Delivering Oracles from God: The Nature of Christian Communication in 1 Peter 4:11a

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Abstract

In 1 Pet 4:11a, those who exercise χαρίσματα involving speech acts are instructed to carry out their tasks ὡς λόγια θεοῦ. Two interpretations of this phrase have gained prominence within Petrine scholarship. Some claim that Scripture is being referenced to establish a standard for regulating the use of communicative gifts in the church. Others contend that the verse sets up a hypothetical comparison designed to emphasize the appropriate manner in which the spoken word should be performed. The problem is that both of these positions have left crucial questions unattended. The purpose of this study is to provide a close examination of the three issues that most significantly impact the interpretation of 1 Pet 4:11a: (1) the meaning of λόγια; (2) the reconstruction of verbal elision; and (3) the Petrine author's view of divine revelation through human mediation. In the end, I suggest that the verse is intended to convey a direct correspondence between the comparative image (i.e., one who delivers oracles from God) and the ministry of those who exercised speaking gifts within the Anatolian congregations. That is, when Christians rendered service to the community through various forms of verbal communication, they were understood to be dispensing divine revelation.

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Introduction

In 1 Pet 4:11a, scholars are presented with a unique window into ancient perceptions of communicative acts undertaken within early Christianity. The verse follows a general exhortation for readers to use their χαρίσματα to serve other members of the community (v. 10) and is intended to clarify how different spheres of ministry (viz. speaking and serving) should be approached. With regard to those who exercise gifts involving speech acts, the author states, εἴ τις λαλεῖ, ὡς λόγια θεοῦ (v. 11a). A word-for-word rendering of this sentence would be, "if anyone speaks, as oracles of God."

While such a translation might not adequately capture the meaning of the verse, it does begin to reveal where the interpretive difficulties lie. One question that arises from this passage is how to understand the economy of the author's language. Most recognize that the verbal element has been elided. The question is, which verb should be restored and how does the substantive λόγια relate to that form? Another issue involves the nature of the comparative image: not only is the meaning of λόγια a matter of debate, but there is also discussion surrounding the function of the particle ὡς. The perceived nature of speech acts in these Anatolian communities is directly connected to the way such issues are resolved.

Within recent scholarship, two interpretations have gained prominence. One approach is to view the comparison as setting up a recognizable standard with which the author seeks to align all communicative acts performed on behalf of the Christian community. This conclusion is reached through the identification of λόγια. Advocates of this position claim that the designation refers to Scripture. While most have confined its boundaries to the Tanakh, some have expanded the referent to include the recorded words of Jesus and the writings of the apostles as well. But regardless of how broadly the term is thought to apply, proponents all agree that the verse is intended to hold up the written word of God as the means of regulating the content of spoken communication in the church.[1]

[1] This approach was espoused by a number of interpreters within an earlier generation of scholarship (e.g., Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* [2nd ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902] 174–75), and it has been advocated by some modern commentators as well (e.g., Donald G. Miller, *On This Rock: A Commentary on First Peter* [PTMS 34; Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1993] 306–307; Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005] 282). One of the most recent defenses of this view can be found in the work of Benno A. Zuiddam, who has published various studies on the meaning of λόγια and its practical application for biblical scholarship (see Benno A. Zuiddam et al., "Λόγιον in Biblical Literature and Its Implications for Christian Scholarship," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 19 [2008] 379–94, at 387; Benno A. Zuiddam, "Oracles of God: A Comparative Study of Apostolic Christianity and Its Greco-Roman World" [PhD diss., North-West University, 2008] esp. 163–76; idem, "Die Woord as maatstaf: die implikasie van Godspraak in 1 Petrus 4:11," *NGTT* 55 [2014] 489–508, at 501–6).

An alternative approach is to interpret the designation λόγια as a reference to the utterances of God communicated in verbal form. Those who adopt this position generally assume that the verse sets up a hypothetical comparison: those members with communicative gifts are encouraged to carry out their tasks *as though* they were delivering information that came directly from the mouth of God.[2] While such an approach emphasizes the seriousness and gravity with which speakers should endeavor to communicate the Christian message, their words are not taken to be equivalent to the oracles of God. Instead, interpreters simply view the comparative image as reflecting the appropriate manner in which speaking should be carried out in the church.

These two positions currently represent the most popular interpretations of 1 Pet 4:11a. Yet, both have left crucial questions unattended. Those who claim that λόγια represents Scripture often make this identification apart from any type of diachronic examination of the term's usage in antiquity. What is more, they rarely provide justification for the problematic grammatical structure that is generated by such a restoration. On the other hand, those who argue that the comparative image reflects a hypothetical scenario often default to this position without considering how the Petrine author depicts the mediation of divine revelation elsewhere in the epistle.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to provide a close examination of the three issues that most significantly impact the interpretation of this verse: 1) the meaning of λόγια; 2) the reconstruction of verbal elision in the apodosis clause; and 3) the views of the Petrine author regarding the mediation of divine revelation. After closely examining these matters, I will suggest that the sentence is actually meant to convey a direct correspondence between the comparative image and the situation of the letter's readers.[3] In other words, those who exercised χαρίσματα involving speech acts were understood to be delivering oracles from God, a conclusion that further contributes toward modern understandings of Christian communication in antiquity.

The Meaning of λόγια in 1 Peter 4:11a

At the heart of the debate surrounding the interpretation of 1 Pet 4:11a is the meaning of λόγια. While some interpreters have expressed doubts about the possibility that the anarthrous form would refer to Scripture,[4] the general premise that λόγια could,

[2] This has been the most popular view in recent scholarship. See, e.g., Duane F. Watson, *First Peter* (Paideia; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012) 104; Martin Vahrenhorst, *Der erste Brief der Petrus* (Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 19; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016) 177; et al.

[3] Over the years, there have been a handful of scholars who have proposed that some type of correspondence might be in view (e.g., J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* [HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1969] 180; Karl H. Schelkle, *Die Petrusbriefe. Der Judasbrief* [6th ed.; HThKNT 13/2; Freiburg: Herder, 1988] 120). No one has provided a defense of this theory, however.

[4] See, e.g., J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Waco, TX: Word, 1988) 250. In this regard, opponents argue that the absence of the article indicates that the phrase should be understood as

and often did, represent the sacred writings of Jews and Christians usually goes unchallenged. In fact, even those who deny that λόγια represents inscripturated revelation in 1 Pet 4:11a regularly acknowledge that the term conveyed this meaning in other places. What I will demonstrate, however, is that leading up to the composition of 1 Peter,[5] λόγια predominantly referred to *spoken* utterances received from a deity. Although the term was occasionally used to describe sacred writings, this meaning is somewhat rare prior to the second century CE, and thus its identification required specific contextual clues.

In its wider usage, λόγιον referred to a saying or pronouncement made by a deity,[6] and consequently, it was often used synonymously with the term χρησμός ("oracle"). Outside of Jewish literature, there are approximately 93 occurrences of the singular form (according to *TLG*) leading up to, and contemporary with, the composition of the New Testament. It is employed with reference to individual utterances originating from the divine realm. Over this same time period, the plural form appears approximately 69 times in extant sources. But rather than stressing any kind of collective sense, as though the oracles were understood as a defined collection, the plural generally represents multiple oracles.[7]

Numerous λόγια from the ancient world have been preserved in Greek writings.[8] Even without these specific examples, however, it would be possible to discern their primary functions from the way they are described in the source materials. Oracles were thought to provide supplicants with two forms of information. Some prescribed tasks to be performed or instructions to be followed.[9] These might dictate everything from whether one engaged in war to whom one might marry. The recipients undertook these duties with the utmost seriousness and zeal. This

indefinite (thus, "λόγια of God," rather than "*the* λόγια of God"). Elsewhere, however, this same construction (with an anarthrous λόγια θεοῦ) is employed to communicate a definite idea (see Num 24:4, 16 LXX). Such a usage is consistent with Apollonius's Corollary, which states that when both nouns in a genitive phrase are anarthrous, they normally share the same semantic force (see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996] 250–52). In this case, since θεοῦ is definite, λόγια could be as well. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that since an anarthrous form *can* perform a definite function, it *should* be understood as definite in this particular instance (as argued by Zuiddam, "Oracles of God," 168). Ultimately, context must be the determining factor.

[5] Elsewhere, I have argued that 1 Peter is a pseudonymous composition written between 70 and 95 CE (see Travis B. Williams, *Persecution in 1 Peter: Differentiating and Contextualizing Early Christian Suffering* [NovTSup145; Leiden: Brill, 2012] 22–34).

[6] See *LSJ* 1056; cf. BDAG 598. For an introduction to ancient oracles more generally, see W. Ruge, "Orakel," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (ed. Georg Wissowa and Wilhelm Kroll; vol. 18/4; Stuttgart: Alfred Druckenmüller, 1939) 829–66; Veit Rosenberger, "Oracles," in *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopedia of the Ancient World*, vol. 10, *Obl–Phe* (ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 183–87.

[7] Cf. Herodotus, *Hist*. 1.64; Polybius, *Hist*. 3.112.8; Strabo, *Geogr*. 17.1.17; Plutarch, *Rom*. 14.1.

[8] E.g., Strabo, *Geogr*. 1.3.7; Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesian Tale* 1.6; Diodorus Siculus, *Hist*. 2.26.9.

[9] For examples, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom*. 19.2.1; Strabo, *Geogr*. 3.5.5; Pausanias, *Descr*. 3.16.10; Athenaeus, *Deipn*. 6.79 (Kaibel).

is clear from a phrase that frequently accompanies references to oracles. When describing why an individual or group engaged in a particular course of action, ancient authors note that the deed was performed κατά τι λόγιον ("according to a certain oracle").[10] In other words, the directives received in an oracle were treated as instructions to be obeyed. The other function of oracles was to provide insight into future events.[11] For this reason, they are often associated with a prophecy. Not only could oracles be given by a prophet/soothsayer, their recipients awaited and eagerly attempted to discern their fulfillment.[12] The difficulty created by oracles is that they were sometimes given in an enigmatic form, and thus could be puzzling to those who received them. In some cases, this led recipients to misunderstand their meaning and even to act in ways that were contrary to the oracle's intent.[13]

On a few occasions, the term λόγιον denotes a spoken utterance that was preserved in writing. One example is found in Aristophanes's satire *The Knights*. In this instance, the slaves Nicias and Demonsthenes plot to steal the secret oracles (χρησμοί) of Cleon, a fellow slave who had gained the confidence of their master and had thereafter caused problems for the two. While Cleon was in a drunken slumber, Nicias swiped the oracles and brought them back for Demonsthenes to read (*Eq*. 118: φέρ' αὐτόν, ἵν' ἀναγνῶ). When Demonsthenes asks Nicias to "pour again" (referring to his desire for more wine), the latter inquires, "Is 'pour again' in the oracles (ἐν τοῖς λογίοις)?" (*Eq*. 122). So, while a λόγιον was a spoken utterance, it could be recorded in a written form.[14]

But even when referring to the written form of oracles as λόγια, an important distinction was normally made between the *content* and the *medium* of communication. That is to say, λόγια were thought to be contained in books; they were not the books themselves. This very fine distinction, which should probably not be pressed too far, is borne out in the literature, particularly in the case of the one group of prophecies that was known and often accessed in written form: the

[10] For examples of this phrase, see Epimenides, *Testimonia* frag. 1.53; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist*. 4.65.3; 5.54.4; Polybius, *Hist*. 8.28.7; Strabo, *Geogr*. 6.1.5; 13.1.53; 14.1.27; 16.4.19; Plutarch, *Thes*. 27.2; 32.5; *Arist*. 9.2; *Ant*. 34.1; Diogenes Laertius, *Vitae* 1.115; Pausanias, *Descr*. 1.44.9.

[11] See, e.g., Pausanias, *Descr*. 2.20.10; Polyaenus, *Strategemata* 1.8.1; Arrian, *Anab*. 7.16.5; Plutarch, *Lys*. 22.5-6; *Nic*. 13.1; Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesian Tale* 1.7.

[12] On the delivery of a λόγιον by a prophet/soothsayer, see Plutarch, *Aris*. 9.2; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 7.9. On the anticipated fulfillment of oracles, see Aristophanes, *Vesp*. 800; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist.* 4.73.6; Pausanias, *Descr*. 2.7.1.

[13] For examples of the enigmatic form of oracles, see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom*. 1.24.1; Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesian Tale* 1.7. For examples of misunderstanding, see Strabo, *Geogr*. 6.1.5; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist*. 16.91.3; Plutarch, *Pel*. 20.7; Pausanias, *Descr*. 3.11.6.

[14] Throughout classical literature, references are made to ancient λόγια (e.g., Heraclides Ponticus, *Fragmenta* 46b.8; Euripides, *Heracl*. 405; Polybius, *Hist*. 8.28.7; Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist*. 14.56.5; 15.49.2; 15.54.1; Plutarch, *Cam*. 4.1; *Nic*. 13.1; Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.212.4). The continued existence of these oracles from antiquity obviously requires some medium of preservation. In some cases, statements are made about oracles being remembered (e.g., Herodotus, *Hist*. 8.141; Plutarch, *Thes*. 26.4), indicating that some oracles were preserved through oral transmission. In other instances, however, it would have only been natural to preserve them in writing.

Sibylline oracles. In one instance, when Rome was in an uproar over an oracle (λόγιον) related to the city's downfall, which was reportedly from the Sibyl, "Tiberius denounced the oracle as spurious and made a careful investigation into all the books that contained any prophecies (τὰ βιβλία πάντα τὰ μαντείαν τινὰ ἔχοντα ἐπεσκέψατο)" (Cassius Dio 57.18.4–5). Such a description suggests that λόγια were found *in* the books. Another case in point is a statement from Plutarch. He notes a situation in which "many secret and prophetic books (βίβλων) were consulted, which they called the Sibylline." What is noteworthy about this description is that he states that "some of the hidden oracles in them (ἔνια τῶν ἀποκειμένων ἐν αὐταῖς λογίων) were said to refer to the fortunes and events of the time" (*Fab*. 4.5). This description also suggests that sacred books were thought to be merely *receptacles* of divine oracles.

The use of λόγιον within Jewish and Christian materials is similar to that found in other literature, although with a few key developments. One important difference is the tendency to connect λόγιον with the genitive modifier θεοῦ or κυρίου, a combination that is rare outside of these texts.[15] The popularity of this form reflects the influence of the LXX, where the collocation is used with some regularity.[16] In the LXX, the term λόγιον carries similar nuances to those found in Hellenistic writings. Aside from a singular instance in which it refers to human speech,[17] it describes the utterances of YHWH to humans, which are often delivered through special intermediaries (e.g., Moses; prophets). Like those oracles described in Hellenistic literature, these λόγια are focused on instructions or commands that the people of God are expected to follow, as well as promises about their future circumstances.[18]

[15] For examples of λόγιον connected with the genitive modifiers θεοῦ or θεῶν, see, e.g., Aelius Aristides, *Or*. 50 (Jebb p. 412); Polyaenus, *Strategemata* 8.43.1; Xenophon of Ephesus, *Ephesian Tale* 1.7; Flavius Claudius Julianus, Εἰς τὴν μητέρα τῶν θεῶν 18.30; Damascius, *De principiis* 1.86.10.

[16] The LXX uses a few different variations of this phrase: λόγια θεοῦ (Num 24:4, 16; Ps 106[107]:11); τὰ λόγια κυρίου (Ps 11[12]:7[6]; 17[18]:31[30]; 104[105]:19); τὸ λόγιον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ (Isa 28:13); and τὸ λόγιον τοῦ ἁγίου Ισραηλ (Isa 5:24). The term λόγιον is also used in second-person speech directed toward YHWH (τὸ λόγιόν/τὰ λόγιά σου: Deut 33:9; Ps 118[119]:11, 38, 41, 50, 58, 67, 76, 82, 103, 116, 133, 140, 148, 158, 162, 169–70, 172; 137[138]:2; Wis 16:11; cf. Ps 118[119]:123 [τὸ λόγιον τῆς δικαιοσύνης σου]), as well as third-person references (Ps 147:4 [Eng. 147:15]: τὸ λόγιον αὐτοῦ; Isa 30:27: τὸ λόγιον τῶν χειλέων αὐτοῦ; cf. Isa 30:27: τὸ λόγιον ὀργῆς).

[17] The one instance is found in Ps 18[19]:15[14], a passage that runs contrary to the claim of Zuiddam et al. that "while the author of λόγος could be human or divine, λόγιον was always produced in the heavenlies" ("Λόγιον in Biblical Literature," 381). Aside from the example in Ps 18[19]:15[14], there are also a few other occurrences in Hellenistic literature where the term is used to describe human speech. In both cases, it is connected with someone possessing extraordinary prophetic abilities (cf. T.Benj. 9.1 (Cod. Grae. 731) [oracles of Enoch]; Philostratus, *Vit. Apoll*. 4.24 [oracle of Apollonius]; Nicolaus, *Frags*. 68, line 99 [oracles of Zoroaster]).

[18] Cf. T. W. Manson, "Some Reflections on Apocalyptic," in *Aux sources de la tradition chrétienne. Mélanges offertes à M. Maurice Goguel à l'occasion de son soixante-dixième anniversaire* (ed. Philippe H. Menoud and Oscar Cullmann; Bibliothèque théologique; Neuchatel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1950) 139–45, at 143, who divides the LXX uses into four primary meanings: a) oracular communications of God to man either directly or through a prophet; b) divine commandments; c) divine promises; and d) human utterance in worship.

The prescriptive function of God's oracles can relate to a particular task in which the recipient requires specific directions, or it may relate to the laws that God bestowed upon those within a covenantal relationship.[19] The promissory nature of divine oracles is not always spelled out in detail (although, cf. Ps 11[12]:7[6]), but this function is evident from the fact that recipients regularly implore God for the deliverance that has been promised, and from the fact that God is commonly praised for the assurances that are offered.[20]

Another important distinction among Jewish and Christian writers is the manner in which the term λόγια was used to describe the utterances of God in written form. Some authors employed the word as a reference to oracles that had been preserved in a tangible form. This usage is found in the writings of Philo, who employs λόγια as a reference to inscripturated revelations when describing the Therapeutae, a Jewish sect that flourished in Alexandria. He mentions that, "in every dwelling there is a sacred place, which is called the holy place, and a chamber in which they seclude themselves to perform the mysteries of a holy life." What is noteworthy is the materials taken for this task. It is said that they "carry in nothing (μηδὲν εἰσκομίζοντες), neither drink, nor food, nor anything else which is necessary for supplying the needs of the body, but only the laws and oracles (λόγια) declared through prophets . . ." (*Contempl.* 25).[21] The fact that λόγια are carried into the secluded recesses of their dwellings reveals that some type of written document is in view.

But some Jewish and Christian authors extended this usage further. Moving beyond the meaning found in Hellenistic literature, wherein certain texts were thought to *contain* divine oracles, these authors employed λόγια as a synonym for the sacred writings themselves. In this way, they attributed an implicit importance to the *written medium* along with the words that were preserved therein. This usage is first attested in the Letter of Aristeas. In this account, the Jewish contingent sent to deliver the sacred Scriptures to Alexandria arrived at their destination and were immediately summoned by the king. The texts that they presented at the royal court are said to have been written on the finest parchment (ταῖς διαφόροις διφθέραις) and arranged with such care that even the connections between pages were invisible. Upon these materials, the law was inscribed (γεγραμμένη) in gold characters (Let. Aris. 176). What is noteworthy is the king's response to these texts. The author

[19] For specific directives, see Num 24:4, 16. For covenantal commands, see Deut 33:9; Ps 118[119]:11.

[20] On the specific pleas for God to act "according to (his) λόγιόν," see Ps 118[119]:41[38], 58, 76, 116, 133, 169–70. On the praise of assurance that God will act upon his promises, see Ps 17[18]:31[30]; 104[105]:19.

[21] Cf. Philo, *Praem.* 1: "It so happens that there are three forms of the oracles (λογίων) which were delivered through the prophet Moses: one third relate to the creation of the world, another third are historical, and a final third are legislative." This three-fold division appears to reflect the content of the Torah, not necessarily the Torah as a collection of sacred books. Elsewhere, Philo describes specific passages from the Torah as individual λόγιον (see *Gig.* 49 [Deut 5:31]; *Fug.* 60 [Gen 4:15]; *Congr.* 134 [Deut 10:9]).

tells us that "when the coverings (of the books) had been removed and the pages had been unrolled, the king stood still for a long time and then bowing down about seven times, he said: 'Thank you, friends, and thank you even more to the one who sent you, and most of all, thank you to God, from whom these oracles (τὰ λόγια) originate'" (Let. Aris. 177). In this instance, the king employs the term λόγια with reference to the physical scrolls before him. It is the written medium, not simply the message contained therein, that was considered sacred.

Another example of this usage is found in a passage from Josephus. When explaining why the Jewish people found themselves in a situation of destruction and defeat following the war with Rome, Josephus points to two oracles. The first he connects to the demolition of the tower of Antonia, which made the temple foursquare. Such a situation should have been avoided, according to Josephus, because "they had it written in their oracles (ἀναγεγραμμένον ἐν τοῖς λογίοις ἔχοντες): 'when the temple precinct becomes foursquare, then the city and the temple will be taken'" (*J.W.* 6.311). While the people did not heed this prophecy, Josephus notes that they did focus on another oracle (χρησμός) that was "likewise found in their sacred writings (ὁμοίως ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς εὑρημένος γράμμασιν)" (6.312). This prophecy described one from their company ruling the earth. The problem, Josephus says, is that the oracle (τὸ λόγιον) was misunderstood and misapplied by the Jewish people, and that it actually referred to Vespasian (6.313). While the source of both of these oracles is debated, what is important is that Josephus uses τὰ λόγια as an equivalent for τὰ ἱερὰ γράμματα ("sacred writings").

Considered from a diachronic perspective, what this evidence reveals is that during the time leading up to the composition of 1 Peter, λόγια referred predominantly to the *spoken* utterances of a deity. The two passages discussed above, along with a single reference in 1 Clement,[22] represent the only examples where the term is used to describe a group of sacred writings prior to the second century CE.[23] After this point, the meaning was taken up by early Christian writers as a common way of representing both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures.[24] This consideration is important for identifying λόγια in a late first-century document like 1 Peter. Positing a reference to divine revelation in a *written* medium should only

[22] The reference is found in 1 Clem. 53.1: "For you know, and know well, the sacred writings (τὰς ἱερὰς γραφάς), beloved, and you examine the oracles of God (τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ); therefore, we write these things as a reminder."

[23] Aside from the occurrence in 1 Pet 4:11a, λόγιον appears three other times in the New Testament (Acts 7:38; Rom 3:2; Heb 5:12). Space does not permit me to address these passages directly, but I would contend that none of them provide any indication that written documents—or, even more specifically, a defined collection of written documents—are in view.

[24] While this use of λόγια became common in Christian writings from the 2nd cent. onward, it is unnecessary to trace its development beyond the time of 1 Peter. For a full survey of the way the term was used in early Christian literature, see John Donovan, *The Logia in Ancient and Recent Literature* (Cambridge: Heffer and Sons, 1924), with important corrections offered by T. W. Manson, "The Life of Jesus: A Survey of the Available Material: (4) The Gospel According to St. Matthew," *BJRL* 29 (1946) 392–428, at 396–99, 411–28.

occur on the basis of strong contextual indicators. These might include a reference to the physical nature of the writing materials, or to the act of reading, or to some connection that is specifically drawn to a collection of texts. The problem is that none of these clues is present in 1 Pet 4:11a; instead, the author connects λόγια to *speaking* activities (εἴ τις λαλεῖ).

But the meaning of lexical forms is not the only interpretive question that must be considered. Next, we will explore the various ways that verbal elision might be reconstructed in the apodosis of the sentence and how it impacts the meaning of the passage.

The Reconstruction of Verbal Elision in 1 Peter 4:11a

The second issue that shapes the interpretation of 1 Pet 4:11a is the reconstruction of the verbal element that is necessitated by elision. Most interpreters agree that the omission of the main verb in the apodosis requires the inference of some form of λαλέω, likely an implicit third person imperative (λαλείτω): "whoever speaks, let them speak. . . ."[25] Where various approaches depart from one another is in their treatment of the elided element in the ὡς-clause. For those who regard λόγια as a reference to Scripture, the term is understood as the subject of a third-person verb (λαλοῦσιν) implicit within the ὡς-clause: "whoever speaks, let them speak like the Scriptures (speak)." As a result, the verse is interpreted to mean that any spoken communication designed for the benefit of the Christian community must be consistent with what God has already revealed in written form. If the words that are spoken are contrary to Scripture, then the χάρισμα is not being properly discharged.

There are various considerations that prevent this interpretation from being an entirely convincing solution, however. Most notably, this approach does not adequately explain the form and function of the elided element of the ὡς-clause. Scholars have noted that λόγια can function as the nominative subject or the accusative object; but in this particular context, the latter represents the more plausible option.[26] More specifically, λόγια is employed as the object of an implied participle (λαλῶν): "whoever speaks, let them speak like someone speaking oracles of God."[27] Evidence for this interpretation comes from the second half of the verse. The text reads, "whoever serves, let them serve like (someone serving) from the

[25] Cf. Jacques Schlosser, *La première épître de Pierre* (Commentaire biblique: Nouveau Testament 21; Paris: Cerf, 2011) 253.

[26] Others have reached this same conclusion, e.g., Samuel Bénétreau, *La première épître de Pierre* (2nd ed.; Commentaire évangélique de la Bible; Vaux-sur-Seine: Édifac, 1992) 246.

[27] Cf. Mark Dubis, *1 Peter: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament; Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010) 144; Greg W. Forbes, *1 Peter* (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2014) 149. Some incorrectly claim that λόγια is the direct object of the understood imperative (e.g., Francis W. Beare, *The First Epistle of Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction and Notes* [3rd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1970] 186; Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996] 299).

power which God supplies (ὡς ἐξ ἰσχύος ἧς χορηγεῖ ὁ θεός)" (1 Pet 4:11b). In this case, a participial form (διακονῶν) is required to make sense out of the ὡς-clause. Given the parallel nature of these two sentences, it seems best to supply a similar form in the first half of the verse as well. Grammatical considerations add further support to this interpretation, since it is consistent with the fact that in Koine Greek—much like in the classical period—the participle was often elided when it appeared with the particle ὡς (e.g., 1 Cor 9:26; 2 Cor 2:17; Eph 6:7; Col 3:23).[28]

Another factor in the restoration of elision is the wider usage of λόγιον in the Hellenistic world. While there is a very meager amount of evidence to suggest that the term, in an anthropomorphized sense, represented a communicative voice that spoke to ancient listeners (which would be consistent with a nominative function for λόγια),[29] in the overwhelming majority of cases λόγια were messages awaiting deliverance by ancient speakers.[30] Oracles represented the transmission of divine words to human recipients. Their communication is sometimes specifically connected to priests or priestesses who are associated with a sacred site. At Delphi, for instance, divine oracles were delivered by the Pythian priestess.[31] Other mediums are also known, however. Oracles might be delivered through magi, prophets, or even just learned individuals.[32] The role of these intermediaries was to serve as a faithful conduit to allow the words of the god or goddess to be accurately transmitted. When it was performed correctly, recipients were able to hear from the divine realm. This is sometimes stressed by references that depict oracles as originating directly from the gods.[33] Such a consideration would suggest, then, that the λόγια θεοῦ in 1 Pet 4:11a are words from the divine that must be transmitted by human mediators.

With this point now established, we will move on to consider the third and final issue that impacts the interpretation of 1 Pet 4:11a: the Petrine author's view of divine revelation and human mediation.

[28] See BDF §425(4); Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 3, *Syntax* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963) 158 n. 1.

[29] See Herodotus, *Hist*. 8.62: "the oracles say (τὰ λόγια λέγει) we must found a colony there [i.e., Siris in Italy]"; cf. also Philo, *Somn*. 1.166: "the oracle calls (εἶπε τὸ λόγιον) the grandfather, 'the father of the practitioner.'"

[30] In the past, scholars have raised concerns about interpreting λόγια as a nominative subject on the basis that "λόγια are always things spoken (even if afterwards written down) and not things speaking" (Edward G. Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Essays* [2nd ed.; London: Macmillan, 1947] 219).

[31] Pausanias, *Descr*. 2.20.10; Plutarch, *Thes*. 26.4; cf. Manetho, *Frags*. 54.46.

[32] Magi: Herodotus, *Hist*. 1.120. Prophets: Philo, *Gig*. 49; *Spec*. 1.315; 3.7; *Mos*. 2.188, 262–263; *Praem*. 1; *Contempl*. 25; Plutarch, *Arist*. 15.4; Philostratus, *Imag*. 1.4.2. Learned men: Arrian, *Anab*. 7.16.5.

[33] Diodorus Siculus, *Bib. hist*. 15.74.3: ἔχων δὲ παρὰ θεῶν λόγιον ("he had an oracle from the gods"); Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom*. 1.34.5: ὡς ἔστιν εὑρεῖν ἔν τε Σιβυλλείοις τισὶ λογίοις καὶ ἄλλοις χρηστηρίοις ὑπὸ τῶν θεῶν δεδομένοις εἰρημένον ("like those said to be found in certain Sibylline oracles and other prophecies given by the gods"); cf. also Pausanias, *Descr*. 10.1.10; Polyaenus, *Strategemata* 4.3.27; Philostratus, *Imag*. 2.33.1.

The Mediation of Divine Revelation in 1 Peter 4:11a

The comparative image in 1 Pet 4:11a, as we have demonstrated above, involves the spoken utterances of God being transmitted to Christian congregations through human agents. What remains to be considered is the nature of this comparison. That is, does the author envision a direct correspondence between the image he constructs and the communicative situation within early Christian communities, or does this image represent a hypothetical comparison provided for illustrative purposes only?

Most interpreters take the latter approach, claiming that those who exercised speaking gifts in the church were merely intended to perceive themselves as communicating the words of God. Within the pertinent literature, two reasons are generally given for rejecting the direct correspondence of the comparison in 1 Pet 4:11a: the presence of the comparative particle (ὡς) and the problem(s) created by a constant influx of divine revelation. In what follows, we will consider the legitimacy of these objections in some detail. Through a close examination of both the immediate and the more remote contexts, we will show that neither presents a problem for the direct correspondence theory and that the evidence—while not overwhelming—actually appears to favor this position over against the hypothetical view.

A. Reevaluating the Comparison in 1 Peter 4:11a

One of the primary reasons for positing a hypothetical comparison in 1 Pet 4:11a is the fact that the instructions are framed as part of a simile (ὡς). This point is particularly stressed by Gerhard Kittel, who states that "the intentional ὡς makes it clear that in primitive Christian consciousness the term [**λόγιον**] was reserved exclusively for the divine Subject. There is hesitation to say that the believer utters λόγια θεοῦ. He declares ὡς λόγια θεοῦ."[34] Others have similarly understood the comparative particle as a means of distancing the speech acts carried out in the Christian community from the oracles of God.[35]

But while the comparative particle must be taken into account, such a literary diagnosis is not sufficient to assign the comparison to the realm of the hypothetical. This is because the basis of the association is left unstated. It is possible that the Petrine author drew on the image of communicating divine oracles because it vividly illustrated the proper approach toward speaking within a local congregation. On the other hand, it is equally possible—and later, I will argue that it is more probable—that speakers were urged to understand their communicative duties in this way because the author believed there was a direct correspondence between human words and God's oracles. Both of these positions represent plausible foundations from which the current comparison could have been drawn.

[34] *TDNT* 4:139.

[35] See, e.g., Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 161; Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter* (trans. J. E. Alsup; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 303.

Rather than focusing on the comparative particle, therefore, a more pertinent consideration is the parallel construction that follows.[36] As in the case with the question of verbal elision, the second half of the verse provides a clue to the interpretation of the comparison in the first half. In 1 Pet 4:11b, the author instructs his readers, "whoever serves, let them serve as one serving from the strength which God supplies" (ὡς ἐξ ἰσχύος ἧς χορηγεῖ ὁ θεός). Few would deny that an actual correspondence was thought to exist between this comparison and the situation of the Petrine audience. Instead of representing a hypothetical model that believers could only hope to emulate (i.e., as though their strength were not actually supplied by God), this visual image describes the reality in which readers found themselves. They are encouraged to carry out their ministry tasks in light of the fact that they are empowered by the divine.

In the same way, it would be natural to assume a direct correspondence between the oracles of God and the speech acts that were undertaken in the Christian community.[37] As such, speakers are not being instructed to conform the language and content of their message to the character of God's word (as assumed by proponents of the scriptural view). Rather, the author is stating that those exercising speaking gifts are actually communicating the words of God. This certainly requires that speakers undertake their tasks with humility and seriousness (as proponents of the hypothetical view have stressed); but the need for such a disposition is not the ultimate focus of this verse. At issue is the nature of the task that is being performed.

B. Human Speech as Divine Revelation in 1 Peter

Most of the opposition to the correspondence view stems from the broad nature of the referent ascribed to λαλεῖ (v. 11a). It is generally agreed that "speaking" in this verse refers to verbal communication involving members of the Christian community exercising their χαρίσματα for the benefit of the church body.[38] The implications of this view are significant: if the dispensing of communicative gifts generated the very words of God, then divine revelation would have been continually dispensed in the church. What remains to be seen is whether this revelatory nature of speaking gifts would be consistent with the theology of 1 Peter. In what follows, therefore, we will consider how the Petrine author represents divine revelation through human channels elsewhere in the epistle.

[36] Cf. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 250–51.

[37] Cf. John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 759 n. 539: "The point of both qualifications is that the gifts of both speech and service are supplied by God."

[38] See Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2010) 130; Watson, *First Peter*, 104.

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B.1. The Proclamation of Christian Missionaries as Divine Revelation

One event with which 1 Peter closely connects human speech and divine revelation is the evangelization of the readers. The circumstances surrounding this event are briefly described in two places, with each revealing important information about how God is thought to communicate through human intermediaries. In 1 Pet 1:12, the author discloses the supernatural empowerment behind the proclamation of the gospel. The language of the verse (διὰ τῶν εὐαγγελισαμένων ὑμᾶς) distances the author from the group that initially evangelized the Anatolian communities, suggesting that others likely carried out the task; nevertheless, their efforts are portrayed as a work of the Spirit. These missionaries themselves are depicted as intermediate agents (διά + genitive) in this process.[39] Ultimately, it was God who was responsible for announcing (ἀνηγγέλη) the gospel to the readers in much the same way that God provided revelation (ἀπεκαλύφθη) to the Israelite prophets. In this instance, the means through which God's message was disclosed to human recipients was the Holy Spirit, who was "sent from heaven" (1 Pet 1:12).[40] The process of this transmission is fairly straightforward, then: God used divine channels (Holy Spirit) to convey supernatural words to human missionaries, who then became God's mouthpiece for communicating the gospel across the ancient Mediterranean region.

The question that is raised by this reconstruction is whether such a process was achieved without a revelational disconnect. That is, as the message passed from the divine realm to the human realm (and more specifically, from the divine mediator to human agents) was anything lost or impeded during the transfer? Or, to put the question another way, was the message proclaimed by human agents understood to be the very words of God that originated in the divine realm?

The answer to this question might be found in the letter's second reference to the process of evangelization. In 1 Pet 1:23–25, the author describes the audience's new birth and attempts to emphasize its divine causation. The readers are reminded that they had been reborn from (ἐκ) imperishable rather than perishable seed, and that this took place "through the living and abiding word of God" (διὰ λόγου ζῶντος θεοῦ καὶ μένοντος) (1:23). While λόγος is occasionally used among New Testament authors to refer to the Son of God,[41] here it is probably best to understand the term

[39] See Dubis, *1 Peter*, 21. See, further, Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 431–38.

[40] See Michelangelo Tábet, "La Scrittura e lo 'Spirito di Cristo' (1Pt 1,10–12)," in *Initium Sapientiae: Scritti in onore di Franco Festorazzi nel suo 70° compleanno* (ed. Rinaldo Fabris; RivBSup 36; Bologna: Dehoniane, 2000) 373–85, at 378: "la descrizione dello Spirito Santo come 'mandato dal cielo' serve . . . a caratterizzare il messaggio evangelico come messagio divinamente ispirato."

[41] John 1:1, 14; 1 John 1:1; Rev 19:13. Some posit a similar interpretation in this instance (e.g., Jacques Schlosser, "Ancien Testament et christologie dans la prima Petri," in *Études sur la première lettre de Pierre. Congrès de l'ACFEB, Paris 1979* [ed. Charles Perrot; LD 102; Paris: Cerf, 1980] 64–95, at 71–72; Jacob Prasad, *Foundations of the Christian Way of Life according to 1 Peter 1, 13–25: An Exegetico-Theological Study* [AnBib 146; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2000] 364–73).

as a reference to the spoken utterances of God (hence, θεοῦ is a subjective genitive). This interpretation derives from the connection with the two verses that follow.

The author illustrates his point about the enduring nature of the "word of God" through a citation from Isa 40:6–8, a passage originally meant to assure Babylonian exiles that God's promises of restoration would be fulfilled. The quotation reflects the text of the LXX with only a few minor points of divergence. One important difference is the substitution of κύριος for θεός, a change that was most likely made for christological reasons.[42] In its present form, the citation sets the transient nature of physical life (v. 24) in contrast to "the word of the Lord" (τὸ ῥῆμα κυρίου), which is said to endure forever (v. 25). Since the quotation was introduced in support of the author's claim about the "word of God" in v. 23, it is natural to conclude that ῥῆμα and λόγος are used synonymously. Nevertheless, one distinction can be drawn from the author's christological reading of Deutero-Isaiah. Rather than functioning as a subjective genitive (i.e., the message that the Lord speaks), as was the case in the source text, κυρίου in this instance should most likely be taken as an objective genitive, describing the message proclaimed about the Lord. Support for this interpretation is found in the brief explanatory comment that follows the citation: "this is the word (τὸ ῥῆμα) that was preached to you" (v. 25b). This statement indicates that the "word" (ῥῆμα) received from Christian missionaries was the same "word" (λόγος) that contributed to their new birth. As such, one could say that those who originally evangelized the Anatolian congregations did so by proclaiming a divine message, the very word of God.

When the details of these two passages are assembled, it is apparent that the Petrine author understood the evangelization of the Anatolian readers to involve the communication of God's word through human mediators, a process that was aided by the Holy Spirit's transmission of the divine message to the human realm. While the message proclaimed by these Christian missionaries likely consisted of traditional themes related to the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, they were not merely communicating human words; in actuality, they were transmitting a message that originated from the divine. By preaching the gospel, they were speaking the very "word of God" (λόγος θεοῦ). What this means is that the transmission of the divine speech through human agents would not have been an altogether unusual prospect to the Petrine author.

The question that remains, then, is whether any distinction would have been made between the inspired message proclaimed by these early Christian missionaries and the words that were proclaimed by individual members of the Anatolian congregations through the deployment of spiritual gifts. If these two activities were understood as merely different manifestations of the same Spirit working through the same medium (i.e., human agents), then it would be natural to assume that the

[42] See Martin H. Scharlemann, "Why the *Kuriou* in 1 Peter 1:25?," *CTM* 30 (1959) 352–56, at 353–54.

words spoken in the latter context would have been understood as the "word of God" as well.

B.2. The Proclamation of Church Members as Divine Revelation

While the metaphor of rebirth is introduced in 1 Pet 1:23–25 as a way to describe the readers' response to the proclamation of the gospel, it is extended further in the subsequent verses (2:1–3) in an effort to explain their responsibilities as newborn children. The ultimate task that they are assigned is to crave τὸ λογικὸν ἄδολον γάλα (2:2). Discerning the precise meaning of this phrase has proven difficult within critical scholarship, but therein lie important clues about the Petrine author's view of divine revelation and its dissemination through human agents.

Various suggestions have been made with regard to the specific allusions inherent within this command. Some have connected the reference to the mystery cults, wherein initiates were given milk and honey to symbolize their new birth (cf. Sallust, *De deis et mundo* 4; PGM 1.20).[43] Others stress a connection with Christian baptism, drawing from the (somewhat later) references in Christian literature to milk and honey being consumed by the newly baptized (cf. Tertullian, *Cor*. 3.3 and *Marc*. 1.14; Hippolytus, *Trad. ap*. 23.1–3; Jerome, *Lucif*. 8).[44] But given the established usage of this same metaphorical imagery elsewhere (see below), it is unnecessary to attach it to any specific rituals. To understand the meaning of this phrase, we must focus on the adjectival modifiers used to describe it.

The specific type of milk that is in view in 1 Pet 2:2 is represented by two adjectives: λογικόν and ἄδολον. The latter is a term that is ordinarily employed to denote the unsullied nature of actions (Plutarch, *Brut. an*. 4), relationships (Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant. rom*. 7.32.2), or moral qualities (Philo, *Her*. 95 and *Ios*. 148). When it is used with reference to material substances, it reflects a purity without any mixture of contamination, such as gold that has undergone the process of refining (cf. Cornelius Alexander, frag. 18.21; Eup. 2.15; Philo, *Leg*. 1.77). The term is found frequently in the nonliterary papyri as part of loan contracts, leases, and sales receipts that recorded the quality of agricultural products.[45] One example comes from a contract that was written up for the lease of a piece of property in the village of Kerkeosiris (southern Fayum, 103 CE). It states, "The appointed

[43] See, e.g., E. Richard Perdelwitz, *Die Mysterienreligion und das Problem des I. Petrusbriefes. Ein literarischer und religionsgeschichtlicher Versuch* (RVV 11/3; Giessen: Töpelmann, 1911) 57–59; Beare, *First Epistle of Peter*, 115; cf. *TDNT* 1:646–47.

[44] See, e.g., Frank L. Cross, *1 Peter: A Paschal Liturgy* (2nd ed.; London: Mowbray, 1957) 47; A. R. C. Leaney, *The Letters of Peter and Jude: A Commentary on the First Letter of Peter, a Letter of Jude and the Second Letter of Peter* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 30.

[45] The adjective is used to describe the uncontaminated form of various products: wine (P.Col. 280; CPR 18.5; P.Col. 280; P.Grenf. 90); corn/grain (P.Mich. 121; BGU 2024; P.Flor. 72); grain (BGU 1268, 1943, 1944); herbs (BGU 1015); olives (BGU 2333); radish seed (SB 10532); oil (P.Ryl. 97). But wheat is by far the most common (BGU 1005; P.Col. 176, 178; P.Mich. 312, 321, 567, 633; P.Oxy. 1474; P.Ryl. 601; P.Teb. 11, 105, 109, 388; et al.).

rent shall be paid every year by Ptolemaios to Horion (or one sent by him) in the month of Payni, with the payment being made in wheat that is new, pure, and uncontaminated in any way (πυρὸν νέον καθαρὸν ἄδολον ἀπὸ πάντων)" (P.Teb. 105). From other references, it appears that this uncontaminated form referred to its lack of mixture with dirt or other food products (cf. SB 10942, 14301; P.Wisc. 7; P.Teb. 370). In 1 Pet 2:2, the adjective clearly makes sense as a description of that which is free from any substances that might pollute it.

Closer to the source domain of the author's metaphor of nursing newborn babies is another context in which this adjective must be understood: the physiology of infant nutrition.[46] Among ancient medical theorists, breast milk was thought to be a combination of excess menstrual blood, which the growing fetus pressed up into the breast (Hippocrates, *Gland.* 16.572; Aulus Gellius, *Noct. att*. 12.1.12–14; cf. *Lev. Rab*. 14.3) and male semen, which heated the blood (Aristotle, *Gen. an*. 2.4, 4.8). This made it "a semen-infused concoction that enable[d] the creation, restoration, and completion of life."[47] Without reference to the role of a female in the process of birth, 1 Peter focuses on God's role in the process of new birth. The milk on which these newborns feast ultimately derives from the procreative seed of God (cf. 1 Pet 1:23). This is crucial, given the other important assumption about milk in antiquity.

The process of breastfeeding was believed to impact not only the physical but also the moral development of the child.[48] Specifically, the disposition of the one who nursed the child was said to dictate the quality of the milk supplied, which in turn shaped character formation (cf. Aulus Gellius, *Noct. att*. 12.1.14–20). This assumption explains the importance that many assigned to finding a proper wet nurse in the event that the mother did not breastfeed (see Soranus, *Gyn*. 2.19–27; Plutarch, [*Lib. ed*.] 5). In the present verse, the milk proposed for the Petrine audience not only originated from the deposit of God's seed, it also appears to have been consumed directly from the breasts of God, who "is portrayed in this text as a mother suckling her babies."[49] This motherly role guarantees that the milk in question would be completely wholesome and uncontaminated (ἄδολος), thus positively impacting the character of the readers.

[46] For more substantive treatments of this topic, see Troy W. Martin, "Christians as Babies: Metaphorical Reality in 1 Peter," in *Reading 1–2 Peter and Jude: A Resource for Students* (ed. Eric F. Mason and Troy W. Martin; RBS 77; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014) 99–112, at 106–12; idem, "Tasting the Eucharistic Lord as Usable (1 Peter 2:3)," *CBQ* 78 (2016) 515–25, at 518–22; Alicia D. Myers, "*Pater Nutrix*: Milk Metaphors and Character Formation in Hebrews and 1 Peter," in *Making Sense of Motherhood: Biblical and Theological Perspectives* (ed. Beth M. Stovell; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016) 81–99, at 82–88.

[47] Myers, "*Pater Nutrix*," 86.

[48] See, further, Philip L. Tite, "Nurslings, Milk and Moral Development in the Greco-Roman Context: A Reappraisal of the Paraenetic Utilization of Metaphor in 1 Peter 2.1–3," *JSNT* 31 (2009) 371–400.

[49] Donelson, *I & II Peter*, 57.

The other adjective (λογικός) used to describe this milk presents some difficulty—although it relates more specifically to the question of divine revelation. Within Hellenistic literature, λογικός was used to describe what is rational (or reasonable), and consequently, it was a favorite term among (especially Stoic) philosophers.[50] Given the frequency with which this usage appears, many have proposed a similar connection in the present verse (hence, "rational milk").[51] It is thought to describe "food capable of sustaining those powers by which man [*sic*] beholds truth, and becomes capable of wisdom," a food that, at the same time, "would calm down passion and appetite, the ruling powers of humanity in the heathen life."[52] In this way, the word is said to echo earlier references to the intellect and desires (cf. 1 Pet 1:13–14, 22).

An alternative is to set λογικός in contrast to milk as a literal food source for physical nourishment. Within this approach, two aspects receive emphasis. Focusing on the representative quality of λογικός, some believe that the adjective was employed to clarify that the milk in question is to be taken figuratively (hence, "metaphorical milk").[53] Adding greater specificity to this interpretation, others have stressed that λογικός was, at times, used to denote the incorporeal nature of a given entity. Some ancient authors, it is noted, employ this adjective to describe spiritual offerings/sacrifices performed apart from ritual killing (cf. T. Levi 3.6; Corp. herm. 1.31; 13.18, 21). Viewed from this perspective, the present phrase would be rendered "spiritual milk," denoting milk that feeds the spiritual (as opposed to the physical) needs of believers.[54]

Neither the "rational" nor the "metaphorical/spiritual" interpretation is without problems, however.[55] For this reason, many have sought an alternative approach, interpreting λογικός against the backdrop of its immediate context. Having just mentioned the "word of God" (λόγος θεοῦ) that generated the new birth of the readers (1 Pet 1:23–25), the author employs an adjectival form that derives from the substantive λόγος, the suffix -κος conveying the sense, "belonging to" or "with

[50] See *LSJ* 1056; *TDNT* 4:142–43.

[51] This view was common among an earlier generation of commentators (see, e.g., F. J. A. Hort, *The First Epistle of St. Peter I.1–II.17: The Greek Text with Introductory Lecture, Commentary, and Additional Notes* [London: Macmillan, 1898] 100–101). But it has also been occasionally defended by more recent interpreters (e.g., W. Edward Glenny, "1 Peter 2:2a: Nourishment for Growth in Faith and Love," in *Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Greek Exegesis* [ed. Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006] 441–48).

[52] Hort, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 101.

[53] E.g., J. E. Huther, *Kritisch exegetisches Handbuch über den 1. Brief des Petrus, den Brief des Judas und den 2. Brief des Petrus* (4th ed.; KEK 12; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1877) 104; Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament*, vol. 4: *The Epistle to the Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles of St. James and St. Peter, the Epistles of St. John and St. Jude, and the Revelation* (5th ed.; Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1878) 345.

[54] This translation is reflected in the majority of modern versions (e.g., NEB, NRSV, NIV, ESV, HCSB, NET), and it has been defended by a variety of modern interpreters (e.g., Donald P. Senior, *1 Peter* [SP 15; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003] 49).

[55] For a fuller discussion, see Elliott, *1 Peter*, 400–401.

characteristics of" in relation to the root to which it is attached.[56] In this way, the milk in question would be λόγος-milk,[57] a type that is closely related to the spoken word.[58] Some years ago, this interpretation was set on a firmer philological foundation by Dan McCartney, who demonstrated that in the Hellenistic world "the very common meaning of 'rational' was often closely tied to the facility of speech" (see Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Comp*. 11.119; Plutarch, *Alc*. 2.5). Furthermore, he noted that λογικός is even used, on occasion, to describe verbal communication (Plutarch, *Cor*. 38),[59] which seems to be the case in its present usage. But regardless of whether this philological approach presents a stronger case than either of the positions discussed above,[60] most would agree that the adjective is intended to echo the earlier use of λόγος (see 1 Pet 1:23–25).

The meaning of the two adjectival modifiers in 1 Pet 2:2 plays an important role in establishing the referent of γάλα ("milk"). A second factor that further aids in this process is the identification of the milk metaphor in other early Christian sources. When this same image is employed elsewhere in contemporary texts, it is always used to describe the teaching imparted within a Christian community. Paul claims that he fed only milk to the Corinthian congregation because they were not ready

[56] See James H. Moulton and Wilbert F. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 2, *Accidence and Word-Formation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1929) 377–79. Cf. also A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (4th ed.; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1934) 157–58.

[57] Since it is difficult to communicate this exact sense with an equivalent English term, the adjective is often treated as though it were the genitive (τοῦ) λόγου as a way to bring out its proper meaning; hence, "milk of the word" (cf. KJV, CEB, NASB, CSB, NKJV). Some have questioned this translation, with a few even declaring it to be an impossible rendering (see Hort, *First Epistle of St. Peter*, 100; Beare, *First Epistle of Peter*, 115). It is important, however, not to confuse an explanatory translation with a description of a form's actual function. Although the sense of denominative adjectives with -κος suffixes can sometimes be conveyed by merely supplying an -ly ending to the English root word (e.g., Heb 9.1: τό ἅγιον κοσμικόν, "earthly sanctuary"), there is no standard means of communicating such forms in English. Often, it requires translating the adjective as though it were a genitive modifier (cf. Tit 3.9: μάχας νομικάς, "quarrels about the law"), which is the case in the present instance. Lacking a suitable English equivalent, it is perfectly natural to treat λογικός as though it were functioning like a genitive: "milk of the word."

[58] Cf. Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 147; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 400–401.

[59] See Dan G. McCartney, "λογικός in 1Peter 2,2," *ZNW* 82 (1991) 128–32, at 132.

[60] One of the strongest objections raised against this position is its circumlocution. In her critique of this position, Karen H. Jobes notes: "The straightforward phrase 'word of God' (*logos tou theou*) occurs in almost every book in the New Testament and more than eighty times throughout the whole. If Peter meant to restrict the referent of the metaphor to the preaching of the gospel or the reading of scripture, he had a straightforward way to say that" ("'Got Milk?' A Petrine Metaphor in 1 Peter 2.1–3 Revisited," *Leaven* 20 [2012] 121–26, at 122). What this objection overlooks is how such an alteration would have impacted the semantics of the passage. If the author were to have written τὸ ἄδολον λόγον θεοῦ ("the uncontaminated word of God"), the metaphor of the new birth would have been compromised. Even τὸ ἄδολον γάλα λόγου ("uncontaminated milk of the word") would have communicated something slightly different, placing the focus on λόγος rather than on γάλα. The explanation for the present construction, then, seems to lie in the author's intent to maintain the metaphor that has been carried along over the last few verses.

to receive more advanced instruction (1 Cor 3:2; cf. 1 Thess 2:7), while the author of Hebrews equates milk with the fundamental principles of the oracles of God (5:12; cf. Barn. 6.17). This consideration, in combination with the λογικός-λόγος connection discussed above, has led most to equate the "milk" in 1 Pet 2:2 with the message of the gospel of Christ.[61]

Upon first glance, this interpretation might seem to imply that the diet of the Anatolian congregations consisted of a very narrow stream of content, being limited to historical considerations about Christ's death and its role in the triumph over sin. But for the Petrine author, this message was much broader. The gospel of Christ was thought to provide both a pattern for Christian living and a hope for eschatological reward.[62] In this way, it was an all-encompassing message, not only about the past, but also about the present and the future. This means that the word of God that was originally proclaimed to the readers (1 Pet 1:23–25) is one-and-the-same substance with the message that fuels spiritual growth (2:1–3).

This brings us back to the relationship between the message proclaimed by early Christian missionaries and the speech acts of individuals who ministered within their local communities. Based on the connections drawn above, it seems perfectly natural that the Petrine author would describe the exercise of communicative χαρίσματα as involving the actual transmission of divine oracles (1 Pet 4:11a). Just as the readers had earlier received the word of God from missionaries who spread the gospel across Asia Minor, so also they are encouraged to continue longing for the same word of God that was regularly proclaimed to them within their Christian congregations. While we can only speculate about whether and to what extent new revelations might have been received through this process, what seems clear is that when believers proclaimed the message of Christ, they were (thought to be) communicating the very words of God.

Conclusion

The interpretive questions raised by 1 Pet 4:11a present scholars with a variety of challenges. The focus here has been on the three issues that most significantly impact the meaning of the verse: the referent of λόγια, the reconstruction of the sentence necessitated by verbal elision, and the nature of the Petrine author's views

[61] Jobes has advocated a wider application of this referent beyond the word of God, arguing that the milk in question is "milk that is true to the nature of the new eschatological reality established by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and into which Peter's readers have been re-born" ("Got Milk? Septuagint Psalm 33 and the Interpretation of 1 Peter 2:1–3," *WTJ* 64 [2002] 1–14, at 13). The basis for this claim lies in Jobes's insistence that the referent be sought not in the preceding verses (1:23–25) but in the more immediate context (2:1–3) and, in particular, in connection with the quotation from Ps 33 (LXX) in v. 3 (see, further, idem, "'O Taste and See': Septuagint Psalm 33 in 1 Peter," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 18 [2015] 241–51, at 245–50). However, such a theory is unable to account adequately for the various connections between milk and the word of God mentioned above.

[62] See, further, Cliff Barbarick, "Milk to Grow On: The Example of Christ in 1 Peter," in *Getting 'Saved': The Whole Story of Salvation in the New Testament* (ed. Charles H. Talbert et al.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011) 216–39.

on divine revelation. As I have shown, these issues create significant problems for the two most widely accepted interpretations of the passage. For this reason, I have set forth an alternative. What I have proposed is that 1 Pet 4:11a is intended to convey a direct correspondence between the comparative image (i.e., one who delivers oracles from God) and the ministry of those who exercised speaking gifts within the Anatolian congregations. This means that when Christians rendered service to the community through various forms of verbal communication, they were understood to be dispensing divine revelation. Not only does this interpretation represent a fresh perspective on communicative acts in 1 Peter, it also reveals that an epistle whose testimony is often neglected within the wider field of New Testament scholarship might have something to contribute to wider discussions of inspired speech in early Christianity.