

PETRINE REDEMPTION: ITS MEANING AND EXTENT

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For Peter, redemption is Christ's work, setting people free from their previous lifestyles. Peter does not use Paul's exhaustive redemption concept, which includes features such as justification, forgiveness, and the ultimate departure from the sinful body (Rom 3:24; 7:25; Eph 1:7). Rather, Peter's concept of redemption emphasizes a changed life.

I. THE MEANING OF PETRINE REDEMPTION

The basic concept of redemption is the exchanging of ownership, often by paying a price. Peter expresses this thought with two words. First, *lytroō* means "to set free, redeem or rescue" and often includes paying a ransom.¹ The second word, *agorazō*, emphasizes the market imagery of purchasing goods.² In such an exchange the goods are set free from the seller, usually to be possessed by the purchaser.

Redemption is applied to people when they are freed from a previous owner. For example, both Greek words for redemption are used to describe the purchasing of slaves. Such redemption may result in enslavement to a new owner or in the slave's being set free.³ Furthermore these words express the idea of ransom, wherein a conqueror may free prisoners by defeating their master in battle.⁴ The above examples of human redemption involve the one redeemed exchanging allegiance to the previous dominating power for allegiance to the one accomplishing the redemption. The redemption of people, however, does not require the one redeemed to have a new owner. The person may simply be set free.

The purchase price of the redemption Peter talks about was the death of Christ. For example, Peter heard Jesus say that his purpose in coming was to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45). Such an idea is substitutionary in nature: Jesus died in the place of others.⁵ Peter develops this theme by first designating what the price of redemption was not and then

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¹BAGD 484.

²Ibid., p. 12.

³Both words are used in this way; cf. A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (New York: Harper) 328, 333.

⁴TDNT 4 (1967) 344; MM 383.

⁵TDNT 4 (1967) 343.

identifying what it was (1 Pet 1:18–19). For example, the price was not perishable (*phthartois*), that which is subject to corruption or destruction.⁶ Additionally, silver and gold are mentioned as dross compared to the extreme value (*timē*) of the actual price paid. In contrast the actual price is the precious blood of Christ. The imagery of the blood refers to Christ's death, not to Bengelian effusion (draining Christ dry in order to obtain his blood as the imperishable material substance of value).⁷ Peter and others in his presence use the concept of the blood of Christ as a reference to Christ's death (Acts 1:19; 5:28), which is further indicated by the context that develops that Christ rose from the dead (1 Pet 1:21). Thus Christ's death is characterized by a simile: Christ's blood shed was like that of the sacrificial lamb—that is, the lamb was unblemished and spotless, indicating the required purity of the sacrifice. Therefore Jesus Christ is a pure sacrifice who died for the redemption of mankind.

There is no description in Peter of a price being paid to another, such as to God or to Satan, for Peter describes redemption in the OT pattern of Yahweh's delivering Israel from bondage and captivity, yet without paying another a ransom price (Exod 6:6; Isa 52:3). By this time among the Jews the concept of ransom had become identified with the vicarious sufferings of the righteous.⁸ In such a situation the suffering of the righteous is not given to anyone as payment. It is simply accomplished. The situation would be analogous to that whereby the slain soldiers of a conquering army accomplish the freeing of slaves through the shedding of the soldiers' blood in a decisive battle that wins a war.⁹ The slaves could be said to have been redeemed by the blood of the conquering army. In such a battle the blood of the dead soldiers is not collected for anyone's payment price. So neither is the blood of Christ paid to someone in exchange for the redemption of mankind.

The accomplishment of Petrine redemption is that of freeing people from their previous futile ways of life (1 Pet 1:18). A prior lifestyle was characterized by *mataios*, which means "idle, empty, fruitless, useless, powerless, lacking truth."¹⁰ This futile lifestyle was inherited from the forefathers as the worthless commitments of a pagan.¹¹ For example, this prior lifestyle was composed of ignorant lusts (1:14), diverse evil actions (2:1) and Gentile dissipation (4:3–4). No doubt there were Jews among those with such lifestyles since in 1 Peter so many Jewish imageries are used. These Jews, however, either had a milder former lifestyle or else ran in the same Gentile excesses. In either case their lives before the redemption through Christ had been futile (1:18). Now Christ

⁶TDNT 9 (1974) 103–104.

⁷Contra J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh, 1858), 4. 474; cf. P. E. Hughes, "The Blood of Jesus and His Heavenly Priesthood in Hebrews," *BSac* 131 (1973) 99–109.

⁸TDNT 4 (1967) 341.

⁹Bigg, *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1978).

¹⁰BAGD 496.

¹¹TDNT 4 (1967) 521–524.

had freed them from (*ek*) such futility. They no longer needed to be involved in their previous lifestyles. As such, Petrine redemption is an act that focuses on requiring the redeemed to live differently. For example, the repeated commands throughout 1 Peter remind believers of their obligation. The act of Christ redeeming them must be followed by their own action. However, Petrine redemption does not extend through the believer's life with any continual enablement. The continual soteriological enablement described in Peter is identified with other soteriological motifs, such as the continual presence of the Spirit upon the believer (4:14). Petrine redemption then is a definite act wherein Christ initially frees a person from his former futile way of life and thus renders him under obligation to obey God in his new changed lifestyle.

Petrine redemption is not to be equated with Petrine salvation. In Peter, salvation is a present process (3:21; 4:18) that is not completed until one enters the kingdom in the end times (Acts 2:21; 1 Pet 1:5, 9; 2 Pet 3:15). In contrast Petrine redemption is a past fact, fully accomplished by Christ when the life is transformed (1 Pet 1:18; 2 Pet 2:1). Peter never describes salvation as a past fact. Things can be presently soteriological, however, if they normally lead to the future salvation. Additionally, Petrine salvation focuses on freedom from judgment and obtaining kingdom benefits. Petrine redemption focuses on the past transformation of futile lifestyle. In Peter, one can be soteriologically redeemed without having been saved. Furthermore, while Peter includes redemption with the total process of salvation he indicates by the extent of redemption that the redemption of an individual does not guarantee that he shall be ultimately saved.

II. THE EXTENT OF PETRINE REDEMPTION

This is a difficult issue, based on the interpretation of 2 Pet 2:1. Two non-soteriological solutions are suggested: (1) God's bringing Israel out of Egypt, and (2) God's temporally delivering false teachers from sins. There are four soteriological solutions as well: (1) Peter's charitably calling the false teachers by their own description, (2) hypothetical redemption, (3) loss of salvation, and (4) the apostatizing of previously nonsaved knowers of the truth. Instead of defending and critiquing each position I will attempt to show that contextually the most reasonable view of 2:1 maintains the apostatizing of previously non-saved knowers of the truth who have been soteriologically redeemed.¹²

The redemption is not that of bringing Israel out of Egypt because 2 Peter is written to a mixed group of Christians, some of whom have come from Gentile backgrounds. Most notably, in 2:1 "the people," which should be understood as Israel,¹³ are distinguished from the recipients of Peter's letter. That is, Israel had false prophets; the present recipients will have false teachers rise from among them. Furthermore, since 2 Peter is now Peter's second letter, 2 Peter is written to the same group as 1 Peter (2 Pet 3:1). In this case the recipients

¹²This view appears to be maintained by J. Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 22. 393; R. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco: Word, 1983) 240-241, 274-281.

¹³TDNT 4 (1967) 50-57.

of these letters include Gentiles along with Jews, as indicated by the Asia Minor church character and the previous manner of the lives of the recipients. For example, when Jews rejected the offer of salvation Gentiles in Asia Minor rejoiced at being included in salvation. Additionally Peter's description of the ignorant, futile way of life in Gentile excesses is a strong indication that Gentiles are included (1 Pet 1:14, 18; 4:4). Since Peter writes to a group of Christians from mixed backgrounds it is inappropriate to claim that the exodus was accomplished for them.¹⁴

The context of 2 Peter develops soteriological concerns.¹⁵ For example, the recipients of the letter have the same kind of faith as Peter (2 Pet 1:1). Additionally the recipients have been granted everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Christ (1:3). Furthermore they are to be applying moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance and godliness in their lives as they pursue the kingdom (1:5–6, 11). Following this, Peter guarantees that kingdom salvation shall be fulfilled by appealing to earlier stages of the prophecy that have already occurred (1:16–19). Those who do not pursue such things, however, shall be severely judged and miss salvation (2:2–9). Some have escaped such defilement through this knowledge of Christ only to be reentangled, which results in being worse off than at first (2:20–22). That is, these scoffers shall be condemned while the beloved shall be saved (3:3–15). The temporal deliverances of Noah and Lot in the midst of temporal judgments of others are subsumed under the greater soteriological concerns (2:5, 7, 9). These deliverances are not developed to make the great day of judgment seem less. Rather, they reinforce the fact that since God has judged previously, he will certainly do so again in this greater future judgment when he also saves those who are his.

The buying (*agorazō*) is best seen as soteriological redemption. Even though *agorazō* does not translate OT words for soteriological redemption, the word always means soteriological redemption in the NT when it refers to people as the object of the purchase (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Rev 5:9; 14:3–4). The context clearly develops soteriological issues. Within this development there is a major emphasis on lifestyle, which is quite appropriate to Petrine redemption. For example, those who have knowledge of Christ are to abundantly appropriate in their lives faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and love (2 Pet 1:2–7). This meaningful way of life assures the believer that he shall bear fruit and enter into the eternal kingdom (1:8–11). This meaningful way of life is the reverse of the preredemptive, futile, sinful way of life (1 Pet 1:18; 2 Pet 1:9). So *agorazō* here is best seen as soteriological redemption. The lack of a mentioned price is no reason to overthrow this soteriological meaning since half of the NT soteriological meanings of this word omit any mention of a price (2 Pet 2:1; Rev 14:3–4).

¹⁴Such an appeal is usually made through either Deut 32:6 or 2 Sam 7:23. For a further defense of the Jewish and pagan background of these recipients see D. Kennard, *The Doctrine of God in Petrine Theology* (dissertation; Dallas Theological Seminary, 1986) 104–108.

¹⁵Parallel to 2 Peter, Jude develops a similar common salvation (v 3), judgment (vv 5–16) and exhortations to guarantee salvation (vv 17–23) and the security from Christ the Savior (vv 24–25).

The master (*despotēs*) who is denied by the false teachers is Jesus Christ (2 Pet 2:1). First, since the redemption accomplished by the master is soteriological (2:1) and Peter describes only Christ as the one who soteriologically redeems people (1 Pet 1:18–19), then Christ is the master of whom Peter speaks in 2 Pet 2:1. Second, Christ is the master because the context emphasizes soteriological concerns. For example, Peter elsewhere uses *despotēs* of the sovereign creator (Acts 4:24). However, the sovereign creator is an unlikely reference in 2 Pet 2:1 since creator is only a minor element in 2 Peter, subservient to the greater concern of eschatological salvation and judgment (3:4–7). Additionally Peter elsewhere uses *despotēs* of earthly slave masters (1 Pet 2:18). However, there is no indication of earthly masters and their lying slaves in 2 Peter. In fact the false teachers are free with the human freedom to pursue a multitude of different actions inappropriate for slaves, most notably their own licentious living. Third, Jesus is the master since *despotēs* is broadly translated as *ʾādōnāy* in the LXX, and Peter understood *ʾādōnāy* (translated by *kyrios*) to be Christ in the only recorded time Peter referred to a passage as containing it (Acts 2:34, 36). Fourth, the parallel account in Jude 4 uses *despotēs* to refer to Christ. That is, within a context of the common salvation the false teachers are denying the Master (*despotēs*) and Lord (*kyrios*), Jesus Christ.

It is inappropriate to appeal to a hypothetical redemption in 2 Pet 2:1, patterned after Luke 14:15–24. A. Chang, for example, maintains such a hypothetical purchase.¹⁶ But Chang nullifies his position by arguing that the statements of purchase are outright lies. He argues for false statements of actual purchase rather than true statements of hypothetical purchase. Such an argument better supports the view of charity, calling someone something that they call themselves, even though it is false. I. H. Marshall, however, does develop the hypothetical nature of the purchase in Luke. In that case “the purchase may well have been arranged on the condition of a later inspection and approval” where the reference to necessity (*anankē*) “implies the legal obligation of the purchaser to complete the sale.”¹⁷ This Lukan example, however, is in the middle of an actual transaction and does not develop the effect of a rejection of a completed purchase such as Peter develops in 2 Pet 2:1. The meaning of Petrine redemption as actual or hypothetical is then not determined by an appeal to Luke but by the context of 2 Peter.

A contextual appeal to 2 Peter surfaces three groups who have actually experienced the change of life normally resulting from Petrine redemption. The first is that body of believers who are growing in the qualities of salvation (2 Pet 1:4–6). For example, this group escaped lusts through moral excellence and godliness. Second, the theoretical possibility of a second group is admitted by Peter in the context. They may have begun with these changed qualities and then left them, having forgotten their purification from their former sins (1:9–11). Peter condemns these apostates as doubly blind, unfruitful and in danger of missing the kingdom. Peter then develops this theoretical group as two actual groups: the false teachers, and those who barely escape lusts, only

¹⁶A. Chang, “Second Peter 2:1 and the Extent of the Atonement,” *BSac* 142 (1985) 55–56.

¹⁷I. H. Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 589.

to be enticed back into their former lifestyles (2:18–22).¹⁸ These two groups experience the lifestyle change that the knowledge of Christ produces. For example, those who barely escape from the ones who live in error still actually escape for a time (2:18). The repetition of *apophygontes* in vv 18, 20 identifies the possibility of some people barely escaping, only to be overcome again. The context of v 20, however, primarily has to do with the false teachers, who are the third group. This is demonstrated contextually since the false teachers are those who entice by fleshly desires, promising freedom while they themselves are slaves overcome¹⁹ by judgment²⁰ (2:18–19). Furthermore the use of “for” (*gar*) in vv 19–20 connects this immediately preceding material with what follows, so that false teachers remain the primary subject.²¹ The false teachers are indicated as the subject through the repetition of “overcome” (*hēttōntai*) in v 20, emphasizing the judgment that “overcomes” (*hēttetai*) the false teachers in v 19. Since v 20 primarily has to do with the false teachers, they also had actually escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of Christ. They have experienced the change of life normally resulting from Petrine redemption (1 Pet 1:18; 2 Pet 2:20).

The false teachers have been redeemed soteriologically under Peter’s concept of redemption. (1) They have been redeemed soteriologically because Christ has bought (*agorazō*) them in a soteriological manner (2 Pet 2:1). (2) The soteriological redemption was not hypothetically applied but actually accomplished, since the false teachers have experienced the results of Petrine redemption: a changed life (2:20). Thus where the results of the work have been present one should consider the work of redemption as having been accomplished. (3) Redemption results were accomplished by the knowledge (*oida*) of Christ, which further identifies the redemption as having been soteriologically accomplished. For example, the divinely-given, true knowledge of Christ is within the precious and magnificent salvation promises (1:3–4). This soteriological knowledge is a commitment to truth that leads to salvation and the kingdom (1:8–11; 3:18). So the one who diligently continues in soteriological knowledge shall arrive at kingdom salvation. It is then best to see the false teachers as actually having begun by Petrine soteriological redemption, which resulted in their transformed lives through Christ’s death.

The false teachers have in turn, however, exchanged their knowledge and

¹⁸Two groups are indicated because the accusative of 2 Pet 2:18 cannot be identified with the subject, the false teachers who entice them; contra Jerome, *Adv. Iovin* 2 n. 3; Augustine, *de Fid. et Op.* c. 45; Vg.

¹⁹As in a battle, those overcome are slaves of their enemy; cf. Bauckham, *Jude* 277.

²⁰The use of *phthoras*, “corruption,” refers to divine judgment (2 Pet 2:12) and its morality (1:4). The word is not used by Peter for moral corruption; *TDNT* 9 (1974) 104, 275.

²¹Perhaps in the focus on the false teachers the enticed ones who barely escape (*apopheugontas*, 2 Pet 2:18) are warned of a similar fate by the repetition of *apophygontes* in 2:20. However, the conceptual relationship between v 18 (“enticed by fleshly desires”) and v 20 (“the defilements of the world”) is not significant because there is no verbal connection (as with the false teachers in 2:10). Since the context emphasizes the false teachers as the subject, any conceptual appeal should maintain this emphasis.

moral living for an ignorant life of rampant sin and certain condemnation. Having come to know (*epiginōskō*) the way of righteousness and experiencing (*epiginōskō*) it, they have then rejected it (2:21), which in turn has plunged them into an ignorant life (*agnaeō*, 1:12). Such ignorance is akin to the unbeliever's condition of practicing sinful lust and persecuting Christ (Acts 3:17; 1 Pet 1:14; 2:15). These false teachers, however, are worse off than if they had remained unredeemed ignorant unbelievers (2 Pet 2:21). (1) They know the commandment that they must live righteously. In being overcome by the entanglements of the world they know judgment will follow their obedience. (2) Their true bent demonstrates clearly that they are fools (2:22). Proverbial statements such as a dog returning to its vomit and a washed sow returning to the mire recall the contextual use in Prov 26:11 signifying a fool returning to his folly. These false teachers cannot say they never knew better. They have committed high-handed sin, knowingly rejecting both Christ and the way they must live. Such an unrighteous life will be kept by the Lord under impending punishment for the day of judgment (2:9).

Such a concept renders Petrine redemption superabundant rather than impotent. First, the elect are redeemed, accomplishing for them a transformation of life that leads toward their guaranteed salvation (1 Pet 1:1–5, 18). In Peter's terminology salvation is identified with the resurrection and the kingdom (1:5, 9, 10). Things can be considered presently soteriological, however, if they normally lead toward that salvation even if they do not fully accomplish it (3:21; 4:18; 2 Pet 3:15). Redemption as a soteriological work of Christ is effective in its transformation of the lives of the elect on their journey toward salvation. Second, redemption is no less effective where it accomplishes its full work of life transformation among some, like the false teachers who are not recipients of other soteriological works, which are needed if they would be saved. One should not fault a work of Christ that does more than is soteriologically necessary. A work of Christ may go beyond the limits of the elect to benefit others for a time. This redemption is not, however, hypothetical universalism because it is actually applied to all those who are transformed. Petrine redemption should then be conceived of as a limited redemption, which nevertheless extends beyond the limits of the elect. It also includes all who experience the transformation of life by means of Christ's death, even for a time.