

Tyndale Bulletin 41.2 (1990) 276-289.

## THE USE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS IN 1 PETER

Gene L. Green

How did the author of 1 Peter use the OT to develop Christian ethics? In the quest for moral guidance for his readers he drew from sections of OT teaching and did not quote or allude to this teaching in isolation from its context. His selection of texts was based upon the correlation between the situation of the people of God in the OT and that of his readers. The teaching he extrapolated from the OT was then developed in the author's own terminology to show its relevance for the suffering Christian communities in Asia Minor.<sup>1</sup>

### I. The Readers and their Situation

There are few books in the NT which make more extensive use of the OT than 1 Peter. This is rather surprising since the Christian communities to which the author writes were not composed of Jewish but rather Gentile converts.<sup>2</sup> This is evident from 4:3 where it is stated that the readers had done the will of the Gentiles in the past. The list of vices Peter enumerates includes idolatry and focuses on sins connected with sexual and alcoholic excess. In 1:18 Peter reminds his readers that they were redeemed from this 'vain' way of life inherited from their forefathers. The word used is μάταιος which was often employed in critiques of pagan cult idolatry, a background which is probably reflected here.<sup>3</sup> And 1:14 calls the readers

---

<sup>1</sup> The most comprehensive examination of the hermeneutic of 1 Peter is W.L. Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition in 1 Peter* (Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck] 1989). Schutter, however, does not deal specifically with the question of the use of the OT in the development of the ethical exhortation.

<sup>2</sup> Longenecker classifies 1 Peter as a Jewish Christian tractate and states that the NT authors made extensive appeal to the OT only when their audience was primarily Jewish. Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1975) 186ff, 210ff. But the audience which 1 Peter addressed was manifestly Gentile.

<sup>3</sup> See W. C. van Unnik, 'The Critique of Paganism in 1 Peter 1:18', *Neotestamentica et Semitica*, (ed.) E. Earle Ellis and Max Wilcox (Edinburgh, T. T. Clark, 1969) 129-142; *TDNT*, 4.521f.

not to be conformed to their former lustful life which they lived in ignorance, undoubtedly a reference to their ignorance of the true God.<sup>4</sup> The descriptions of the reader's past state makes it highly unlikely that the audience was in the main Jewish and not Gentile.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite their non-Jewish heritage, the apostle draws on the OT at almost every turn in order to interpret the working of God in the present time and to give moral direction to his readers.

The adverse situation in which the readers find themselves heightens the need for a proper understanding of God's work and the Christian's moral obligations.<sup>6</sup> The Christian communities were being persecuted by the society whose life-style they had rejected (4:3, 4). The social pressure was intense as the Christians were spoken evil of (2:12; 3:16), reviled (3:9), insulted (3:16), blasphemed (4:4), and denounced (4:14). They were in a vulnerable position where at any time they may be called to give an account of their faith (3:15, 16).<sup>7</sup> While

<sup>4</sup> Acts 3:17; 17:30; Eph. 4:18. L. Goppelt, *Der Erste Petrusbrief* (Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1978) 117 states, 'Er will janicht die Formen des geschichtlichen Lebens als solche ablehnen, sondern nur ihre Prägung durch ἄγνοια, "Unwissenheit", and tineuitta, "Begehre". Beides ist nach at.-jüdisch-urchristlicher Tradition Kennzeichen des Heidentums.'

<sup>5</sup> Some have suggested that the churches were mixed Jewish and Gentile communities. J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London, A. & C. Black 1969); E. G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London, Macmillan 1947); Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Leicester, Apollon 19904); Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (Leicester, IVP 1988) 38; John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press 1981) 65-67. The internal evidence does not lead to this conclusion.

<sup>6</sup> The most useful, though conflicting, discussions of the sociological situation of the readers can be found in Goppelt, *Erste Petrusbrief*; David L. Balch, *Let Wives Be Submissive* (Chico, California, Scholars Press 1981); Idem, 'Hellenization/Acculturation in 1 Peter', *Perspectives on First Peter* (ed.) Charles H. Talbert (Macon, Georgia, Mercer University Press 1986) 79-101; Elliott, *Home for the Homeless*; Idem, '1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy: A Discussion with David Balch', *Perspectives on First Peter* (ed.) Charles H. Talbert (Macon, Georgia, Mercer University Press 1986) 61-78.

<sup>7</sup> The persecutions represented in 1 Peter were non-official but rather those that were the common lot of believers in the early church. On the nature of the persecutions see E.G. Selwyn, 'The Persecutions in 1 Peter' *NTS* 1 (1950) 39-50; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter*; Ernest Best, *1 Peter* (London, Oliphants 1971); James Moffatt, *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1918); W.C. van Unnik, 'Peter, First Letter of' *IBD* 3.758-66; Idem, 'Christianity According to 1 Peter', *ET* 68 (1956) 79-83; C.F.D. Moule, 'The Nature and Purpose of 1 Peter' *NTS* 3 (1957-58) 1-11.

verbal abuse and social rejection were the main forms of persecution, in some cases the hostility may have taken the form of physical attacks (2:20; 3:6; 4:1). The pressures on the Christians were especially acute where close social relationships existed, viz. slaves/masters, husbands/wives (2:18-3:6).

The crux of the matter was their reaction to this social rejection. They had begun to be ashamed of their faith (4:6).<sup>8</sup> They were tempted to retaliate, (3:9; cf. 2:23), and to conform to a more socially acceptable lifestyle, (4:2, 3; 1:14). In fact, the goal of their adversary, the devil, was to lead them into apostasy, (5:8, 9).<sup>9</sup> Peter combats this problem with the theology and ethics of the epistle. And with this situation ever present in his mind he makes extensive use of the OT, both as it interprets the deed of God and elaborates his demand.

## II. The Sectional Use of the Old Testament

One of the most fascinating aspects of 1 Peter is the way the author interprets the OT in his attempt to address the reader's social and moral crisis. The most extensive quotation of the OT is found in 1 Peter 3:10-12, taken from Psalm 33:13-17(LXX):

ὁ γὰρ θέλων ζωὴν ἀγαπᾶν  
καὶ ἰδεῖν ἡμέρας ἀγαθὰς  
παυσάτω τὴν γλῶσσαν ἀπὸ κακοῦ  
καὶ χεῖλη τοῦ μὴ λαλῆσαι δόλον  
ἐκκλινάτω δὲ ἀπὸ κακοῦ καὶ ποιησάτω ἀγαθόν  
ζητησάτω εἰρήνην καὶ διωξάτω αὐτήν  
ὅτι ὀφθαλμοὶ κυρίου ἐπὶ δικαίου  
καὶ ὦτα αὐτοῦ εἰς δέησιν αὐτῶν  
προόσωπον δὲ κυρίου ἐπὶ ποιοῦντας κακά.

For the one who desires to love life  
And to see good days  
Let him stop his tongue from evil  
And his lips from speaking deceit,

<sup>8</sup> The present imperative with μή implies that the action is already in progress and must be stopped. J.H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* 4 vols. (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark 1906-1976) 1.122.

<sup>9</sup> van Unnik, 'Christianity', 81; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter* 9, 209f; F.W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Oxford, BasilBlackwell, 1970) 204; Best, *1 Peter* 174; Alan M. Stibbs and Andrew F. Walls, *The First Epistle General of Peter* (London, Tyndale Press 1959) 172; J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (Waco, Texas, Word Books 1988) 299.

Let him turn from evil and do good  
 Let him seek peace and pursue it.  
 Because the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous  
 And his ears are open to their prayers  
 But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.

Peter's hermeneutic is distinctly literalist here, yet he takes the liberty to mould the text in order to apply it—assuming that the quotation comes from the LXX. In verse 10a he has eliminated the interrogative particle of the LXX as well as the words *ἐστὶν ἄνθρωπος* (is the man). Also, *ἀγαπῶν* (loving) has been changed to an infinitive connected with *ζωήν* (life) and the words *γάρ* (for) and *καί* (and) have been added. So while the LXX reads, 'Who is the man who desires life, loving to see good days,' 1 Peter says, 'For the one who desires to love life and to see good days, etc.' There has been a subtle shift of meaning, on which Stibbs comments:

What he here writes does not, as in the psalm, describe simply the man who desires a long life and a good one. Rather it describes the man who wishes to live a life which he can love and find worthwhile, a life that is not marked by endless frustration and boredom.<sup>10</sup>

Peter also give the quotation a distinctively eschatological turn. For him *ζωή* (life) is not simply long life and prosperity, but 'eternal life', the life really worth loving (cf. 3.7) and the 'good days' seem in context to be 'the days of future glory'.<sup>11</sup> In addition to these changes, the third person imperative is inserted in the place of the second person imperative. Finally, the imprecatory clause at the end of Psalm 33:17 has been omitted, perhaps due to Peter's redemptive concern for the unbelievers, even those who persecute the Christian communities.<sup>12</sup> All these alterations betray Peter's deliberate attempt to interpret the OT ethical instruction in the light of his reader's present situation. He draws out the meaning of the

<sup>10</sup> Stibbs-Walls, *Peter* 131.

<sup>11</sup> Beare, *Peter* 161. So Kelly, *Epistles of Peter* 138; Michaels, *1 Peter* 180.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Peter speaks of the judgment of the unbelievers (4:5, 17) and displays the hope that their verbal abuse will be silenced (2:15). But Peter also shows concern for the redemption of those who do not believe (3:15f, 1; and perhaps 2:12).

OT text for those who live in the present age of fulfilment. As Manson has said, once the meaning of the OT text was found:

it becomes the clear duty to express it; and accurate reproduction of the traditional wording of the Divine oracles took second place to publication of what was held to be their essential meaning and immediate application.<sup>13</sup>

But why is our author drawn to quote these particular verses from Psalm 33 in his moral instruction? Why not draw from the myriad of other OT texts whose teaching would be just as applicable? A clue to the answer can be found in the 1919 article by W. Bornemann in which he argues that 1 Peter is a baptismal address based on Psalm 33 of the LXX.<sup>14</sup> We need not accept his theory regarding the baptismal occasion of the document, nor his argument for the role of Silvanus as its author.<sup>15</sup> But Bornemann's conclusion that 1 Peter was composed with repeated reference to the psalm cannot be dismissed.<sup>16</sup> Not only is the psalm quoted in 1 Peter 3:10-12, but 2:3 (εἰ ἐγεύσκασθε ὅτι χρηστός ὁ κύριος, Since you have tasted that the Lord is kind) is a modified quotation from Psalm 33:9 (γεύσασθε καὶ ἴδετε ὅτι χρηστός ὁ κύριος, Taste and see that the Lord is kind).<sup>17</sup> Apart from these quotations, other

<sup>13</sup> T.W. Manson, 'The Argument from Prophecy' *JTS* 46 (1945) 135ff.

<sup>14</sup> W. Bornemann, 'Der erste Petrusbrief-eine Taufrede des Silvanus?' *ZNW* 19 (1919-20) 143-165.

<sup>15</sup> See R.P. Martin, 'The Composition of 1 Peter in Recent Study' *Vox Ev* 1 (1962) 34ff; Best, *1Peter* 20.

<sup>16</sup> Schutter, *Hermeneutic and Composition* 44-49, questions Bornemann's conclusion with regard to the influence of Psalm 33 on the teaching of the epistle. He discusses each supposed parallel between the psalm and 1 Peter and concludes that 'none of Bornemann's purported allusions to Ps. 34 are sufficiently convincing so as to qualify more easily as evidence of dependence than of biblically-patterned discourse, with the exception of several iterative allusions that could hardly have been traced to the psalm unless its relevant portion had been quoted in extenso (3:7, 13, 17 *bis*, 4:19).' (48) It cannot be denied that taken individually most of the parallels between 1 Peter and Psalm 33 that Bornemann presents are not sufficiently strong to warrant his conclusion concerning the influence of the Psalm on Peter's thought. But taken together they show that there is something more than a 'tangential relationship to the psalm' (*ibid* 47). As I will show, Peter tended to use sections of OT scripture when he developed his ethics, and he exploited sections of text which reflected a similar situation to that of his readers.

<sup>17</sup> Peter adds the introductory particle εἰ and changes γεύσασθε into an indicative. καὶ ἴδετε was omitted since it did not fit with his hunger imagery. Bornemann suggests that καὶ ἴδετε may be echoed in 1:8, 'Petrusbrief' 147.

allusions to Psalm 33 appear in the epistle. For example, Peter 2:4 (πρὸς ὃν προσερχόμενοι, Coming to Him) echoes Psalm 33:6 (προσεέλθατε πρὸς αὐτόν, Come to Him). Parallel themes appear in both documents, such as of the blessing of God (1 Pet. 1:3; Ps. 33:2), the affliction of the righteous (1 Pet. 1:6; 2:19-21, 23; 3:17; 4:12, 15, 19; 5:10; Ps. 33:7, 18, 20), and their joy through affliction (1 Pet. 1:6, 8; 4:13; Ps. 33:4). The fear of the Lord is a common element (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:17, 18; 3:2; Ps. 33:8, 10) as is the necessity of hope (1 Pet. 1:3, 13, 21; 3:5, 15; Ps. 33:9, 23). Both the psalmist and the author of 1 Peter turn their eyes to the salvation of the Lord, though of course the latter gives this concept eschatological significance (1 Pet. 1:5, 10; 2:2; 3:21; Ps. 33:5, 7, 8, 18, 20). In both God's people are called 'holy ones' (1 Pet. 1:15; 2:9; 3:5; Ps. 33:10) and 'aliens' (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11; Ps. 33:5). These and other parallels of thought and vocabulary<sup>19</sup> show that Peter did not draw out only a few verses of the psalm as the basis for his ethical instruction for the persecuted communities of Asia Minor. Rather he took into account the whole of its thought and teaching.

A comparison of the indicated occasion of the psalm with that of 1 Peter is instructive. Psalm 33, according to the title, was a psalm of David. It was said to be written at the time when he 'changed his face', or disguised his sanity, by acting like a madman before his persecutor, Abimelech, the king of Gath.<sup>20</sup> While it is true that the psalm itself 'shows no real connection with the event described'<sup>21</sup> the supposed background is in accord with the sentiments of the psalm. Psalm 33 is rich with the themes of the persecution of the righteous and the deliverance of the Lord. Its emphasis is upon the proper attitudes of the righteous through their affliction, such as the fear of the Lord, humility, doing good and seeking peace. This is exactly the type of situation Peter had to address. He chose to draw from this psalm for it spoke

<sup>18</sup> 3:21 may refer not only to eternal but temporal deliverance from hostile forces.

<sup>19</sup> For a complete examination of the parallels see Bornemann, 'Petrusbrief' 147ff.

<sup>20</sup> A.A. Anderson, *Psalms* (London, Oliphants 1972) 1. 268 suggests that Abimelech was the Semitic name for the king of Gath, Achisch.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

specifically concerning how the people of God were to live in a hostile environment.

We are already familiar with this type of early Christian exegesis from the seminal study of C.H. Dodd.<sup>22</sup> Certain sections of the OT were employed to interpret the Christ event and shape Christian theology.<sup>23</sup> This method, I believe, was drawn over into the field of ethics. A section of the OT was used to interpret the situation of the Christian community and to give direction to their moral life.

Psalms 33 is not the only OT section which Peter used. Isaiah 8 is quoted in 1 Peter 2:8 (λίθος προσκόμματος καὶ πέτρα σκανδάλου, A stone of stumbling and a rock to trip over) and 3:14, 15 (τὸν δὲ φόβον αὐτῶν μὴ φοβηθῆτε μηδὲ παραχθῆτε, κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, Do not be afraid of them neither be terrified, but reverence Christ as Lord in your hearts). This latter text is taken from Isaiah 8:12b. Here again the text quoted seems to be the LXX, with changes made by Peter in accordance with the situation of the readers he addresses.<sup>24</sup> But 1 Peter 2:8, which is derived from Isaiah 8:14, does not appear to be a quotation from the LXX but instead from the Hebrew text. This verse, along the other 'stone' passages, made up one of the early testimonies used in first century Christian apologetics. With repeated use in the church the Hebrew form became standardized.<sup>25</sup> These two texts from Isaiah 8 signal that our author had this section of the prophet's message in mind when

<sup>22</sup> C.H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures* (London, Nisbet 1952).

<sup>23</sup> See also Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetic* (London, SCM 1961) 4.

<sup>24</sup> αὐτῶν (their) is substituted for αὐτοῦ (his), οὐ is eliminated and οὐδὲ μή it is exchanged for μηδέ. "In the Hebrew original the prophet and his disciples are warned not to share the fears of the populace ('fear ye not their fear') or count holy what they count holy, but to regard the Lord of hosts as holy and fear Him alone. The Greek translator seems to have misunderstood the first part of the passage and, substituting 'fear of him' for 'their fear', to have taken it as an exhortation to the citizens of Jerusalem not to be afraid of the king of Assyria, Kelly, *Epistles of Peter* 141ff. Peter sues the LXX meaning, although the change of enemies from the king of Assyria to the gentile populace causes him to alter αὐτοῦ (his) to αὐτῶν (their). Peter also adds τὸν Χριστόν (Christ), making the reference to the κύριον (Lord) explicitly christological.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Rom. 9:33. Discussions of the 'stone' passages can be found in Dodd, *Scriptures*; Lindars, *Apologetic*; E. Earle Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh and London, Oliver and Boyd 1957).

he composed his epistle. Other allusions to the thought contained there can also be traced. The disobedient are singled out (1 Pet. 2:8; 3:1, 20; 4:17; Is. 8:11) and the ones who believe or trust in God are those who are granted aid and deliverance (1 Pet. 1:5, 7, 9, 21; 5:9; Is. 8:14). The temple imagery is present in both passages (1 Pet. 2:4, 5, 9; Is. 8:14) and they both speak of the judgment of the persecutors (1 Pet. 4:5, 17, 18; Is. 8:9, 10). Most importantly, this section in Isaiah gives instruction for those who face overwhelming hostility and stresses the proper attitudes and conduct that the people of God are to adopt in the face of great conflict. The parallels between the situation of the prophet and his disciples and that of the persecuted Christians in Asia Minor leads Peter to make use of this section of the OT in the development of his ethical teaching.

Other sections which Peter may have had in mind when he composed the epistle are Psalm 117, Isaiah 28, 40, and 53. Of these four, only Isaiah 53 is particularly relevant to the question of the use of the OT in the development of Christian ethics. There can be no doubt that Isaiah 52:13-53:12 was used as a whole by the early church to interpret the Christ event.<sup>26</sup> Peter alludes to it extensively in the Haustafel section of this epistle. In 1 Peter 2:21-25 there are at least five reference to Isaiah 53 (vs. 9-1 Pet. 2:22; v. 7-1 Pet. 2:23<sup>27</sup>; vv. 12, 4, 5-1 Pet. 2:24; v. 6-1 Pet. 2:25). Peter freely quotes the Isaiah material before him to interpret the ministry of the Lord and the current troubles of his readers. The suffering servant is Jesus Christ and the sheep are the Gentiles to whom the apostle writes. The passage is well suited to the author's purpose for it speaks of the persecution of the righteous, God's deliverance, and the conduct of the righteous under persecution.

Peter's exegesis of this passage, however, is somewhat different than that of the others hitherto discussed. There is no direct ethical command in Isaiah 53 for the people of God. The picture is of the Righteous One suffering for the unrighteous many. Yet our author extrapolates the ethical implications of the prophecy along an *imitatio* pattern. The Christian slaves are to follow in Christ's footprints since he

<sup>26</sup> See Lindars, *Apologetic*, 77ff.

<sup>27</sup> Not a quotation, but the Isaiah passage does seem to be in mind.



left them an example (ὑπογραμμός). This means non-retaliation, even though one suffers while doing good (1 Pet. 2:22f.). This teaching is translated into general instruction for the whole community in 3:9: μὴ ἀποδιδόντος κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἢ λοιδορίαν ἀντὶ λοιδορίας (Do not return evil for evil, or insult for insult).

Thus far, all the sections from the OT which Peter referred to have had to do with the persecution of the elect, the proper conduct under persecution, and the vindication of God. Our author drew out the correspondences between God's saving history, past and present, and where such analogies did exist he adopted the teaching of the OT to give moral instruction for his readers.

Peter's teaching about Sarah and the holy women of old (3:5, 6) betrays a similar methodology. They were subject to their husbands, and Sarah herself called Abraham κύριος (Lord) (Gn. 18:12). For our author this indicated her obedience to her husband.<sup>28</sup> To be sure, Peter does not concern himself with the whole of Genesis 18, nor does that section speak of the suffering of the righteous in any way. Yet Peter sees a relationship between Sarah and the Christian women. The correspondence in history between Sarah and these women is made explicit by the statement, 'whose [that is, Sarah's] children you have become', 3:6.<sup>29</sup> Thus her behaviour is to be imitated by these women, even those who have non Christian husbands (3:1, 2). There is a relationship here between the people of God in the past and in the present. This indicates that Peter is not merely concerned with pulling out any seemingly relevant material from the OT, but rather his primary interest is in the correspondences between people and situations in the redemptive plan of God. Where such correspondences exist, the OT teaching is paradigmatic for Christian behaviour. The moral implications of these correspondences are developed on an

<sup>28</sup> Perhaps there is a reflection here of rabbinic interpretation of Gn. 18:12. *SB* 3.764; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter*, 131; J.W.C. Wand, *The General Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (London, Methuen 1934) 91.

<sup>29</sup> The punctuation of this verse is problematical. Does the author mean that by virtue of their relationship with Sarah they are to act like her, or does he say that be doing good and not fearing they become her children? See the *UBS* text.

*imitatio* model, as well as by a literal application of OT moral teaching to the readers of the epistle.

Another text which draws on the OT in the development of Christian moral teaching is 1 Peter 1:16: διότι γέγραπται [ὅτι] Ἅγιοι ἔσεσθε, ὅτι ἐγὼ ἅγιος (For it is written, You shall be holy, because I am holy). This call to holiness is the controlling imperative of the Holiness Code in Leviticus, being repeated at various points in the teaching (Lv. 11:44f.; 19:2; 20:7, 26). Peter's wording is closest to Leviticus 19:2 and we may assume again that he is quoting from the LXX. This observation is confirmed by the fact that both Peter and Leviticus 19:2 follow the call to holiness with instruction concerning the proper response to parental authority (Lv. 19:3; 1 Pet. 1:17). Part of holiness is to fear one's parents, whether the parent is human or divine (cf. 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; 2:2). Once again Peter has a section of OT teaching in mind, albeit a small section. But what correspondence is there, if any, between this text in Leviticus and the situation of the readers of the epistle? Leviticus 19:2a indicates that the call to holiness was to be spoken in the gathering of the sons of Israel. The context in which this call was given was the exodus from Egypt (Lv. 11:44f.) and the separation of Israel from the Gentiles (Lv. 20:26). According to Peter, the Christian community is the new Israel, the people of God (1 Pet. 2:9, 10). They have embarked on an exodus, not out of society (as the Qumran sectaries) but out of the immorality of paganism.<sup>30</sup> As the call to holiness controls the teaching for those who embarked on the exodus from Egypt, so the same call is applied to those who are the new people of God, separated by the redemption of Christ from immorality.

The OT quotation in this instance is signaled by the words διότι γέγραπται (For it is written). The scripture says they should be holy, therefore they must be holy. The text itself is authoritative for the Christian communities in so far as they are themselves the people of God. The correlation

<sup>30</sup> L.Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1981-82) 2. 165f. On the exodus imagery in 1 Peter see also F.L. Cross, *1 Peter: A Paschal Liturgy* (London, Mowbray 1954) 24-27; R.E. Nixon, *The Exodus in the New Testament* (London, Tyndale Press 1963) 27f.

between the history of the people of God, old and new, gives the context in which this imperative from scripture is applied to their present situation.

Another place where Peter appeals to the OT to give form and motive to his ethical teaching is 1 Peter 5:5b: [ὁ] θεὸς ὑπερηφάνοις ἀντιτάσσεται, ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν, (God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble). The quotation is from Proverbs 3:34 which became common stock in the paraenetic teaching of the early church (Jas. 4:6; Mt. 23:12). Yet in 1 Peter there is another allusion to this chapter in Proverbs which indicates that the author drew directly from its teaching (Pr. 3:25 is reflected in 1 Pet. 3:6b).<sup>31</sup> Due to the epigrammatic nature of the proverbs we should not expect to find the correspondences in this case between persons and history. This has been the case with other OT texts which the author has used in the development of his teaching.

To summarize, Peter's use of the OT in the development of Christian ethics is based upon the correspondences which occur in God's saving history. In 1 Peter the past activity of God among his people is linked organically with his present activity among the new people of God. As Kelly says, 'it is one and the same God [who] is at work in history, bringing the same purpose to ever fuller realization in the succession of personages and events'.<sup>32</sup> In so far as there are correlations between past and present history, the imperative given to those in the past becomes normative for the reader's present situation.

### III. The Application of Old Testament Ethics

Peter's interpretation of the OT as a source for Christian ethics is mostly of the literalist variety. Also, the theme of fulfilment is prevalent in his use of the OT, as 1:10-12 indicates. This is one of the clearest statements of the *peshet* type of interpretation. But when it comes to the application of the OT texts to the reader's present moral crisis, the author uses a technique akin to midrashic exegesis. The OT text is cited and

<sup>31</sup> Selwyn, *First Epistle* 408-10 suggests other parallels, none of which are convincing.

<sup>32</sup> Kelly, *Epistles of Peter* 161. See also Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (ET, London, SCM 1967) 134; Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis* 94f.

a commentary is developed upon it. We will examine briefly two examples.

In 1 Peter 3:10-12 the OT quotation of Psalm 33 centres on three points of moral instruction: 1) Restraint of the tongue (vs. 10b); 2) doing good while turning from evil (vs. 11a); 3) seeking peace (vs. 11b). These three points are developed in the ethical teaching, even being linked with other OT material. The restraint of the tongue is a characteristic of the suffering Christ. He had no guile in his mouth and did not retaliate (1 Pet. 2:22, 23). This point is signaled in the author's citation of Isaiah 53:9, with 'guile' (δόλος) being a common element in this passage and in the Psalm 33 quotation. This teaching may be reflected in 3:9 where the thought is taken a step further (3:9 is primarily a translation into the imperative of the attitude of Christ referred to in 2:23). Not only are they to have no guile and to refrain from retaliation, but they are to bless. In 2:1 the readers are told to put off all guile and evil speaking. Perhaps the teaching of the psalm appears again in 3:15f where the readers are instructed to have a response for everyone who asks them for an account of their hope, but in meekness and fear.

Doing good while turning from evil is the second point of the psalm (1 Pet. 3:11a). The call to 'do good' is a central concept in the ethics of 1 Peter (2:12, 14, 15, 20; 3:6, 13, 16, 17; 4:19). Elliott has rightly suggested that 'It is not unlikely that Peter's formulations, formations, and compounds to express the idea of well-doing are adaptations of the thetical statement which was quoted in altered form in 3:11, namely ψ 33:15.'<sup>33</sup>

Finally, the psalm's exhortation to seek peace and pursue it (1 Pet. 3:11b) is developed through out the epistle in the author's teaching concerning how they are to deal with non-Christians, especially those who oppose them. Submission, non-retaliation, a meek reply, doing good even to the evil are all approaches calculated to make for peace.

<sup>33</sup> J.H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy* (Leiden, E.J. Brill 1966) 181. On the meaning of "good works" in 1 Peter see W.D. van Unnik, 'The Teaching of Good Works in 1 Peter', *NTS* 1(1954-55) 92-110; Idem, 'A Classical Parallel to 1 Peter ii. 14', *NTS* 2 (1955-56) 198-202; Bruce W. Winter, 'The Public Honouring of Christian Benefactors, Romans 13:3-4 and 1 Peter 2:14-15', *JSNT* 34 (1988) 87-103.

Although εἰρήνη (peace) does not again appear in an ethical context in the epistle, there is an over-riding conviction that the Christians are to do things that make for peace.<sup>34</sup>

The methodology of the author seems to have been to take the teaching of Psalm 33 and develop it fairly extensively by incorporating it into the very fabric of his moral instruction.

Another passage in which a similar technique is used is 1:16, the call to holiness. The OT passage has been translated into Peter's own language in 1:15: ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸν καλέσαντα ὑμᾶς ἅγιον καὶ αὐτοὶ ἅγιοι ἐν πάσῃ ἀναστροφῇ γενήθητε (But like the Holy One who called you is holy, even you be holy in all your manner of life). Surprisingly, there are no other imperatives in the epistle which call them to be ἅγιοι (holy).<sup>35</sup> And the idea of the imitation of God does not explicitly reappear in any other passage. Yet it appears that this passage is one of the principle imperatives of the epistle. Instead of repeating the language of the imperative, he has translated its thought into forms which are directly applicable to the reader's situation. In 1:15 Peter says they are called to a holy ἀναστροφή (lifestyle). The concept of the Christian ἀναστροφή in other places in 1 Peter is connected with the words καλή (noble) (2:11) and ἀγαθή (good) (3:16), and is equivalent to 'doing good' (3:16, 17) and 'good works' (2:12). The call to holiness is expounded in the repeated exhortation to do good in all situations. Similarly, the imitation of God is developed with reference to the imitation of the activity of Christ (2:21ff).<sup>36</sup> As C. H. Dodd said:

The New Testament idea of the imitation of Christ is a way of making explicit what *kinds* of divine activity should be imitated by men, and how, and why, and in what circumstances. . . . To follow in His steps is to have before us a truly human example, but it is also to have the divine pattern made comprehensible and imitable. Hence, the imitation of

<sup>34</sup> See B.W. Winter, 'Seek the welfare of the city': Social Ethics according to 1 Peter', *Themelios* 13 (1988) 91-94.

<sup>35</sup> 3.2 however, speaks of the Christian wives' ἁγνὴν ἀγαστροφὴν (pure way of life). The imperative in 3.15, κύριον δὲ τὸν Χριστὸν ἀγιάσατε, is best interpreted as meaning they are to 'revere' Christ or 'acknowledge Him as holy' (Mt. 6.9; Is. 19.23; Ez. 20.41; Ecclus. 26.4). Best, *1 Peter* 133; Beare, *Peter* 164; Stibbs—Walls, *Peter* 135; Selwyn, *First Epistle* 192; Kelly, *Epistles of Peter* 142; Michaels, *1 Peter* 187. Cf. *TDNT* 1. 112.

<sup>36</sup> 3.18 may reflect the *imitatio* idea as well.

Christ, being the imitation of God Himself so far as God can be a model to His creatures, becomes a mode of absolute ethics.<sup>37</sup> Christ's life is the perfect pattern for the rejected community of how to imitate God in their afflictions.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Out of this study a few basic points concerning Peter's use of the OT in the development of Christian ethics have emerged. First, he considered the adverse situation and the moral crisis of his readers. Second, he appealed to sections of the OT which for the most part reflected analogous situations in the life of the ancient people of God. Third, in light of the correspondences drawn between God's saving history in the past and present the ethical teaching of the OT was adopted. The OT teaching is normative for the Christian communities since they stand in an organic relationship with the OT people of God. Fourth, this material was then developed in the author's own terminology and thought, explaining more explicitly its application for the readers' present situation. In this time of crisis, the OT had a living, authoritative message for the people of God.

---

<sup>37</sup> C.H. Dodd, *Gospel and Law* (Cambridge, CUP 1951) 41f.

The first word in the phrase Old Testament must not mean unimportant or insignificant to Christians. Further, some doctrines of Scripture are best understood only from the OT. For example, is there a more worldview-shaping passage than Genesis 1:1-2:3? The NT authors stressed that God gave the OT for Christians. Peter asserted of the OT prophets, "It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you" (1 Pet. 1:12). The OT authors understood that they were writing for a future audience—"Christians identified with the NT church." Similarly, Paul was convinced that the divinely inspired OT authors wrote for NT believers, living on this side of the death and resurrection of Christ. The Old Testament is the first, longer portion of the Christian Bible. It is the term used by Christians to refer to the Jewish scriptures, or Hebrew Bible. The Old Testament is not one book written by a single author, but a collection of ancient texts written and re-written by numerous authors and editors for hundreds of years. In general, the Old Testament is essential to the way Western civilization has long thought and talked about God, as well as ethics, justice, and the nature of the world. In its current form, the collection of the Old Testament books was completed by the first century b.c. The individual books themselves, however, are much more ancient—some dating to the tenth and eleventh centuries b.c. or earlier. The New Testament picks up on this Old Testament story and transposes it—even reverses it. If one only looks for "predictions" of Jesus, then "figurative" readings like this will be missed. Jesus's own physical resurrection is an embodiment (pun intended) and therefore fuller expression of the Old Testament nationalistic ideal. Anyway, Anderson's article is quite readable and some of you might enjoy it. If you want to read other things by Anderson, there's a lot, but one of my favorites is *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination*. I read this about 20 years ago and it was one of those "scales falling off the eyes" aha moments for me.