

HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION!
(IF WE MANAGE TO GET THERE, ANYWAY)
AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF 2 PE 1,19–21

HEBREWS-REVELATION PAPER

PRESENTED TO DR. MICHAEL KRUGER

WRITTEN BY: ALBERTO PAREDES

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How Firm a Foundation! (If We Manage to Get There, Anyway)

An Exegetical Study of 2 Pe 1:19–21

¹⁹ καὶ ἔχομεν βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον ᾧ καλῶς ποιεῖτε προσέχοντες ὡς λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν ἀνυχμῇ τόπῳ, ἕως οὗ ἡμέρα διαυγάσῃ καὶ φωσφόρος ἀνατείλῃ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ²⁰ τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι πάντα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται· ²¹ οὐ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη προφητεία ποτέ, ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι.

Introduction

As Reformed pastors or scholars, one of our main tenets is affirming the doctrine of inerrancy and inspiration. Our lives and ministries depend upon the truthfulness of this doctrine. If inspiration is not true, then we cannot completely trust the Bible. If we cannot completely trust scripture, then how should we discern between truth or else therein? Hence, the doctrine of scripture, and its *autopistic* witness of divine inspiration is crucial for our belief system.

2 Peter 1:19–21 is a neglected *loci* for the doctrine of inspiration. Nevertheless, it is also one of the texts which teaches us the most about the inspiration of scripture. However, the text itself presents its own exegetical difficulties.

Hapax legomena, obscure imagery, and ambiguous syntax are only some of the obstacles the exegete needs to sort out before coming to any conclusion of what scripture is, and how is *that* helpful for the Christian.¹ Furthermore, the entire epistle in which this text is found has been the target of tremendous critical scholarship attack especially upon matters of authorship and canonicity. Indeed, we believe that scripture is a very firm foundation, but first, we need to get there through exegesis.

The purpose of this paper is, then, to remind the reader of two things: 1) that the exegetical task is an essential tool for the pastor-theologian; for which this work will serve as a ‘test–case’ that attempts to prove this proposition. And 2) that indeed, the purpose of the apostle Peter was to encourage Christians to trust in the reliability of the written word of God.

¹ Samuel Bénétreau has recognized the difficulty of interpreting this pericope and has proposed reading it considering 1 Peter 1:1,10–12 as an exegetical tool. Though his endeavor proves helpful, it by no means resolves every intricacies and difficulties that our text in view presents. See Samuel Bénétreau, “Évangile et Prophétie: Un Texte Original (1 P 1,10-12) Peut-Il Éclairer Un Texte Difficile (2 P 1,16-21)?,” *Biblica* 86.2 (2005): 174–91.

Starting Presuppositions

I do not here intend to answer every possible question about the text or the epistle beyond any shadow of reasonable doubt. That would require far more space² than the scope of this work allows. Rather, I want to present a plausible case for what the proper translation and meaning of this pericope should be. To do this, it is necessary to begin with some presuppositions, which I will hereby lay out.

Against the vast majority of critical scholars,³ I regard Simon Peter the apostle (1:1, 16-18) as the author of this letter and reject the idea of pseudonimic authorship.⁴ I also will assume the proper place of 2 Peter among the New Testament canon.⁵ I believe that Peter is aware of his imminent death under Nero's authority, and thus, worried about the future state of the church and conscious about the presence of false teachers, he tasks himself with the writing of this letter intending to remind the church about certain truths of the Christian faith that were being denied by those false teachers. The denial of the Parousia seems to have the overall prominence among these false teachings against which Peter is replying. And thus, acquaintance with this fact and its treatment will aid our exegetical endeavor.

² And more qualifications from the author.

³ Bart D. Ehrman, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 456.

⁴ Carson and Moo provide a succinct list of arguments against and for Petrine authorship, displayed side by side, they provide a helpful tool to evaluate the burden of both sides of the discussion. See, D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Second edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 659–63.

To evaluate various arguments in favor of Petrine authorship, see Simon J. Kistemaker, “2 Peter,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*, ed. Michael J. Kruger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 472–73; Michael J. Kruger, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 42.4 (1999): 645–71; Michael Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter, and the General Epistle of Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries 18 (Leicester, England: Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity Press; Eerdmans, 1987), 13–39; Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 139–59; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary v. 37 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 21–36, 317.

To read two examples of the classical argument for pseudonymity and against Petrine authorship, see J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1969), 235–37; Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, 8. Dr., Word Biblical Commentary [General ed.: David A. Hubbard; Glenn W. Barker. Old Testament ed.: John D. W. Watts. New Testament ed.: Ralph P. Martin]; Vol. 50 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 2005), 158–62.

⁵ I here refer to an ontological definition of canon, and to a canon as self-authenticating. To expand upon this understanding of canonicity, read Kruger, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter,” 40–46; 149–51; Michael J. Kruger, *Canon Revisited: Establishing the Origins and Authority of the New Testament Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 88–122.

Finally, another rhetorical feature to have in mind is the structure of the letter. Carson and Moo argue for an overall chiasmic structure for this epistle:⁶

A 1:1-15 “Make every effort”

B 1:16-21 “Hold fast to the conviction that Christ will return”

C 2:1-22 Description and Denunciation of the False Teachers

B’ 3:1-13 “Hold fast to the conviction that Christ will return”

A’ 3:14-18 “Make every effort”

In this way, we understand our pericope to be located within the largest context of the last letter from the apostle to the churches, dealing with the denial of the Parousia, and specifically in B, which deals with two arguments to hold fast to the conviction that Christ will indeed return. Our precise text comes immediately after 2 Pe 1:16-18, this is, the first argument. I may summarize this first argument as follows: “We the apostles, have seen a ‘down payment’ of Christ’s glorious return in the mount of transfiguration, and heard the voice of the Father there bearing witness to the Son.” So, our text begins, and with it, its difficulties.

Better than What?

καὶ ἔχομεν βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον

Translations differ widely on the rendering of this text. These differences are mainly guided by the relationship translators (or commentators) see between βεβαιότερον, often translated as ‘more certain’ and τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον, ‘the prophetic word.’⁷ At a surface level, βεβαιότερον is the comparative form of the word βέβαιος, which is an adjective, meaning: in force, valid, or firm. It generally relates to the stability or permanency of something.⁸

Many render the phrase βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον as the ‘more firm,’ ‘more certain,’ or ‘more reliable prophetic word.’ However, the problem this rendering arises is that we

⁶ Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 654–55.

⁷ Most authors agree that this is idiomatic for The Old Testament writings, and not only the Naabi from the Tanak. Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2006); Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*; Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*; Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter, and the General Epistle of Jude*.

⁸ Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and William Arndt, “Βέβαιος, α, Ον,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 173.

now need to answer the question: more certain than what? Here is when we begin to see differences in interpretation. Some argue that the word is more certain than the whole transfiguration event in 1:16-18. This would be: Argument A is that we have been witnesses of the transfiguration. However, if you are not convinced of that, Argument B begins by presenting something *more certain* than the transfiguration event itself. We will refer to this as B>A.⁹

I find this to be problematic based on two arguments. On a syntactical basis, the use of the coordinate conjunction καὶ at the beginning of our phrase presents Argument B as being of equal status with argument A.¹⁰ Those who argue for B>A will be quick to express awareness with the function and wide range of meaning of the καὶ particle. In which case, καὶ would need to have an adversative function that will be contrasting the whole event, or Argument A, with what is coming: Argument B. The problem with this view, on a discourse level, is that it doesn't seem to quite fit the whole argument. Peter is not arguing that those who believe in the Parousia on the basis of B have a surer foundation than those who believe in the Parousia on the basis of A. He presents both arguments with the intent that they will convince the readers about the imminence of the Parousia.

On the other hand, the whole idea that τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον would be βεβαιότερον with respect to the transfiguration event itself does not seem to be theologically accurate. More questions would arise such as, how is it that the prophetic word would be more sure than the transfiguration? In what sense would it be more certain? What is the intrinsic difference between the historical event in which Christ was endowed with his heavenly glory, and the inspired document that attests for this event? Is it not true that in both cases there is triune divine intervention taking place?

Indeed, in the transfiguration event, the Father is bearing witness to the glory of the Son, while the Spirit has made sure to preserve this event in an inscripturated form. On the other hand,

⁹ Many of the authors who take this view, end up arguing for the transfiguration experience as providing a kind of confirmation to the inscripturated word. To see a good defense of this position, see Travis B. Williams, "Confirming Scripture through Eyewitness Testimony (2 Peter 1:19a): Resolving a Crux Interpretum," J. Study New Testam. (2021):

I remain unconvinced of that position for the arguments presented in this paper. Also, to read a response to Williams, see Stanley E Porter and Andrew W Pitts, "Τοῦτο Πρῶτον Γινώσκοντες Ὅτι in 2 Peter 1:20 and Hellenistic Epistolary Convention," J. Biblic. Lit. 127.1 (2008): 165–71.

¹⁰ See discussion of the use of καὶ in Steven E. Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament: A Practical Introduction for Teaching and Exegesis*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, 2010), 23–27.

scripture, though inspired by the Spirit (2 Ti 3:16), bears witness to the will of the Father and to the glory of the Son. The interrelationship between scripture and the work of the triune God is too close to try to make an argument for the superiority of τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον over the transfiguration event.¹¹

A second option is at hand. Let us remember that, when Argument A is presented, the argument is not the transfiguration event itself, but Peter's experience of this event. This understanding would allow scripture to be rendered as superior to Petrine experience. Nevertheless, such a response still doesn't solve the first syntactical objection on a discourse level. In other words, I see little consistency in rendering καὶ as 'and' in translation, while at the same time giving βεβαιότερον a comparative¹² (even, contrastive) function.

A third option is skillfully explained by Neyrey. Using the available sources, he traces the usage of βέβαιος in relation to λόγος (an argument) in the writings of Philo. Philo basically asserts that when a λόγος is seen by witnesses it is *made* βέβαιος.¹³ Bauckham¹⁴ helpfully explains, "[a]s an anticipatory fulfillment of prophecy, the transfiguration makes the Parousia yet more certain. Hence the translation: 'we have the prophetic word *made more sure*.'"¹⁵ This is, the relationship between τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον and βεβαιότερον, is that βεβαιότερον is describing the effect that the transfiguration had upon τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον. In this sense, they insert the lemma 'made,' which gives βεβαιότερον an adverbial function. One of the objections to this rendering is the addition of a verb that is not there in the Greek. Are we obliged to insert or infer this verb from the text itself, or rather this is a move that seeks to accommodate presupposed interpretations?

¹¹ Calvin qualifies those taking the comparative view as "not fully comprehending the whole context" and "doing violence to the meaning". See John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and The First and Second Epistles of St Peter*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. William B. Johnston, Calvin's Commentaries (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1979), 339–40.

¹² Robertson gives 2 Peter 1:19 and the use of βεβαιότερον as a comparative, but does not explain why nor provides an analysis of the text in its context. Archibald T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1980), 663.

¹³ Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 37C (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 179–80.

¹⁴ Neither Bauckham nor Neyrey ascribe to this interpretation.

¹⁵ Italics his. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 223.

Davids¹⁶ states that βεβαιότερον is functioning as the complement in an object-complement double accusative construction¹⁷ without giving further information. And those who opt for Neyrey's argument on Philo's use of βέβαιος do not state double accusativeness as grammatical grounds for its decisions. Though, it is true, that in those cases sometimes a verb needs to be inserted to clarify the relationship between the object and the complement, neither Wallace¹⁸ nor Robertson¹⁹ cite 2 Peter 1:19 as examples of this grammatical occurrence.

Both Neyrey and Baukham, offer a good solution. After Baukham recognizes that there is no comparative that fits the whole argument well enough, he highlights the common use in Koine Greek of comparative forms for superlative meanings. This is, βεβαιότερον, in this case, would not be 'more firm than something'. It would unlikely be 'made more certain by'. Rather, it would only mean 'very certain' or 'very firm'.

Thus, furthering the discourse, Peter would be stating that just as the transfiguration event bears good witness of the Parousia, the very firm prophetic word does also. This will keep in line the overarching argument, while at the same time respects the function of καὶ as coordinating two clauses (or arguments) of equal status.²⁰

So, we render: καὶ ἔχομεν βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον "And we have the very firm prophetic word," ᾧ καλῶς ποιεῖτε προσέχοντες "which you do good in paying attention to." The firmness of the word lays in its inscription and preservation through the ages. It is this

¹⁶ Davids has one of the less clear treatments of this text in his commentary on 2nd Peter and Jude. First, he renders the text in English as "the word of the prophets made more certain [...]," then, he explains Baukham's position as arguing for "having a firm grasp on the prophetic word", and Neyrey's as "having something made more certain." He opts for the latter. Yet, he concedes that a superlative might be in view. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 206–7.

¹⁷ The full construction being: βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον. See Peter H. Davids, *2 Peter and Jude: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 61.

¹⁸ Wallace silence is significant because he often cites disputed texts that some consider to be whatever grammatical feature he is explaining. Daniel B Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics an Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament ; with Scripture, Subject and Greek Word Indexes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 181–89.

¹⁹ Robertson's silence is even more striking. Since he specifically deals with the double accusative construction as related to the verb ἔχω, and would have had the opportunity to cite 2 Peter 2:19 if he considered it an example of the case in view. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 479–86.

²⁰ Calvin calls this a "twofold evidence." See Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and The First and Second Epistles of St Peter*, 340.

firmness which preserves the event of the transfiguration by many written witnesses today, including the Gospels and Peter's second epistle.²¹

An Obscure Illustration and Enlightening Metaphors

ὥς λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν ἀρχηρῷ τόπῳ,
ἕως οὗ ἡμέρα διαυγάσῃ
καὶ φωσφόρος ἀνατείλῃ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν

The next test is not one of syntax or translation, but one of meaning. The text itself is straightforward. Here are three clauses that read: “1] as a lamp shining in a dark place, 2] until the day dawns 3] and the morning star rises in your hearts.” The puzzle here is not the text, but the message.

Peter seems to be using an illustration of some sort, introduced by the comparative particle ὥς (as). The question is, where is he drawing this illustration from? And what is his purpose in using this imagery? Furthermore, he seems to be using λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν ἀρχηρῷ τόπῳ as an illustration, and ἕως οὗ ἡμέρα διαυγάσῃ φωσφόρος ἀνατείλῃ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν as a metaphor. If so, how do we know the difference? And again, what does this metaphor represents?

To answer these questions, let us first comment some of the commonalities binding these clauses, and then we will analyze each clause by itself.

Right from the start we can see the harmonic use of words or constructions related to light with λύχνῳ φαίνοντι (a lamp shining), ἡμέρα διαυγάσῃ (the day dawns) and φωσφόρος ἀνατείλῃ (the morning star rises). Also, either explicitly or implicitly, there appears to be a comparison with the concept of darkness: ἐν ἀρχηρῷ τόπῳ (in a dark place), the ending of the nocturnal darkness by the dawning of the day, and Calvin notes that our whole life, including ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν (your hearts) are in a sort of “darkness.”²² Furthermore, it is fascinating that

²¹ Clark's conclusion is similar in meaning, though grammatically different. He understands βεβαιότερον as a comparative adjective, which he renders: more firm, or more durable. He goes on to explain that the comparison is between the firmness of the written word, which is more than the apostolic experience. While I agree in the meaning of the passage and believe to be saying the same thing with our own rendering, I do not think Clark deals well with the grammar of καὶ by preserving it as a coordinate conjunction instead of an adversative or comparative one (but). I still think that our rendering preserves Clark's meaning, while respecting the syntactical features of the overarching discourse. Gordon H. Clark, *I & II Peter* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1980), 25–28.

²² Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews and The First and Second Epistles of St Peter*, 341.

in each of these clauses, an *hapax legomena* occurs: αὐχμηρῷ (gloomy or dark), διαυγάση (dawns), φωσφόρος (morning star). Let us revise each of these clauses now individually.

1] ὥς λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν αὐχμηρῷ τόπῳ

The act of paying attention to the very firm prophetic word which we have is compared (ὥς) to a λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν αὐχμηρῷ τόπῳ, a lamp shining in a dark or gloomy place.

It is not at all uncommon in Jewish literature to compare the word of God to a lamp (Ps 119:105, Pr 6:23, Wis 18:4). And the same construction ὥς λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν αὐχμηρῷ τόπῳ is found in the apocryphal 4 Ezra (12:42).²³ Davids does well in pointing out that, though there is probably no dependence here, the case of 4 Ezra illumines how the imagery of light was of common usage in Jewish literature.²⁴ We can be confident that this first illustration would have resonated with the Jewish-culture-aware audience.

2] ἕως οὗ ἡμέρα διαυγάση

Peter does not provide any direct resolution to this metaphor in his letter. Therefore, the interpretation of both ἕως οὗ ἡμέρα διαυγάση and φωσφόρος ἀνατείλει ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν has been a matter of debate among scholars. However, careful analysis of the grammar and the discourse may help in elucidating what Peter meant. To suggest an interpretation, I argue, we need to a) do justice to the grammar, b) fit the context of the discourse, and c) do not suggest any meaning that is against the theology of another pericope in scripture. The suggestion that fits the better these three conditions is to be preferred.

Recapitulating, Peter is arguing for the certainty of the Parousia. He has stated that such as apostolic experience is evidence of the coming judgement, we [the church] also have the very firm prophetic word. He has encouraged the church to pay attention to this word, using it as a lamp is used to bring light into a dark place.

Now Peter continues with the word ἕως. This word alone could function as an improper preposition meaning either ‘while’ or ‘until.’ However, in this context, until is to be chosen for two reasons. ‘While’ almost certainly requires an imperfective aspect from the action to which it is referring. This is, to use ‘while’ we need a verb that will allow the word while, which implies

²³ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 1048.

²⁴ Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude*, 208.

continuity, or at least, indefiniteness, to make sense (eg. I breath while I am walking, or while I walk). However, the verbs in clauses 2] διαυγάση and 3] ἀνατείλη are stated in the aorist tense and are thus perfective in aspect. Hence, a rendering with while is utterly impossible without changing the tense of the aorist in translation. Moreover, the construction ἕως οὗ always renders ‘until’ over against ‘while.’ Then, in this case, the following clauses will indicate *until when* would it be good to pay attention to the very firm prophetic word. This use of *until* is further attested by the fact that both διαυγάση and ἀνατείλη are in the subjunctive mood, in the realm of possibility, not denoting a present reality, but (in this case, at least) a future one.

All this grammatical information is already pointing towards something definite that has not yet occurred, but the author expects to happen. Davids qualifies these clauses, then, as ‘temporal clauses.’²⁵ So, we ought to ask, until *when* should we use the scripture?

The first answer states: ἕως οὗ ἡμέρα διαυγάση, until the day dawns. What day? This is where the context helps to shed light upon this obscure reference. There is a specific day being discussed all throughout Second Peter: the day of the Parousia, that day which the false teachers deny, and for which Peter has been arguing all along. But this is not the only temporal clause.

3] καὶ φωσφόρος ἀνατείλη ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν

The use of καὶ here as a coordinate conjunction, also helps with the interpretation. In this case, since we have temporal clauses in view, and the first temporal clause points to a specific and determined day, the second temporal clause ought to point in the same direction.

If our interpretation of ἕως οὗ ἡμέρα διαυγάση as a reference to the Parousia is correct, then the next temporal clause cannot be any other day. If we are to use the prophetic word until the day of judgement, then we cannot stop using it before that, but we also can’t stop again in a future time after that (at least not without start using it again). If the preposition ἕως οὗ is pointing forward to a stopping point, then the stopping point must be one and the same, even when two different metaphors are used to describe it.

Thus, I argue that φωσφόρος ἀνατείλη ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν is another reference to the same event: the Parousia. Hence Runge’s point about the equality of status between the clauses connected by καὶ stands. Now, beyond grammatical and syntactical evidence, the specific use of φωσφόρος has its own eschatological allusions.

²⁵ Davids, *2 Peter and Jude*, 62.

Though being another *hapax legomena* in the New Testament, the image of such a star could be a reference to Numbers 24:17 LXX in which an ἄστρον ἀνατελεῖ ἐξ Ἰακώβ. Beale and Carson also recognize the eschatological overtones of such a lemma.²⁶

Also, elsewhere in early Jewish literature we see the use of the *star* bearing eschatological significance. The Dead Sea Scrolls provide good examples of this:

“The star is the Interpreter of the Law who will come to Damascus as is written: ‘A star moves out of Jacob, and a scepter arises out of Israel.’ The scepter is the Prince of the whole congregation and when he rises, he will destroy the sons of Seth. These escaped at the time of the first visitation” [CD-A VII, 18–20]²⁷

Also, The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs:

“And His star shall arise in heaven, as a king shedding forth the light of knowledge in the sunshine of day, and He shall be magnified in the world until His ascension. He shall shine forth as the sun in the earth, and shall drive away all darkness from the world under heaven, and there shall be peace in all the earth.” *T. Levi* 18:3²⁸

Furthermore, the New Testament itself elucidates the usage of the night-day contrast (Ro 13:12, 1 Thess 5:4–9). In addition, Revelation 2:28 speaks as well of τὸν πρωῒνον ἀστέρα, the morning star. Later in the book, Jesus Christ identifies himself as that morning star (22:16).

If this is so, and φωσφόρος ἀνατείλη is nothing but another aspect of the same event referred to by ἡμέρα διανύσῃ, the only difficulty remaining is why is this φωσφόρος ἀνατείλη something that occurs ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν?²⁹ Why in our hearts? Though many arguments have been made, including exceeding joy,³⁰ inner illumination, and a transmutation of the

²⁶ Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1048.

²⁷ Also [1QMXI, 6–7], [4Q175, 9–13], Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, Paperback ed. (Leiden : Boston : Grand Rapids, MI: Brill ; Eerdmans, 2000), 561, 131, 357.

²⁸ Also, *T. Jud* 24:1 Alexander Roberts and Arthur Cleveland Coxe, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325. 8: The Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, the Clementina, Apocrypha, Decretals, Memoirs of Edessa and Syriac Documents, Remains of the First Ages* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1995), 16.

²⁹ I am aware that it is possible, on a purely grammatical base, to interpret ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν as modifying γινώσκοντες, however, I am not convinced by those arguments, and assume that ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν is modifying ἀνατείλη. To see a good discussion on this, Terrance Callan, “A Note on 2 Peter 1:19-20,” *J. Biblic. Lit.* 125.1 (2006): 143–50.

³⁰ Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (Indiana: Scribner, 1922), 269.

Parousia into an individual experience,³¹ I believe we should be especially careful with this passage. In a sense, there is nothing wrong with affirming that an event of such magnitude will have existential consequences. On the other hand, this is an obscure topic in scripture itself, and when the scripture is silent, we should be cautious to speak.

This could be a reference to the doctrine of glorification, without making specific statements of what exactly does this mean or how it will look like. Schreiner, grounded in Cauley's observations, provides an interesting suggestion about this passage being a completion of the process of illumination mentioned in 2 Corinthians 4:6.³² In any case, we can say that something exceedingly positive will happen to the individual believer at the time of the second coming of Christ.

Among these same lines, I would argue that in contrast with the dark nature of Peter's description of the second coming for false teachers and unbelievers (2:3, 9–13, 17, 21–22), the imagery provided in verse 19 is strikingly positive. While we often think of the Parousia as the "last event," Peter has used illustrations that imply a new beginning. Both the dawning of a day and the rising of the morning star, which was the common name for Venus,³³ denote not an end, but a commencement.

The first and second conditions seem to have been met. However, doesn't such an interpretation go against verses like Psalms 19:9, 119:89-90, Matthew 5:18, Matthew 24:35 and John 10:35, which all emphasize the eternal character of scripture? Does this interpretation mean that after the Parousia, scripture will become irrelevant? Are we to stop using it at all? No. In fact that seems to go against the βεβαιότερον qualifier. However, with all confidence we may say that we will stop using scripture with reference to the argument being made by Peter, which is, the imminence of the Parousia.³⁴ We will use scripture as evidence for the certainty of the Parousia, until the Parousia comes, then there will be no need to use it as evidence for something that will bear its own witness. That does not mean that scripture will stop being very firm, nor that we will not use it at all after the second coming. It only means that, at that time, its purpose as a witness to the Parousia will be fulfilled.

³¹ As noted regarding Mayor's Commentary on 2 Peter in Beale and Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1048.

³² Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 322.

³³ Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, 225; Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and Jude*, 322; Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 228.

³⁴ Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 228.

γίνεται as an ἐπιλύσις for a Hapax Legomenon

τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται

Most Bibles render τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται as follows: “knowing this first, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation.” This, to me, is problematic. First, because it does not fit well with the rest of the argument. What does *interpretation* have to do with the denial of the day of Judgement?

It might be helpful to note that the construction τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες comes again in the parallel chiastic section in chapter 3:3–4. Its use may shed some light of what Peter has in mind in 1:20. Peter writes:

“[...] knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” 2 Pe 3:3-4

By Peter’s own description of the problem he is addressing, false teachers do not seem to be merely mis-interpreting scripture but denying it altogether. Bearing this in mind, ‘interpretation’ as a rendering for ἐπιλύσεως does not appear as the best candidate.

Furthermore, ironically, the rendering of ἐπιλύσεως as ‘interpretation’ has opened the door to all sorts of misleading explanations. Roman Catholics use this verse as the *locus classicus* for defending the authority of the *Magisterium* as the final judge over matters of biblical interpretation. On the other hand, by using this same rendering of ἐπιλύσεως we have found in the literature cases of utter meaninglessness in translation. Gordon Clark provides an example:

“Strachan makes the remarkable translation: ‘No prophecy is of such a nature as to be capable of a particular interpretation.’” Then, Clark comments: “This means either that no prophecy has any particular meaning and is therefore meaningless, or that a general rule [of scripture, ...] cannot be applied to any particular case [...]. This too makes the OT meaningless.” He adds, “if something less stupid can be extracted from Strachan’s words, it will founder of the fact that 1:21 is not a proper reason for that assertion. Whatever 1:20 means, it must be such that 1:21 explains it.”³⁵

³⁵ Clark, *I & II Peter*, ii. 28-29.

Whatever it is that Strachan was trying to say on that rendering, this passage provides us with two important facts: 1) we are dealing with a difficult text,³⁶ and 2) truly, verse 21 needs to fit what verse 20 means.

It is best therefore to begin with the basics of grammar-translation. Let us start with the verb, and then move from there.

πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως οὐ γίνεται

The verb γίνεται may stay with its usual rendering “to become” or “to come about.” So far, whatever else the verse is saying, it fits the theme of divine origin that will be stressed out in verse 21. The nominative case in πᾶσα προφητεία reveals our subject, which is modified by the genitive γραφῆς. Considering the negative particle οὐ, what we know have is that ‘all prophecy of scripture does not come about’ and then ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως must be qualifying this ‘coming about.’

This is when we should decide what to translate first between ἰδίας and ἐπιλύσεως. As a rule, I am always inclined to translate the more common, and leave that which is obscure to the end. Thus, since we are not yet sure who the ἰδίας is referring to, I would translate this genitive of source in the most general sense as ‘from someone’s own’ pending further clarification if enough clues are provided by context at the end.

So, “no prophecy of scripture comes about from someone’s own ἐπιλύσεως.” Then again, the question rises, why do most scholars translate ἐπιλύσεως as “interpretation?” And is there any other rendering that would make the text clearer?

Answering the first question is easier. The challenge of this verse comes partly because ἐπιλύσεως is another *hapax legomenon* both in the New Testament and in the LXX. To understand its meaning, we ought to look elsewhere. And in going elsewhere, the usual consensus on translation has been the word “interpretation.” ἐπιλύσεως is used in such a way elsewhere in early literature that, almost always, is found to be in a context of clarifying or explaining something. Ironically, here it is the opposite. Since the consensual rendering “interpretation” does not seem appropriate to this pericope, ἐπιλύσεως leaves the interpreter pretty much ἐν ἀρχμῇ τόπῳ³⁷ once again.

³⁶ Davids, *2 Peter and Jude*, 63.

³⁷ In a dark place.

The context from which Peter is talking about is so ‘unique,’ that none of the external sources’ comparisons bears witness to its full meaning in this text. Often mentioned sources include Shepard of Hermas, Athenaeus, Josephus and Aquila’s Genesis. Also, Mark 4:34 in which the verbal form of ἐπιλύσεως is found. The problem with all of these is that they are mentioned in a context in which a text or saying has already been provided, and the word here signifies the explanation or interpretation of such saying. In other words, these examples are not fully dealing with the source of the words itself (though it could be said that they are dealing with the source of interpretation). The case of 2 Peter 1:20 is different.

The reason is that the dominating verb here is γίνεται. Also, let us consider the fact that ἐπιλύσεως is presented as a genitive in apposition with a genitive of source. Finally, we must remember Clark’s rule that, whatever verse 20 is saying, that must be explained by verse 21. And stepping ahead of ourselves for a while, we know already that 21 is dealing with the source or origin of scripture.

All this data signals to the fact that the author is speaking of the source of the prophecy of scripture. This is, the matter being treated here is not at all interpretation (though Peter will mention some of that in 3:16), but origin. How, then, could we fit ἐπιλύσεως as a noun that conveys source? After considering all the evidence, this is not difficult to do. Our first option is to retain the rendering ‘interpretation’ while ascribing to it a meaning that conveys ‘source.’ This is what most scholars do.

I would like to present an alternative. If in fact ἐπιλύσεως is used in many places as interpretation or explanation, the root verb from which the noun comes is ἐπιλύω, and it means, first of all, ‘to loose’ or ‘to release’. Is only in this sense that ἐπιλύσις means interpretation or explanation. The person who explains is, as it were, ‘releasing’, ‘loosing’ or ‘untying’ the meaning of a certain passage.

In this case, most of the commentators seem to be failing to distinguish the categories of “semantic use” and “pragmatic effect.” To briefly summarize this categories, semantic use would be the real meaning or range of meanings of some word while the pragmatic effect would be how people use and understands that same word under certain context.³⁸ Usually, the problem with not distinguishing these categories lays in the “semantic use” taking over the “pragmatic effect” of what it is being said. However, our case seems to be the opposite. The use of this word in

³⁸ Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 7–9.

literature has been so applied to ‘explaining’ and ‘interpreting,’ that its semantic use has almost been reduced altogether in New Testament Greek lexicons. To my knowledge, Liddell only, gives ἐπιλύσις the meaning of ‘release.’ If this meaning has not been prevalent in lexicons, its presence in linguistic keys is extant.³⁹ Some commentators also note this meaning, while deciding to keep with the currently accepted rendering of ‘interpretation.’⁴⁰

We could think about this term in an analogous way as when a movie is *released*. This is a situation in which something that was not yet published is made known. So too, in this case, every single word and phrase around ἐπιλύσεως is pointing to a meaning conveying the idea of source or point of origin, a proper translation, then, could well be: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from a someone’s own release.”

Thus, what we have done is to use γίνεται as the dominating verb which guides the rest of this translation and follow the signs which point to a discussion about origin rather than interpretation. We are still to determine if the ἰδίας refers to the reader, or else. We will determine that in light of the meaning of the next verse.

Who does the Carrying?

οὐ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη προφητεία ποτέ,
ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι.

We have come finally to the last verse of our text, and a review seems appropriate. Peter is writing to the church to warn them against the false teachers who deny the Parousia. He argues from his apostolic experience at the mount of transfiguration, and from the very firm word of prophecy. He encourages the church to keep paying attention to scripture for this matter as a light which illumines a dark place, until the Parousia comes, and something glorious happens in them. To do this, he says we must know something: a three-clause argument. The first clause is that no prophecy of scripture comes about from someone’s own releasing. Who then brings about the prophesy of scripture? The next two clauses will carry the answer with them.

³⁹ Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, ed. Cleon L. Rogers Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publ. House, 1995), 773; Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1998), 584.

⁴⁰ Clark, *I & II Peter*, ii.28.

οὐ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη προφητεία ποτέ

Three things are to be noted from this clause. First, it begins with the discourse particle γὰρ, which function is to further the explanation about that which has been said, without providing any new line of argumentation. In summary, γὰρ is explanatory and not developmental in nature.⁴¹

The significance of this is that, until this point, Peter has not yet given a positive argument for why the prophetic word is βεβαιότερον. A closer reading will show that Peter has stated the firmness of the word, commend the church for paying attention to it, illustrate how it works, indicate until when will it serve its contextual purpose, and denied human origin. Peter has not given a single positive argument to support that the scripture is βεβαιότερον. This is not because Peter is out of ideas, or out of arguments. As we will see, the argument he will provide is so good, that its application will transcend the contextual purpose of his argument. In fact, what Peter is doing is what is known in discourse analysis by the technical term of “forward pointing reference and target.”⁴² Its rhetorical use is to elongate the argument while creating expectation on the reader. In other words, while Peter is not telling us why is it that the scripture is βεβαιότερον, each line ads to our curiosity and eagerness to learn precisely what he is not telling us. He is creating expectation, and he is almost done.

Almost. There is still the clause in view to analyze. And the second thing we are to note about it is the emphatic negation it bears.

Peter already has told us that prophesy does not come about from someone’s own releasing, finalizing the previous phrase with the Greek construction οὐ γίνεται. Now, Peter begins with another negation, οὐ⁴³ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη προφητεία ποτέ, for no prophecy was ever carried by the will of man. The closeness of these two negatives brings a major emphasis to the overall negation being stated, something like Paul’s famous μὴ γένοιτο.

Finally, and as a point of transition, we are to note the verb used by Paul. ἠνέχθη is an aorist passive form of the verb φέρω. Peter is saying that the prophecies were not carried by men. Now, in stating the positive, he will use the same verb, but not the same object nor subject.

⁴¹ Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 51–57.

⁴² Runge, *Discourse Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 61–71.

⁴³ Bolds mine.

Who did the carrying? What was being carried? This are some of the last questions we need to answer.

ἀλλ' ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι.

By using the strong adversative particle ἀλλά, Peter signals the reader that, at last, the answer is coming. Patience will bear its fruit, and we are in for a treat: ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι, men spoke from God being carried along by the Holy Spirit.

There was a carrying,⁴⁴ it is only that those men did not do the carrying.⁴⁵ The use of the same participial form of the verb lets us sneak peek into the process we now call inspiration and see how every time those men of God spoke from him, they did so while being carried along by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶ We call this process concursive operation.⁴⁷ Thus, whatever they said, it was from God, and not from themselves.⁴⁸ With this in mind, I believe the very last step is identifying the ἰδίας from verse 20.

Though we could leave it as indefinite, I would argue that we have, at least, two strong reasons to believe that the ἰδίας is speaking of the prophets and not of anyone. The argument against identifying ἰδίας with the prophets is that these prophets have not been mentioned at all in the text.⁴⁹ However, verse 21 explicitly speaks about the men of God, and it does so while treating the same theme as ἰδίας is making reference in verse 20: the origin of prophetic word. So, it is not from these men's own releasing that prophecy came about, but by the fact that when these men of God spoke, they did so while being carried along by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, it

⁴⁴ I believe that there is a third use of the word φέρω in the text embedded in the word φωσφόρος in verse 19. I can do no other than assume that Peter was aware of the most spread use of ἄστρος rather than φωσφόρος. Still, he opts for a word that is composed by the words for light, and to carry φως+φέρω, literally, the carrier of light, while using it as a reference to Jesus Christ, who said of himself: ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου. Though, I would not preach a sermon out of this.

⁴⁵ Kuske sees more parallels with φέρω by expanding the pericope from 16-21. See David P Kuske, "Exegetical Brief: Conveyed from Heaven--2 Peter 1:17, 18, 21," *Wis. Lutheran Q.* 99.1 (2002): 55-57.

⁴⁶ Green, *The Second Epistle General of Peter, and the General Epistle of Jude*, 101-3; Nicholas Dodson and Joseph K Pak, "An Examination of 2 Peter 1:19-21 and Its Implications for Understanding the Inspiration of Scripture," *Estud. Bíblicos* 76.3 (2018): 385-409.

⁴⁷ Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1980), 282-83; John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2013), 180-81.

⁴⁸ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub. Co., 2020), 135-37.

⁴⁹ Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 322-23.

is interesting to note that ἰδίας is presented in its feminine form, while when referring to the church members (those towards which the letter is addressed), New Testament authors tend to do so in masculine terms. Why choosing the feminine? The feminine-form noun with a masculine meaning ‘προγῆτης’ would provide a very plausible explanation for the feminine ἰδίας.

Conclusions

We have come thus to the end of our pericope. We in fact manage to get here, after a long path of hapax, ambiguities, syntax, and grammar. What is the treasure at the end of this hunt? What do we have?

And we have a very firm prophetic word, to which you do good to pay attention, as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day might dawn, and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first: that no prophecy of scripture comes from a prophet’s own release. For no prophecy was ever carried by the will of man, but men spoke from God being carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:19-21⁵⁰

We may be confident about the firmness, the certainty, and the permanency of the word of God. We know that, though eternal in some respects, and always carrying eternal truth, there is a sense in which after the Parousia, we will no longer need to use it as an apologetic sword. The truth will be clear to everyone, and we will not need to defend it. We learned that though the warnings for false teachers are terrible and truth, the same eschatological event is presented as not the end, but the beginning for the believer. Indeed, this is concurrent with the eschatological image of precious New Heavens and New Earth. We learned that to read the scriptures is to be face to face with God,⁵¹ for though men were instruments in its production, God was at all times the author. At the same time, it follows that ignoring scripture, or pretending to speak in the name of God as receiving prophecy is to belittle God’s marvelous work of real inspiration of scripture.⁵²

Finally, I hope to have proven the critical place of exegesis as a tool in the man-of-God’s belt. We do have a very firm foundation, and we are to proclaim it boldly in all that it says. But to do this, we need to keep growing in our ability to handle it with skill.

⁵⁰ Translation mine.

⁵¹ Sigurd Grindheim, “Biblical Authority: What Is It Good for? Why the Apostles Insisted on a High View of Scripture,” *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 59.4 (2016): 803.

⁵² John Sherwood, “The Only Sure Word,” *Masters Semin. J.* 7.1 (1996): 53–74.

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Appendix I. Sentence Diagram for 2 Peter 1:19-21

19 καὶ ἔχομεν βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον

ᾧ

καλῶς ποιεῖτε προσέχοντες

ὥς

λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν ἀνχμηρῷ τόπῳ,

ἕως οὗ

ἡμέρα διαυγάσῃ

καὶ

φωσφόρος ἀνατείλῃ ἐν ὑμῶν ταῖς καρδίαις,

20 γινώσκοντες τοῦτο πρῶτον

ὅτι

πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς οὐ γίνεται ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως ·

21 γὰρ

οὐ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου προφητεία ποτέ ἠνέχθη,

ἀλλ’

ἄνθρωποι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ

φερόμενοι ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου.

Appendix II. Color-Coded Diagram for 2 Peter 1:19-21 with Discourse Markers

19 καὶ ἔχομεν βεβαιότερον τὸν προφητικὸν λόγον

ὃ

καλῶς ποιεῖτε προσέχοντες

ὥς

λύχνῳ φαίνοντι ἐν αὐχμηρῷ* τόπῳ,

ἕως οὗ

ἡμέρα διαυγάσῃ*

καὶ

φωσφόρος* ἀνατείλῃ ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν,

20 τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες

ὅτι

πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς ἰδίας ἐπιλύσεως* οὐ γίνεται

21 οὐ γὰρ θελήματι ἀνθρώπου ἠνέχθη προφητεία ποτέ,

ἀλλ'

ὑπὸ πνεύματος ἁγίου φερόμενοι ἐλάλησαν ἀπὸ θεοῦ ἄνθρωποι.

[Indicative Clause]

[Relative Pronoun]

[Imperative Clause]

[Comparative Particle]

[Illustration]

[Prepositional Marker of Time]

[First Time Marker/Metaphor]

[Coordinate Conjunction]

[Second Time Marker/Metaphor]

[Adverbial Clause]

[Forward Pointing Markers]

[Negative Statement A]

[Negative Statement B]

[Strong Adversative Particle]

[Positive Statement/Rationale]

Color Code:

Regarding Prophecy

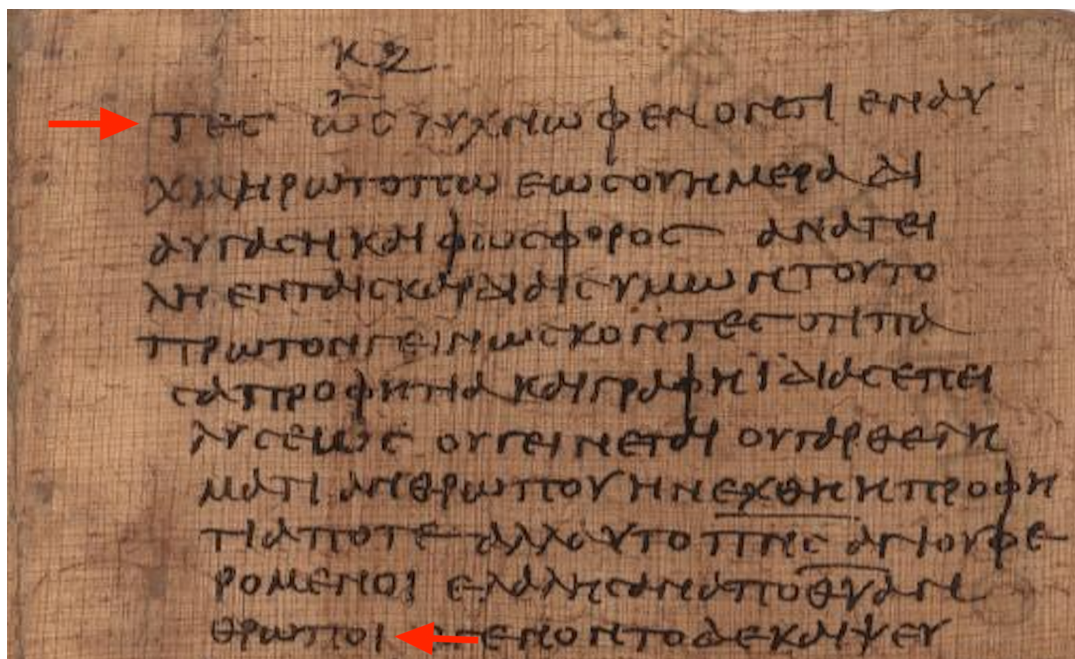
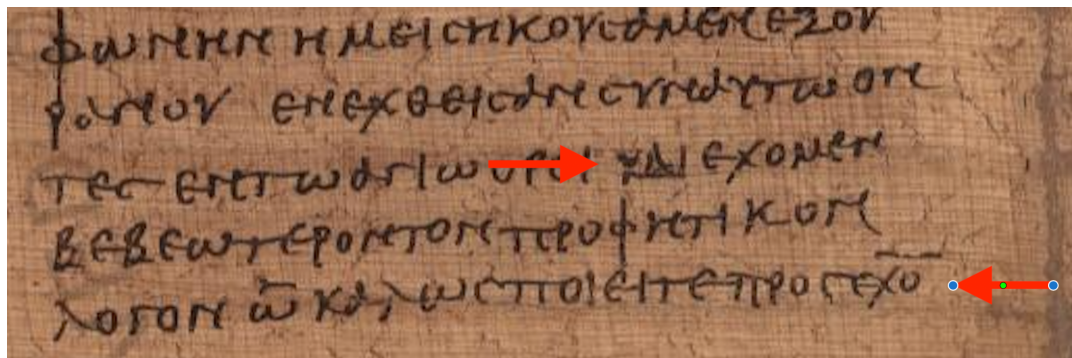
Regarding Light

Regarding Carrying, from pherō

Strong Negatives

*Hapax Legomena

Appendix III. 2 Peter 1:19-21 and Textual Variant in P72



ΣΑΝΣΥΝΑΥΤΩΝΤΕ^ς
ΕΝΤΩΑΓΙΩΡΕΙ ΚΑΙ
ΕΧΟΜΕΝΒΕΒΑΙΟΤΕΡ^{ον}
ΤΟΝΠΡΟΦΗΤΙΚΟΝΛ^ο
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