage will be discussed in order to substantiate the argument that together with LXX Psalm 33 the author here referred to the new way of life in Christ and not the word of God.

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## **2. ABOUT FIRST PETER**

There is little disagreement on the epistolary form of 1 Peter (cf Martin 1992:41), with a clearly defined prescript, thanksgiving, letter-body (body-opening, body-middle, and body-closing), greeting section and farewell. It has also been accepted by most scholars that this letter is paraenetic (cf Selwyn 1946:438; Martin 1992:85, 139), while in paraenetic texts the exhortations are based on the ontological status of the addressed. According to Martin (1992:141) most of the ontological statements in 1 Peter are metaphorical. Since a paraenetic text uses the ontological status of the reader, and since most of the ontological statements are made metaphorically, the metaphors are important for understanding the text.

From the Patristic age there has been division as to whether the Christians addressed in this letter were Jewish or Gentile (cf Selwyn 1952:42). Most of these ancient interpreters accepted the recipients to be Jewish converts, except Augustine and Jerome (cf Jobes 2005:23). Calvin also held the view that they were Jewish and understood *παρεπιδήμοις διασπορᾶς* as literal. It is plausible that they were mostly Jews since Antiochus III sent two thousand Jews there at the end of the third century BCE (Mitchell 1993:32), and there thus had to be a fairly large Jewish community.

The generous use of the Old Testament in 1 Peter cannot be denied (cf Woan 2004:213), and according to Boring (1999:95-96) it is obvious that the author of 1 Peter is saturated with the biblical text, and he seems to assume the same familiarity with his readers. Boring however still feels that the readers are predominantly Gentile, and possibly even the author.

It has also been argued that the allusions and quotations were part of early Christian tradition. Davids states:

... all of the quotations and many of the allusions were part of early Christian tradition, which had pre-selected the themes for Peter. As Snodgrass and others have shown, there is no evidence for the literary dependence of 1 Peter on any Christian or pre-Christian source. But the parallels with the similar passages in Romans, Ephesians, James, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, to name but the most significant works that have been suggested as sources, are impressive enough that we may conclude that these themes, including the supporting passages, were “in the air” of, in many cases, both Judaism and the early church. Peter’s readers would likely have recognized the familiar tone of these citations.

(Davids 1990:25)

Therefore this paper agrees with Selwyn (1952:43-44) who says that “Either view (Jewish or Gentile), if exclusively held, encounters serious difficulties.”

### 3. THE TEXT – 1 PETER 2:1-3

The importance of LXX Psalm 33 in 1 Peter has been argued by some scholars, noting that it was in Peter’s mind in its entirety (Jobes 2005:137). Jobes (2005:137) feels that the language and thoughts of the Psalm can be found throughout 1 Peter 1-3. Jobes finds the reference to the prophets in 1:10-12 to be a reference to the psalmist in this case. Further on we find the allusion to the Psalm in 2:1-3, and the long quotation in 3:10-12.

When we look at the direct allusion to Psalm 33:9 in 1 Peter 2:3, we find the evidence conclusive.

1 Pt 2:3 εἰ ἐγεύσασθε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος

Ps 33:9 γεύσασθε καὶ ἴδετε ὅτι χρηστὸς ὁ κύριος, μακάριος  
ἀνὴρ, ὃς ἐλπίζει ἐπ’ αὐτόν

The only difference is the change of mood from the imperative to the indicative, and the absence of the second verb “to see”. The change in mood can be because of his understanding that the readers of this letter already tasted the Lord, while the omission of the second verb is probably because of the use of the milk-metaphor in 1 Peter 2:2. When we consider the close proximity of this direct allusion in 2:3 to 2:1, where we find similar thoughts to LXX Psalm 33:13, it seems likely that we can assume the author is alluding to the Psalm here as well.

1 Pt 2:1 Ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν καὶ πάντα δόλον καὶ  
ὑποκρίσεις καὶ φθόνους καὶ πάσας

Ps 33:14 παῦσον τὴν γλῶσσάν σου ἀπὸ κακοῦ καὶ χεῖλῃ σου  
τοῦ μὴ λαλῆσαι δόλον

Dauids (1990:25) denies the allusion in 1 Peter 2:1, but the terms “evil” (κακός) and “deceit” (δόλος), and the fact that it is so close to another allusion to the same Psalm in 1 Peter 2:3 makes it more plausible (cf Woan 2004:222).

1 Peter 2:1-3 is part of the first major section of this letter: 1:13-2:10. 2:1 Reflects the form of a “vice catalogue” which was prominent in Pauline

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tradition and paraenesis of the Dead Sea Scrolls (cf Boring 1999:91). It is however, interesting that we do not find the typical second part of a vice catalogue, namely a list of things that is expected of a Christian. Rather we find another allusion to the same Psalm.

In 2:1-3 the author connects the passage to 1:3 where the theme of new birth is introduced. In 2:2 we find the only imperative in this passage (which is to crave), but through this imperative the participial clause in 2:1 is also imperatival. They both instruct the readers on what is expected of them since they have been reborn (1:3), and through the word of God in 1:23-25 it is possible. According to Eriksson (1991:113) the function of the quotation of Psalm 34:9a in 1 Peter 2:3 is to bring the admonition to a close whilst confirming it.

According to Boring (1999:91), there are definite baptismal imagery in the opening participle, while Jobes (2005:131) argues that from the use of Ἐπαυθήμενοι in Romans 13:12; Ephesians 4:22, 25; Colossians 3:8; and James 1:21 it is obvious that it was used idiomatically in the early church to refer to the shedding of behaviour that was inconsistent with the Christian life.

The possibility of intended pun in LXX Psalm 33:9 have been suggested by scholars (cf Jobes 2005:137) where the difference between Christ (χριστός) and good (χρηστός) is only one vowel, while χρηστός is often used in the LXX Psalms as an adjective in reference to God (e.g., Ps 24:8; 33:9; 85:5; 99:5). Boring (1999:92) shows that it can also be used as contrast to the cultural creed promoted by advocates of the Roman civil religion namely “The lord is Caesar”.

#### **4. THE CONTEXT OF THE PSALM**

According to Gunkel (1998:199) Psalm 34 (LXX Ps 33) is a thanksgiving song with its original setting in the worship service, while there are traces of didactic poetry (wisdom poetry) in the latter part of the psalm (cf Craigie 1983:278; Eriksson 1991:68).

The tasting of the Lord's goodness is related to putting hope in him, which in the context of LXX Psalm 33 is a hope for deliverance from shame, affliction and want. According to Jobes (2005:139) this is the same things the Asian Christians their profession of faith in Christ. According to Terrien (2003:304) the invitation to “taste” is an exceptional allusion to a personal experience. Craigie (1983:282) also mentions that this Psalm had different associations for different persons through different periods. It was for example used as a Eucharistic text in the early church due to the phrase “taste and see how good the Lord is”.

There are few differences between the Hebrew and Greek wording. In the Septuagint the translator changed: “from all my fears” (v 4 in the Masoretic Text) to “from all my *sojournings*” (v 5). This seems to be more specifically for their Diaspora setting, although Jobes (2005:138) mentions that it is impossible for us to know whether he did this on purpose to refer back to their situation or whether his situation coloured him so much that he did not relate “fear” with any other term than “sojournings”. The Greek term *πάροικος* is of course then also one of the key words the author uses to describe his audience in First Peter.

Those who seek the Lord for deliverance must stop speaking deceit and evil and must turn away from evil and pursue peace. Thus it is an ethical transformation that qualifies them to be the people whom the Lord will deliver. According to Terrien (2003:304-305) this poem is not a prayer, but a modulated exclamation of joy over divine providence. The poet reveals a personal involvement in the scandal of righteous suffering.

## **5. λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα AS THE KEY?**

The translation and meaning of λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα have long been debated (Jobes 2005:132). While it is almost unanimously understood as the “unadulterated spiritual word of God”. Hort (1898:101) is against the interpretation of γάλα as the word of God, so is Michaels (1988:89) who feels that in the light of 1:25 the medium by which the milk is received must be the proclaimed message of the gospel, the milk however is to be interpreted as the sustaining life of God. Jobes answers to this saying:

therefore, while it is not incorrect to direct Christians to the word of God in Scripture for spiritual sustenance throughout life, it is unlikely that Peter means to limit the milk metaphor exclusively to the written word of God. This would be especially true at a time before the gospel of Jesus Christ is fully and formally inscripturated in the New Testament.

(Jobes 2005:137)

According to Boring (1999: 92) the milk is the word of God that brought their new life into being and continues to nourish it. While Elliott feels that the rendering of the word milk as the word in 1 Thessalonians 2:7; Hebrews 5:12 and Barn 6:7 is enough to convince him. Achtemeier (1996:146-147) argues for milk referring to the word of God. By arguing the root of λογικός being

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λόγος And also comparing it to 1:23 where the allusion to Isaiah refers to seed as the word of God.

The translation of 1 Peter 2:2 found in the NKJV is “desire the pure *milk of the word*”, while Elliott (2000:394) also translates it “the guileless *milk of the word*”. This translation of the Greek is usually based on the cognate relationship between λόγος and λογικός, or by seeing 1:23-25 as the interpretive context for 2:1-3. λογικόν however, is a term rarely used in Christian writings, and could never be equivalent to τὸν λόγον despite any etymological similarity (Jobes 2005:133). But since most scholars are weary of etymological fallacy they base the rendering of milk as the word on the Isaiah quotation in 1:23.

ἄδολον is the negative of the word used for one of the vices in 2:1 (δόλος) Confirming that this metaphor and allusion to LXX Psalm 33 is seen as the answer to the vice catalogue in 2:1. While they are instructed to put off all evil and deceit, they are to crave the guileless milk.

λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα is definitely referring to something different than the σπορας φθαρτῆς ἀλλὰ ἀσθάρτου in 1 Peter 1:23 where the author explicitly meant the word of God. This is confirmed by the fact that the word of God is a prominent feature of Isaiah 40 (which was the quotation in 1 Pt 1:23), while it is not mentioned once in this Psalm. Louw & Nida (1987:675, V1) explains: λογικός, η, ον: pertaining to being genuine, in the sense of being true to the real and essential nature of something – “rational, genuine, true”. Quoting τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν “this is your true worship” from Romans 12:1; and ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα ἐπιτοθήσατε, “as newborn babes you drank the true, unadulterated milk” from 1 Peter 2:2. Since in 1 Peter 2:2 the context is figurative, some translators have preferred to render λογικός as “spiritual,” so as to make the reference not literal but figurative. Michaels (1988:87) and Beare (1970:115) still feels that the best translation for λογικός is “spiritual” since it is a clue that the milk is to be understood metaphorically and not literally (It is notable that the readers most probably would have known that this was to be understood as a metaphor). Jobes (2005:135) argues however that since the word appears so little in early Christian literature, that they probably would mean the same in the instances that they do, therefore “true”.

We do not find the negative connotation to γάλα here as in Hebrews 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 3:1. In contemporary Christian writings milk was usually used either metaphorically or liturgically. Metaphorically it referred to rudiments of the Christian doctrine (e.g., 1 Cor 3:2; Heb 5:12; Odes of Solomon 8:17; 19:1-4; 4:7-10; The Epistle of Barnabas 6:17; Clem Al Paed 1.124, 127) or the whole doctrine of Christ (e.g., Clem Al Paed 1.6).

Liturgically milk mixed with honey was given to newly baptized as a symbol of entry into the promised land, and as food suitable for babies. (e.g., Barn 6.17; Hipp. trad. ap 16; Tertullianus ad versus Marcionem 1.14). While milk has been a symbol of God's grace in Judaism ever since the Promised land was flowing with milk and honey (e.g., Ex 3:8). In James 1:21 γάλα is seen as the grace of God and as here in 1 Peter there is no sign of Christians outgrowing it.

Since milk is such a potent symbol of sustenance it has been used in rituals of several religions. Goppelt (1993:130) however shows that "in no way has the terminology of Gnosticism or of the mystery religions been appropriated" here by Peter (cf Selwyn 1958:305-309). The thought-world of the Greek psalm and that of the author is adequate to explain the milk metaphor.

Furthermore, we find metaphorical incoherence between "milk" (2:2) and "seed" (1:23), which raises the question of whether the same concept, word of God, should be construed as the referent of both metaphors. Goppelt (1993:132) tries to connect these two metaphors describing it as follows: "That those who are born from the word continue to seek the word as a child seeks its mother's milk is not only a life-sustaining obligation; it also corresponds to their actual need."

It, however, makes sense to look at the more immediate context, 2:1-3. Since 2:3 (which is shown to be a direct allusion to LXX Psalm 33) is in a more immediate context than the distant 1:22, and since it is obvious that the entirety of LXX Psalm 33 is in the author's mind as he does quote it again in 3:10-12, we have to consider the contribution of LXX Psalm 33 to the interpretive context.

Further, we find a first-class condition in 2:3 (εἰ, if), which causes the logic of verses 2 and 3 to be "since you have tasted that the Lord is good, crave ...." Thus the implied referent of the milk metaphor is the experience of the Lord himself (cf Jobes 2005:139). Jobes (2005:139) then also notes that the metaphor of taste in LXX Psalm 33:9 is related to putting hope in him, a hope for deliverance from shame, affliction and want. The hope implied in 2:3 forms a conceptual *inclusio* with 1:13. This in other words supports the view that the milk metaphor does not exclusively mean the word of God.

The reading suggested above is consistent with the participle in 2:1 working imperatival together with the imperative in 2:2. They are to crave the Lord by shedding their bad vices and by living according to the behaviours that will keep up the new life they have entered as babies. This is consequently an ethical exhortation, which is consistent with LXX Psalm 33, where they are to stop deceit and evil and follow peace in order to find deliverance from the Lord.

## 6. CONCLUSION

From this study it seems obvious that the λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα cannot refer to the same thing as the Isaiah quotation in 1:23 (which is seen as the interpretive context for 2:1-3 by most scholars). This is argued by the metaphorical incoherence between “seed” in 1:23 and “milk” in 2:2; by the use of milk in early Christianity; by the meaning of λογικόν; and also the typical vice catalogue.

Through these arguments it becomes apparent that the λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα refers to the broader context of the Christian life after conversion and baptism. Jobes (2005:140) states “He is saying that God in Christ alone both conceives and sustains the life of the new birth. They are to crave the Lord God for spiritual nourishment. They have tasted the goodness of the Lord in their conversion, but there is more to be had.” Just as a typical vice catalogue in the New Testament which is followed by what is expected (e.g. Gl 5:19), the readers are here instructed to put away all δόλος and κακία, and to crave the λογικόν ἄδολον γάλα instead.

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