

BAPTIST BIBLE SEMINARY

THE FUNCTION OF THE PERFECT TENSE IN  
FIRST PETER WITH REFERENCE TO VERBAL ASPECT

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## INTRODUCTION

The past decade has seen a renewed interest in the study of the temporal significance of the Greek verb in the area of New Testament studies. This is due in part, to the almost simultaneous publication of the works of Stanley Porter<sup>1</sup> and Buist Fanning.<sup>2</sup> This paper will first describe the nature of verbal aspect by summarizing the development of verbal aspect and by comparing the theories of both men, noting where they agree and where they disagree. An attempt will then be made to apply the discipline of verbal aspect in part by studying the function of the perfect tense in First Peter.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Hatina has made similar studies that have involved both Galatians<sup>4</sup> and Colossians.<sup>5</sup> It is hoped that a more clear understanding of verbal aspect will emerge from this attempt. In addition, this paper will seek to determine which of the theories of both scholars is most valid. Such an assessment will be limited in scope to the study of the perfect tense and only in regards to the epistle of First Peter. Similar studies will need to be made in other New Testament books.

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<sup>1</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood*, (Studies in Biblical Greek 1; New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Buist Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> As found in *The Greek New Testament*, ed. by K. Aland, M. Black, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger, A. Wigren. 3d ed., (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Hatina, "The Perfect Tense-Form in Recent Debate: Galatians as a Case Study," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 8 (1995).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas R. Hatina, "The Perfect Tense-Form in Colossians: Verbal Aspect, Temporality and the Challenge of Translation" in *Translating the Bible: Problems and Prospects*, ed. S. Porter and AR. Hess, 224-52, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplemental Series, vol. 173, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1999).

## VERBAL ASPECT: A SUMMARY

The understanding of the significance of the Greek tense is one of evolution since up through the 19<sup>th</sup> century, time was considered a predominant feature of the tense of a particular verb. Then in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, *Aktionsart* or what is sometimes labeled “kind of action” became as important as time to most scholars.<sup>6</sup> With the dawning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it now seems that the aspect of the Greek verb is poised to dominate Greek tense studies for some years to come. No less a scholar as D.A. Carson stated regarding the significance of verbal aspect to New Testament studies that the “bearing of this result on exegesis cannot easily be overestimated.”<sup>7</sup>

In order to fully appreciate the significance of verbal aspect as it relates to the Greek verb, it is necessary that terminology be properly understood. The following descriptions are in no way an attempt to be exhaustive. Rather they are a brief summary of terms that have a direct bearing on the purpose of the paper.

### DEFINITIONS

#### **Verbal Aspect**

Both Porter and Fanning have somewhat similar definitions of verbal aspect. Porter states that verbal aspect is

a morphologically-based semantic category which grammaticalizes the author/speaker’s reasoned subjective choice of conception of a process-provides a suggestive and workable linguistic model for explaining the range of uses of the tense forms in Greek.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> cf. F. Blass, A. Debrunner and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) {318 [hereafter cited as *BDF*]}.

<sup>7</sup> “An Introduction to the Porter/Fanning Debate” in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research*, Edited by Stanley E. Porter and D. A. Carson, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplemental Series*, vol. 80, (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 22.

<sup>8</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament*, xi.

Fanning defines verbal aspect as

that category in the grammar of the verb which reflects the focus or viewpoint of the speaker in regard to the action or condition which the verb describes. It shows the perspective from which the occurrence is regarded or the portrayal of the occurrence apart from the actual or perceived nature of the situation itself.<sup>9</sup>

What is remarkable is how both men came so close in defining verbal aspect while working independently of each other at almost the very same time. Both men note that the choice of a particular Greek tense is rooted in how the author or speaker conceived of the action. It is their viewpoint of any given situation. The major difference between both men has to do with what is communicated in the choice of a particular verbal form. Porter, as I have been able to determine from some of his writing, believes that the tense forms only communicate aspect and not time or *Aktionsart*. In other words, the Greek tense is timeless. Time is the product of contextual factors known as deictic indicators.<sup>10</sup> Fanning on the other hand believes that temporal emphasis is contained in the verbal form but only in the indicative and only in a secondary role. He writes,

In the indicative, the tense-meaning (the sense of temporal relationship to some reference-point) is almost always a major consideration in the overall sense. There are some indicatives which occur in timeless uses or in times other than normal ones (e.g. gnomic tenses, historical and futuristic presents, proleptic aorists and perfects, etc.), but for the most part time-connection is a primary feature of the overall meaning.<sup>11</sup>

The point here for Fanning is that time is a primary consideration of the overall meaning (i.e. context, lexis, tense form). Hence by default, it is secondary in the tense form alone.

Rodney J. Decker defines aspect as “the semantic category by which a speaker or writer grammaticalizes a view of the situation by the selection of a particular verb form in the verbal

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<sup>9</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 84-85.

<sup>10</sup> Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek New Testament*, 98-108.

<sup>11</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 323.

system.”<sup>12</sup> The major result of this emphasis on the author’s portrayal of a given situation is that the choice of the Greek tense form is not for the purpose of grammaticalizing time but aspect. The author’s aspect is either perfective, as represented by the aorist tense, imperfective, as represented by the present and imperfect tense, or stative, as represented by the perfect and pluperfect tense.<sup>13</sup> The theory of verbal aspect therefore does not look at the tense to determine the time of action. Time is not grammaticalized by the choice of tense form but by temporal indicators in the text such as adverbs, syntax, character of the verb, and context.<sup>14</sup> Instead, verbal aspect, as determined by the choice of verbal form (tense), is looking to show how the author perceived a particular action. The choice of tense comes under the heading of the speaker’s view of a given situation; i.e. aspect. Decker in a clear manner summarizes the various aspects as follows:

Perfective aspect views the situation in summary as a complete event without regard to its progress (or lack thereof). Imperfective aspect views the situation as in progress without regard for its beginning or end. Stative aspect depicts a state of affairs that exists with no reference to any progress and which involves no change. All of these aspects are the speaker’s view of the situation.<sup>15</sup>

The last description regarding the stative aspect has significant ramifications for this study. In the past, the perfect tense had two areas of emphasis. It has been traditionally understood to be describing a past act with existing results. This dual temporal element of the perfect tense has been seriously called into question by the recent scholarship in the area of verbal aspect and will be dealt with below.

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<sup>12</sup> Rodney J. Decker, *Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

## *Aktionsart*

While aspect deals with the way that the speaker or writer portrayed the action from his own viewpoint, *Aktionsart* historically has dealt with the “kind of action” that the choice of tense form has attempted to demonstrate. The distinction between aspect and *Aktionsart* has not always been made. *BDF* seems to equate both *Aktionsart* and aspect, noting that

The original function of the so-called tense stems of the verb in Indo-European languages was not that of levels of time (present, past, future) but of *Aktionsarten* (kinds of action) or aspects (points of view).<sup>16</sup>

Nigel Turner makes a distinction between aspect and tense, noting that the former relates to how the writer viewed a particular situation. He then however, goes on to equate aspect and *Aktionsart*. He writes,

In some places in the NT interpretation is considered by a consideration which is important for understanding the verb. Originally in Indo-Germanic speech the tense–stems of the verb were not intended to indicate kinds of *time*, e.g. present, past or future. That came later, and incidentally can usually be assumed in Greek; but essentially the tense in Greek expresses the kind of *action*, not time, which the speaker has in view and the *state* of the subject, or, as the Germans say, the *Aspekt*. In short, the tense–stems indicate the point of view from which the action or state is regarded. The word *Aktionsart* (kind of action) has been taken over in all countries to express this essential idea.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore we see that even in regard to the definition of *Aktionsart* there is some discrepancy in the meaning of terminology.

## **Grammaticalization**

Grammaticalization refers to those elements that are inherently contained in the grammatical and morphological form of the Greek verb, such as person, number, mood, and voice. The debate

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<sup>16</sup> *BDF*, {318. cf. also Dan Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Under the heading of “The Element of Aspect” he writes (“Kind of Action”), 499. In all fairness to Wallace, he then goes on to argue that a clear distinction needs to be made between aspect and *Aktionsart*.

<sup>17</sup> Nigel Turner, *Syntax* in James. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3:59 [hereafter cites as MHT].

in the area of verbal aspect is whether the choice of tense grammaticalizes time or even *Aktionsart*. For purists like Porter and Decker, the answer is no on both accounts. The Greek tense form only grammaticalizes aspect. Fanning would argue that in the indicative mood, the tense form grammaticalizes time in a secondary role based upon time-values of the verb in those indicative moods.<sup>18</sup> Fanning, in criticizing Porter's work on verbal aspect, clearly states his view of the temporal significance of all tense forms in the indicative. He rejects the view of Porter that the verbal forms carry no temporal value at all, writing,

It is true that time is not as important for Greek tenses as for English ones and that the aspect values of viewpoint or conception of the process are of central importance in all the forms of the Greek verb (except the future). But the linguistic evidence is overwhelming that in the indicative forms the tenses carry the double sense of time and aspect together.<sup>19</sup>

Even K. L. McKay notes his reservations about Porter's system.<sup>20</sup>

Porter on the other hand sees Fanning wanting to argue for verbal aspect as the significant element of the tense form and yet wanting to hang on to traditional understanding of the tense as carrying some temporal meaning. This has led Porter in charging Fanning with not coming out all the way and leaving behind his traditional understandings of the Greek verb.<sup>21</sup>

It seems clear to me that Porter is arguing for a system that has no exceptions. For Porter, time is never determined by the choice of the tense form but by temporal indicators (deixis) in the context. If exceptions can be found, then the whole system may be as exception-prone as the traditional understanding of the Greek verb.

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<sup>18</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 126-96.

<sup>19</sup> Fanning, "Approaches to Verbal Aspect" in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research*, 58.

<sup>20</sup> K. L. McKay, "Time and Aspect in New Testament Greek," *Novum Testamentum* XXXIV (1992): 3.

<sup>21</sup> Porter, "In Defense of Verbal Aspect" in *Biblical Greek Language and Linguistics: Open Questions in Current Research*, 36-40.



## Marked and Unmarked

As noted above, in regard to verbal aspect, there are three major categories. The author's aspect is either *perfective*, as represented by the aorist tense, *imperfective*, as represented by the present and imperfect tense, or *stative*, as represented by the perfect and pluperfect tense. Markedness in effect deals with the weight of emphasis that a particular writer wants to place on a particular action.<sup>22</sup> In regard to the tense form chosen by the writer, the perfective aspect (aorist) is unmarked. It is the expected choice of the writer. The imperfective (present/imperfect) is marked signifying a bit more emphasis while the stative (perfect/pluperfect) is the most heavily marked.<sup>23</sup> The stative aspect is the choice of the writer when he wants to place the most significance on what he is attempting to communicate. Decker notes,

This suggests that an exegetical decision should rarely (if ever) hinge on the significance of an aorist verb by itself since it is the default, normal tense a writer uses when he does not want to express any particular semantic value. Unmarked features in a language are thus of less significance exegetically than marked features.<sup>24</sup>

This statement runs contrary to what is often stated in Greek grammars. Many influential grammars down through the years have asserted that the aorist tense is the most important of all the tenses.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps Hatina has summed up best the significance of choice on behalf of the writer or speaker. He notes,

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<sup>22</sup> Rodney J. Decker, "As the Verb Turns: Verbal Aspect and *Aktionsart* in Recent Study," Unpublished paper for NT-1, Seminar in New Testament Hermeneutics and Exegetical Method (Clarks Summit, PA: Baptist Bible Seminary, 2001), 3. The subsequent three descriptions of markedness come from this paper.

<sup>23</sup> Porter notes that this markedness of the perfect is along four major lines: *Distributional markedness* because the perfect/pluperfect displays the least frequency of usage among the three tense forms; *Material markedness* since the Perfect has the most "morphological bulk" of all the tenses; *Implicational markedness* in that it displays such irregularities and defection; and *Semantic markedness* (*Verbal Aspect*, 245-251).

<sup>24</sup> Decker, "As the Verb Turns," 3.

<sup>25</sup> e.g. H. E. Dana and J. R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1927). Dana and Mantey state under the heading of the aorist tense, "We approach now the most prevalent and

Since the stative aspect is most heavily marked it conveys, by itself, more information than other tense-forms. The perfect can also be described as the foreground plane within a discourse, used to introduce the most discrete, defined, and contoured elements, as opposed to the background plane of the aorist which forms the basis of a discourse and the foreground plane of the present which introduces semi-significant characters and situations or noteworthy descriptions. In essence, the perfect form conveys no temporal indication whatsoever, for that is determined by deixis.<sup>26</sup>

The level of one's understanding regarding the issue of markedness often manifests itself in one's philosophy over the role of the biblical languages to interpretation.<sup>27</sup>

### **Semantics and Pragmatics**

In many ways, this is the most important area of both definition and distinction that needs to be understood in regard to how the issue of verbal aspect impacts exegesis. Semantics deals with the meaning of the form while pragmatics refers to the study of the meaning of a form as it is used in a particular context.<sup>28</sup> For instance, a present tense is a semantic value. It carries with it a certain weight. Yet a present tense may be used to refer to a yet future event such as in Matthew 26:2: "The Son of Man is delivered up for crucifixion." The verb "delivered" (παραδίδοται) is present tense yet the event is future. The semantic value of the present is imperfective aspect but the pragmatic value that encompasses the semantic value is future time. What we are talking about is usage in a particular context.

The same is true of an aorist tense. It commonly has a pragmatic value of past tense. It is used for instance, throughout the gospel narratives in the simple conveying of events that have in

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important of the Greek tenses," 193. However Moulton correctly notes of the perfect that it is "the most important, exegetically, of all the Greek tenses," (*Prolegomena* in MHT, 1:140).

<sup>26</sup> Hatina, "The Perfect Tense-Form in Recent Debate," 6.

<sup>27</sup> cf. Decker's discussion of Grammatical Minimalism vs. Maximalism in "As the Verb Turns," 4-5.

<sup>28</sup> Decker, "As the Verb Turns," 4.

fact taken place. Yet in many contexts it is found to be conveying a pragmatic value of present<sup>29</sup> and future time.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that there are so many exceptions to the ways that Greek tense forms can be classified should have tipped off scholars that there was something more at work in the choice of tense than time or even kind of action. As Porter and Fanning have demonstrated, it was the viewpoint of the author as he decided to describe it.

#### SUMMARY

Verbal aspect refers to the viewpoint of the writer or speaker. His choice of tense form is his decision as to how he wanted to portray the action: perfective, imperfective, or stative. The basic premise of verbal aspect is that time is not grammaticalized by the choice of tense form but by temporal indicators in the text such as adverbs, syntax, character of the verb, and context.<sup>31</sup>

#### **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PERFECT TENSE IN LIGHT OF THE PORTER/FANNING DEBATE**

Just as the understanding of the Greek verb has seen an evolution of thought and understanding as noted above, so too the meaning of the perfect tense form. Earlier models of the perfect tense form were completely temporally based, stressing a past action whose results continued on indefinitely.<sup>32</sup> This gave way in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when *Aktionsart*

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<sup>29</sup> e.g. 1 Peter 1:24. Both verbs ἐξηράνθη and ἐξέπεσεν are aorist but have present tense values.

<sup>30</sup> e.g. John 15:8; The verb ἐδοξάσθη is aorist yet the action is dependent upon Jesus' disciples bearing fruit in the near future.

<sup>31</sup> This basic premise is not held by Fanning, but by Porter and Decker. Fanning does see some temporal significance in the choice of the verbal stem.

<sup>32</sup> cf. Georg Benedikt Winer, *A Treatise on the Grammar of New Testament Greek*, transl. and ed. W. F. Moulton, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1870), 331; C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 13.

became the primary model of understanding the Greek verb. However, a glance at subsequent grammars will demonstrate that temporal significance still existed, though in some cases in a subordinate role.<sup>33</sup> Turner notes regarding the perfect,

The *Aktionsart* belonging properly to the tense is either fulfillment in the present of a process begun in the past or else the contemplation of an event having taken place in the past with an interval intervening, whereas the English perfect is used when no interval intervenes. It is therefore a combining of the *Aktionsarten* of aorist and present.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of the dominance of these Greek grammars, the perfect tense continued to possess in the minds of most exegetes, a kind of “completed action, incorporating both the punctiliar force of the aorist and the durative force of the present.”<sup>35</sup>

Both Fanning and Porter agree that the choice of a tense form is the way in which the writer or speaker chose to portray the action. The choice of tense form is the way his viewpoint is conveyed. What they differ on as we have already noted is whether or not that choice of tense form grammaticalizes time. In regards to the perfect tense (and pluperfect as well), we see their distinction more clearly.

Fanning argues that the meaning of perfect tense combines three elements<sup>36</sup> and the result of this combination is a condition resulting from an earlier occurrence. In other words, for Fanning, the perfect tense form has a dual time element.<sup>37</sup> Porter’s view of the perfect tense is much

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<sup>33</sup> e.g. *BDF* notes regarding the perfect tense that it “combines in itself, so to speak, the present and the aorist in that it denotes the *continuance of completed action*, {340. Dana and Mantey note that the perfect tense “is the tense of completed action. Its basal significance is the progress of an act or state to a point of culmination and the existence of its finished results. That is, it views action as a finished product.” *A Manual Grammar*, 200.

<sup>34</sup> Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, in MHT, 3:81-82. cf. also Earnest DeWitt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 3d ed. ([Chicago]: University of Chicago Press, 1900; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 37.

<sup>35</sup> Hatina, “The Perfect Tense-Form in Recent Debate,” 4.

<sup>36</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 290-291. These three are *Aktionsart* of *stative* situation, internal tense-feature of *anteriority*, and as aspect-feature of summary viewpoint concerning an occurrence.

simpler. He holds that the perfect tense in no way grammaticalizes time which, he states, is determined by deixis.<sup>38</sup> Decker has provided an excellent summary of Porter's thesis of verbal aspect, as well as an evaluation of his theory and a summary of temporal deixis.<sup>39</sup>

I believe that since the perfect tense is "the most heavily marked" of the tense forms, an examination of the perfect tense in a large section of the New Testament will help facilitate a clearer understanding of whether or not the Greek tense form grammaticalizes time. This should naturally lead to a validating of the proper understanding of the choice of tense form by the writer or speaker as it refers to the Porter/Fanning debate.

#### **THE PERFECT IN FIRST PETER: APPLYING THE DISTINCTIONS OF VERBAL ASPECT**

First Peter is a very attractive New Testament epistle to study for the purpose of evaluating the function of the perfect tense form as it relates to verbal aspect for several reasons. First, there are fifteen uses of the perfect tense which is a manageable number for the scope of this paper.<sup>40</sup> Secondly, the majority of the uses are lumped together in two major sections of the book, allowing one to see how Peter uses them in the flow of his argument of the book. Thirdly, several of the uses of the perfect tense in First Peter are verbs that are used in the epistle in other tense forms. This allows for interesting discussion as to why, for instance, one verb in a part of a section is an aorist and why the next use of that verb is a perfect.

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<sup>37</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 112.

<sup>38</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994), 25,26.

<sup>39</sup> *Temporal Deixis*, 33-59.

<sup>40</sup> My count in UBS, 3<sup>d</sup> ed.

## THE ARGUMENT OF FIRST PETER

The epistolary structure of First Peter is built around three major sections. Following a short salutation (1:1-2) that contains no uses of the perfect tense, Peter declares his message around three major issues: Salvation (1:3-2:10), Submission (2:11-3:7) and Suffering (3:8-5:11). He ends with a short conclusion (5:12-14) in which no uses of the perfect are found. As a matter of fact, nine of the perfect uses are in the section on Salvation and the remaining six of the uses are found in the section on Suffering.

At this point the uses of the perfect tense in First Peter will be addressed. In each case an attempt will be made to understand the choice of Peter in regard to both traditional understanding of the Greek perfect as well as the use of the perfect in reference to verbal aspect.

### **Salvation (1:3-2:10)**

In this first major section, Peter calls on his readers to worship God for providing such a great salvation while living holy lives that reflect their status as the people of God. In 1:3-12 the call to worship God for such a great salvation is declared. This is followed in 1:13-21 with the fact that the call to live holy lives is based on the character and provision of God. This holy life is then lived out through the word of God (1:22-25; 2:1-3) and is a logical outcome of the believer's new standing which consists in their being called the people of God (2:4-10).

#### *The call to praise God for providing such a great salvation 1:3-12*

In the call for believer's to praise God for providing so great a salvation in 1:3-12, Peter uses two perfect tense forms. In 1:4 he uses **τετηρημένην** to state that the believer's inheritance, which he describes as imperishable, undefiled, and won't fade away, is "reserved in heaven for you." Many commentators point to the fact that this choice of tense form is for the purpose of stating that the reserving of the believer's inheritance was performed in the past, is in process

today, and continues to be true into eternity.<sup>41</sup> However there seem to be factors at work in the context that argue for this past work, present reality, and future experiencing of this inheritance. First of all, the inheritance (κληρονομία) of which Peter speaks of is based upon the past work of God. Peter says that this inheritance is based (κατά upon the mercy of God in the past when he caused sinners to be born again through the work of Christ. Therefore the inheritance that the believer now enjoys has a past referent. The believer's inheritance also looks forward in that it is "in heaven" for us. Since we are not yet there, it awaits us. The preposition εἰς also may imply a kind of goal for us which signifies future. The point is that an aorist tense here would have accomplished the same idea. Our inheritance has been reserved for us by God for a time when we are with in heaven. Paul uses very similar language in Colossians 1:5 when he states, "the hope laid up for you in heaven." He employs a present tense (ἀποκειμένην) to speak of a hope which they presently enjoy and will no doubt enjoy for all eternity. Why then the perfect tense here in First Peter? Simply, to emphasize the certainty of the great salvation God has provided us through the work of His precious Son. Peter portrays this keeping as stative from his viewpoint. God has reserved it for us. It is kept "by the power of God" (1:5). This is truly worth highlighting!<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> cf. J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter: Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, 1988). Michaels writes, "The passive participle τετηρημένην points indirectly to the action of God in preserving an inheritance for his chosen people (ἐν οὐρανοῖς, "in heaven," virtually a circumlocution for God, confirms this), while the perfect tense of the participle suggests that God's actions had its beginning in eternity past (cf. "in the foreknowledge of God the Father" [v 2]; "foreknown before the creation of the world" [v 20].)" 21-22.

<sup>42</sup> There is a kind of chiasm at work in the smaller section of 1:3-5 that builds up to highlight this perfect. Peter uses an aorist, present, perfect, present, aorist in speaking of this great salvation of God that is provided to us.

"...who has caused us to be born again..." (ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς) **aorist**  
 "...unto a living hope..." (εἰς ἐλπίδα ζώσαν) **present**  
 "...which is reserved..." (τετηρημένην ἐν οὐρανοῖς) **perfect**  
 "...who are protected..." (φρουρουμένους) **present**  
 "...to be revealed..." (ἀποκαλυφθῆναι) **aorist**

There is an interesting observation about the verb **τηρέω**. Peter uses it in his second epistle in four places, one of which is perfect while the other three uses are present. In 2:4 he uses the present **τηρουμένους** to speak of a reserving of angels “for judgment” (**εἰς κρίσιν**) while in 2:17 he uses the perfect **τετήρηται** to describe how the coming darkness of false teachers has been reserved. It is hard to see a dual time element in the latter but not the former if the perfect indeed carries such weight. Both passages speak of a reserving or keeping for a fixed point in time. Semantically, the perfect has a stative aspect. Pragmatically, it emphasizes both the past and future.

In 1:8 Peter employs his second perfect tense form in this section by speaking of the kind of joy believers experience over their faith in a Savior that they have never seen or can see. In light of such faith, Peter states that his readers “greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.” The expression “full of glory” is derived from the perfect participle **δεδοξασμένη**. It seems clear that a present tense participle would carry the same idea.<sup>43</sup> This is demonstrated by the fact that their love for Christ is in the present tense (**ἀγαπᾶτε**), their inability to see him now is in the present tense (**ὀρῶντες**), their faith in him is in the present tense (**πιστεύοντες**) and the call to rejoice in him is in the present (**ἀγαλλιᾶσθε**). The choice of Peter to use a perfect seems to be for the simple purpose of underscoring the quality of their joy as being full or complete of glory. This is borne out, I believe, when it is observed that the perfect is modifying the present tense verb **ἀγαλλιάω** which is in fact the second use of the verb in three verses (here and in 1:6). The believer rejoices in trials because he can rejoice in faith in a Savior whom He loves though having never seen. The perfect tense form highlights such joy. Now undoubtedly

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<sup>43</sup> However many commentators insist that the choice is because of the dual time element at work in the perfect. Davids for instance notes that this joy is “a joy that has already been glorified, not in the sense that they already experience the fullness of glory of the coming of Christ, but in the sense that in their love and commitment to Christ



the joy that we experience will last into eternity but that is because the inheritance that is ours and the God who graciously provides it will also last forever. Our faith results in eternal life and that will always be a cause for great, eternal joy for us. Peter does seem to be employing the perfect to denote a state and not a consequence of a previous action. Therefore the perfect tense form cannot be said to be denoting a dual time element.

*The call to holiness is based on the character and provision of God 1:13-21*

In this section emphasizing the character and provision of God as the basis for holy living, Peter employs three perfect tense forms (16, 18, 20) in showing that God is holy and that He has provided His very own Son to accomplish our redemption. In v. 16 Peter, after urging his readers to be holy, appeals to the Old Testament and introduces the quote of Leviticus 11:44 with the perfect *γέγραπται*. While the perfect tense is the overwhelming choice in the New Testament for introducing Old Testament passages, it is very difficult to see in this a dual time element such as “it was written in the past and continues on.” This is because of that fact that New Testament writers at times employ the present tense verbs in appealing to the Old Testament.<sup>44</sup> In a sense, the perfect is used in a kind of timeless manner. Paul in Romans 10:5 uses the present tense *γράφει* is speaking that “Moses writes.” Surely Paul is not saying that what was written in the past is now null and void in this particular passage.<sup>45</sup> It is best to see Peter’s point here as being that he has placed his heaviest weight upon this Old Testament passage for why he writes what he does. We should indeed be holy, for our living God is holy himself. We need to be like our God! In other words, God’s word is authoritative for us. It is so written.

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they experience a joy that partakes of and anticipates the joy of the final day of salvation.” Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*: NICNT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 59.

<sup>44</sup> e.g. *λεγεί* in Galatians 3:16; 4:30.

<sup>45</sup> cf. Hatina, “The Perfect Tense-Form in Recent Debate,” 12.

In v. 18 Peter uses the perfect tense form εἰδότες in appealing to their knowledge regarding the means of their salvation. His readers knew that it wasn't with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ that they were saved. The perfect active participle from οἶδα is unusual itself since the verb almost always carries a present reference.<sup>46</sup> Even Fanning admits that οἶδα is an exception to his system.<sup>47</sup> Peter views their knowledge as imperfective though he employs a stative tense form. He is not viewing when this knowledge began or whether it has ended, but only that it is in progress as he writes. Obviously their knowledge of this fact is as old as their redemption which took place in the past. In other words, εἰδότες is tied back as far as the aorist passive ἐλυτρώθητε, but Peter's view of their knowledge of this is currently going on.<sup>48</sup> Therefore it seems clear here that there is no inherent dual time element at work in the perfect tense form.

Peter then uses the perfect tense προεγνωσμένου in verse 20 to speak of how Christ was foreknown by the Father before the foundation of the world as a sufficient Savior for sinners. The idea of a dual time element at work in this perfect participle may seem plausible on the surface. It can be argued under a traditional understanding of the Greek perfect that Christ was foreknown by the Father in the past and this relationship continues on into the present. However this idea is true regardless of the fact that this participle is perfect. First of all, the temporal preposition πρό in the expression “before the foundation of the world” argues for an earlier

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<sup>46</sup> Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 16; οἶδα often has the force of the present tense γινώσκω, cf. Moises Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 164-69; for an excellent treatment on the uses of οἶδα and γινώσκω, see Donald Burdick, “Οἶδα and Γινώσκω in the Pauline Epistles” in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 344-56; cf. also Decker, *Temporal Deixis*, 142-143.

<sup>47</sup> Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, 112 n. 74.

<sup>48</sup> cf. K. L. McKay, “On the Perfect and Other Aspects in New Testament Greek,” *Novum Testamentum*, XXIII, 4 (1981): 302-303.

relationship. Christ was set apart by the Father to be the Savior of the world in eternity past, at least before the foundation of the world.<sup>49</sup> Paul for instance uses the aorist tense of προϋνῶστω in Romans 8:29 in speaking of our election unto salvation, a salvation which as we know was marked out in eternity past (Eph. 1:4). Secondly, the sufficiency of Christ to fulfill that role is still operating since He appears to fulfill this destiny ἐπ' ἑσχάτου τῶν χρόνων. In addition, there are theological factors at work in the possible choice of the perfect here in verse 20. The fact that the Father and Son are eternal beings lends it self inherently to the idea that the nature of the relationship is one that existed in the past and continues on. Peter is therefore viewing the work of God through Christ as stative; that of a relationship that exists without any reference to its progress and which involves no change. While the perfect tense form may have a pragmatic meaning of a past action and an existing result, its semantic meaning carries no such weight.

*The call to holiness is based on the word of God 1:22-2:3*

In Peter's call to holiness based upon the word of God, he uses two perfect tense forms. In verse 22 Peter is about to urge his readers to "fervently love one another from the heart" and he prefaces it with the fact that they have already experienced the work of God in their lives. He writes that they can carry out the command to love each other, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren." The verb "purified" is a perfect tense from ἀγνίζω and clearly seems to be operating in conjunction with the perfect tense in verse 23. In other words, the perfect tense forms used by Peter both introduce the reason for the command and summarize the basis for it as well.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> The idiom πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου seems to suggest the idea of eternity past; cf. Eph. 1:4; Matt. 25:34; John 17:24.

<sup>50</sup> "Since you have ...**purified** your soul...(ἡγνικότες)  
 "...**love** one another from the heart" (ἀγαπήσατε)  
 "since you **have been born again**..." (ἀναγεγεννημένοι )

The use of the perfect tense of ἀγνίζω seems to be for the purpose of portraying an existing state of purification of the soul, namely salvation.<sup>51</sup> This is seen for several reasons. First, this purification of their soul was in conjunction with their “obedience to the truth.” This expression reflects their obedience or faith in the gospel of truth.<sup>52</sup> Their faith in the gospel resulted in a purified state of their souls. Secondly, The second perfect tense used to sum up the need for brotherly love is speaking of their salvation experience, namely their being born again. While the injunction to his readers is to love one another, their ability to obey the command is rooted in the fact that they have been saved. They are now able to love because they have been loved of God. Therefore Peter emphasizes their ability to love one another. To argue that the perfect tense emphasizes the work of God in the past in saving them and his ongoing work of keeping them may be true theologically, but not derived from the tense form chosen by Peter. Peter is portraying their purification of soul as it exists without any regard to its inception, progress, or end. They are in fact saved and because of it they can fervently love one another from the heart.

As noted, the second use of the perfect in this section is ἀναγεγεννημένοι in verse 23. It is this particular perfect that serves as an excellent example of why the choice of tense form by the author is not for the purpose of grammaticalizing time. The verb itself (ἀναγεννάω) is not used at all in the LXX or classical Greek. It is only used twice in the New Testament, both times by Peter in this first chapter. It is the earlier use in verse 3 that is really interesting. In verse 3 Peter mentioned the fact, as he does here in verse 23, that his readers have been “born again.” The

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<sup>51</sup> The verb ἀγνίζω is used throughout the LXX in contexts of ceremonially cleansing (Exod. 19:10; Nu. 8:21; Isa. 66:17), and even in the New Testament it seems to have that usage in three of the six uses in the New Testament (John 11:55; Acts 21:24,26; Acts 24:18). The use by James in 4:8 is an imperative for cleanliness of living, as is the other use in 1 John 3:3. Therefore this use of Peter would be the only such use of purification unto salvation in the New Testament. However the fact that it is tied to “souls” and seems clearly parallel to the perfect ἀναγεγεννημένοι in v. 23 which does speak of salvation argues for a similar use here in verse 22.

<sup>52</sup> cf. Eph. 1:13; Col. 1:5; 2 Thess. 1:8.

perfect tense in verse 23 is a classical example of the traditional understanding of the dual time element at work in the Greek perfect. In other words, “we have been born again and continue to be so.” It fits well with the doctrine of eternal security and preaches very well. However, if this were the major thrust of the Greek perfect and a seemingly exact fit with Peter’s theology, it is fascinating that Peter’s first use of the verb is aorist. What is so remarkable is that both uses are found in contexts that have both past and future references. It is not being argued here that the new birth of which Jesus spoke so eloquently in John 3 has no ongoing results from a previous action. On the contrary, the context bears this out in both instances. It is just that this is not what is being communicated by the choice of tense form alone.

For instance, in the aorist use of ἀναγεννήσας in verse 3, Peter spoke of being born again through the work of Christ with the fact that this salvation is even now on reserve, being protected by God’s power for a salvation “in the last time” (ἐν καιρῷ ἐσχάτῳ.). Then here in verse 23, he uses similar contextual markers to make the very same point. He states the fact that we have been born again not of a dead seed but of an imperishable (future sense) one. This imperishable seed is the living word of God which he says “abides forever” (μένει εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). The question then is this: Why the aorist in verse 3 and the perfect in verse 23? It seems that by this kind of *inclusio*, Peter is emphasizing the salvation aspect of his message and argument. He is bringing his argument of salvation to a close and he wants to underscore the fact that we have been given a great salvation, one that is brought about by God’s word and power and which should translate into holy living.

*The call to holiness is natural because of the believers standing as the people of God 2:4-10*

In this final section dealing with salvation (1:3-2:10), Peter uses two perfect tense forms in highlighting the believer’s new status as the people of God. In 2:4-10 Peter switches metaphors

from the milk of God’s word that is needed for growth (2:1-3), to that of a building that is growing up into a holy priesthood for the purpose of offering up spiritual sacrifices. In discussing the fact of their being “built up,” he addresses Christ as a “living stone” and believers as “living stones.” Christ the living stone, Peter says, was “rejected by men” (ὑπὸ ἀνθρώπων μὲν ἀποδοκιμασμένον). The perfect tense here is simply looking at the state of affairs as they exist from Peter’s point of view.<sup>53</sup> While it is true that both Jews and Gentiles rejected him in the past and continue to do so, this is not Peter’s point. Peter is attempting to make a major contrast between God’s acceptance of Christ and that of sinners, and he uses a μὲν... δὲ construction to accomplish his purpose.<sup>54</sup> By marking the rejection of Christ with the perfect, he is also similarly marking the contrast of the Father, who views Christ as “choice and precious” in His sight.

In addition, it would seem strange for Peter to use a perfect to emphasize a past action with existing results here in verse 4 given his quote from Ps. 118:22 in verse 7. In verse 7 the verb “rejected” is also the verb ἀποδοκιμάζω used in verse 4, but it is aorist and not perfect! Peter is saying the same thing in verse 4 with the perfect that he is saying in verse 7 with the aorist. Nothing is lost by his use of the perfect. On the contrary, we see the blessed acceptance of the Father through the highly marked rejection of the Son by sinners. The Old Testament scriptures themselves validate this rejection, which Peter emphasizes with the perfect.

The second use of the perfect in this section appears in 2:10 with the appearance of the perfect participle ἡλεημένοι. In this section stressing the believer’s new status as the people of

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<sup>53</sup> This is not the common view of interpreters. Paul J. Achtemeier, in a more recent commentary noted that the perfect tense is for the purpose of noting ongoing rejection. He writes, “That it is the living stone that is rejected probably means that the author is thinking of those contemporaries of his who reject the gospel, rather than the rejection Christ suffered at the time of his crucifixion. Such a view is supported by the participle ἀποδοκιμασμένον (“rejected”) in the perfect tense, which points to the ongoing rejection suffered by Christ” *I Peter: Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 154.

<sup>54</sup> Such a construction is used for contrast; cf. *BDF* {447; Porter, *Idioms*, 212.

God, the perfect is used for a description of what Thurén calls, “Honorary Titles.”<sup>55</sup> Peter is contrasting what was not true of his readers as pagans, with what is now true of them as Christians. He writes,

for you once were NOT A PEOPLE,	(οἱ ποτε οὐ λαος )
but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD;	(νῦν δὲ λαὸς θεοῦ, )
you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY,	(οἱ οὐκ ἤλεημένοι )
but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.	(νῦν δὲ ἐλεηθέντες. )

While the verbs need to be supplied in the first two lines of verse 10, this is not the case in the last two lines. Peter has set up a pair of contrasts that in effect are saying the same thing. The reason they were NOT A PEOPLE was because they had received no mercy, while the reason they “now” were THE PEOPLE OF GOD was because they had in fact received such mercy. The passage contains clear temporal indicators. There is the fact that in the past, “once” (ΠΟΤΕ), they were alienated from God.<sup>56</sup> This is set against (δὲ) the fact that “now” (νῦν) they were His people. Peter’s use of a perfect in this particular construction may on the surface seem to cause some problems for Porter’s view. Porter (and others) argue that the use of the perfect is not for the purpose of grammaticalizing time but to underscore a particular point or emphasis by the writer or speaker. If that is the case, then one would have expected a reversal of tenses with the use of the verb ἐλεέω. Peter uses the perfect to state that they had in the past not received mercy (ἤλεημένοι), but now in the present they had (ἐλεηθέντες). However this criticism can just as easily be made of the traditional understanding of the Greek perfect tense stem. If in fact the perfect refers to the existing results of a past action, then a perfect tense would have underscored the theological significance of their having received such mercy, namely that this mercy

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<sup>55</sup> Lauren Thurén, *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter: The Origins of Christian Paraenesis*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplemental Series, vol. 114, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995), 128.

continues on in their lives. Therefore, Peter may well in fact here be emphasizing the great darkness and hopelessness in which his readers once found themselves; without mercy before a holy God.

In summary of his section dealing with salvation, Peter employs perfect tense forms for the purpose of emphasizing certain great truths of salvation. They include the hopeless situation of having rejected Christ (2:2) with the corresponding result of being apart from God without mercy (2:10), as well as being born again through the eternal word of God (1:22-23).

### **Submission (2:11-3:7)**

As noted above, no uses of the perfect tense are found in this section. However, a couple of observations can be made regarding what is found in this section. First, it is worthy to note how Peter shifts away from theological issues of salvation (1:3-12) and general statements about holy living that reflects our status as God's people (1:13-2:10), to a very practical area of Christian living, namely submission. He begins the section in 2:11 with an appeal "to abstain from fleshly lusts" before giving the command to "submit" themselves to all human institutions that have a claim on them. The verb "submit" (ὑποτάσσω), used to introduce how believers are to submit to those over them in society, is then used to introduce the need for slaves to submit to their masters in 2:18 before being used for how Christian wives are to submit to their husbands in 3:1 in a section ending in 3:7. Peter then moves on to discuss the issue of suffering in 3:8 that runs through 5:11.

This section contains a present tense use of **δοξάζω** in 2:12 that is tied to a future event, the coming "day of visitation." The verse pictures a time when Gentiles, perhaps because of being saved through the witness of the saints or simply because of the holiness of God as they stand

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<sup>56</sup> This temporal adverb is implied in the third line of verse 10.



before him, are glorifying God. As noted above, in 1:8 Peter employed the verb as a perfect tense participle to portray our current (ἄρτι) state over faith in Christ. It would seem that if traditional understandings of the dual time element of the perfect tense form were correct, the tenses should have been switched. The emphasis in 1:8 isn't on both the past and present, but the present time (ἄρτι). However a perfect tense form would make sense here in 2:12 since they will glorify in God at that time and will assuredly do so through time eternal. Perhaps this isn't that great a point, but one might at least have expected a present tense in 1:8 given the present tense verb "believing" since this result is tied to their current faith.

Perhaps the absence of any perfects in a major section of the epistle's argument can be attributed to the subject matter. The material contains many admonitions and exhortations that lend themselves to imperatives along with present tense participles that are governed by such commands. The material simply isn't conducive to many stative ideas or statements.

### **Suffering (3:8-5:11)**

In this large section dealing with the role of suffering in the lives of the people of God, Peter uses six perfect tense forms. In the first section dealing with the believer's response to unjust suffering (3:8-19), there are no perfects. It is in the section that stresses the believer's endurance under such suffering (4:1-19) that Peter uses five perfects which are all found in close proximity to each other (4:1; 4:3(3x); 4:7).

#### *The Believer's response to unjust suffering 3:8-19*

As noted above, there are no uses of the perfect tense in this section. However there is at least one aorist verb that seems to function like a perfect (according to the understanding of the perfect by Fanning and others). In 3:18, Peter states that Christ, having been put to death in the flesh,

had been “made alive in the Spirit” (ζωοποιηθεὶς δὲ πνεύματι). Now if the dual time element of the perfect was true, then one should have expected a perfect here: “Christ was made alive in the Spirit and continues to live.”<sup>57</sup> It would seem that Peter here is more interested in maintaining a consistency of tense forms surrounding the μὲν ... δὲ.

*The Believer’s endurance under unjust suffering 4:1-19*

Peter begins in 4:1 with a summary of his description of the work of Christ detailed in 3:18-22.<sup>58</sup> He then states that since Christ suffered in the flesh (unjustly; 3:18), his readers should get ready to do the same. Peter then gives the reason (ὅτι) for his exhortation, namely, that “he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” There are major theological issues at work here in verse one surrounding the manner in which this statement is true regarding both Jesus and believers.<sup>59</sup> Our concern here regards Peter’s choice of the perfect πέπαυται (“has ceased from sin”). This ceasing from sin is dependent upon the expression, “suffered in the flesh” (ὁ παθὼν σαρκί). This expression is a restatement of the fact that Christ “suffered in the flesh” (παθόντος σαρκί) which in fact is a summary of 3:18-22, in particular 3:18. Here we see that Christ was “put to death in the flesh” (θανατωθεὶς μὲν σαρκί). The point is that Christ’s being put to death in the flesh (3:18) and suffering in the flesh (4:1a) are synonymous statements,

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<sup>57</sup> There are no perfect uses of the verb in the New Testament.

<sup>58</sup> οὖν here is resumptive of 3:18.

<sup>59</sup> In regards to Christ, his death and subsequent resurrection demonstrated that in fact sin never had a claim on him. Sin, and its result, death, had no power over him; hence the grave could not keep him. Through his death (and validating resurrection), Christ died to death. The believer, by virtue of his death with Christ and resurrection with him, also has died to sin and its result, death. The believer currently has been delivered from sin’s penalty and power. One day, he will be delivered from its presence as well. However the immediate context would seem to argue for both a literal death as well as spiritual death. Peter has just finished demonstrating in 3:18-22 that Christ suffered in the flesh, namely, he died. He then tells them in verse 1 to “arm” themselves for the same thing: i.e. “get ready to die yourselves.” Yet in verse 2, he talks about their living on in holiness. The stress on living for the will of God rather than the lusts of men would argue for at least the implication in verse 1 that the ceasing from sin is in

forming an *inclusio*.<sup>60</sup> Christ in fact died in His body (“flesh”). Peter’s readers ought to get ready and “arm” themselves for the very same purpose and prepare to die. Peter then states that should that happen they need not concern themselves since “he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.” The meaning of the perfect tense “ceased” (πέπαυται) is a matter of some debate as noted above because of its association regarding Christ.<sup>61</sup> The verb is normally rendered in the New Testament as an aorist,<sup>62</sup> as is the case in Peter’s only other use of the verb in 3:10. It has the semantic range in the New Testament of “stop, cease, finish, be at an end.”<sup>63</sup> Peter’s point is really a simple one: the one who has died is all done with sin. This is very similar to Paul’s teaching in Romans 6:7: “for he who has died is freed from sin.” However we are dealing with a different verb; “freed” (δικαιόω) versus “ceased” (παύω).

It would seem that if a traditional understanding of the Greek perfect were at work here, it would be necessary to take the idea here as literal death, since that is the only way that one can really be finished with sin. In other words, the one who has suffered in the flesh and died has ceased from sin and continues to exist in such a state.<sup>64</sup> This is not an easy expression to interpret.<sup>65</sup> In one sense, the entire phrase “because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” is parenthetical. If left out, the Peter’s argument flows just as clear, with his imperative

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regards to our being able to say no to sin by virtue of our dying to sin through our union with Christ. Perhaps the better understanding is that they ought to get ready to die, but in the meantime, live holy lives.

<sup>60</sup> Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 277.

<sup>61</sup> See note 59.

<sup>62</sup> Of the 15 uses in the New Testament, 8 are aorist, 3 are present, 2 are future, 1 is imperfect, and the 1 perfect here in 4:1.

<sup>63</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2d ed., rev. and aug. F. Wilbur and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 638.

<sup>64</sup> cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, Thornapple Commentaries ([New York]: Harper and Row, 1969; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), 167.

“arm yourselves” (ὀπλίσασθε) finding its ultimate purpose even quicker, namely, “so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.” If this is true, then the entire statement takes on an almost proverbial thrust.<sup>66</sup> In either case, by literal death or by spiritual union with Christ’s death, such a one has ceased from sin.<sup>67</sup> But the purpose for the imperative given in verse 2 does seem to argue against the idea of literal death alone. This does seem to be more a problem for Fanning, than it would for Porter. In Fanning’s view, the ceasing or ending of sin would need to be ongoing: “he...has ceased from sin in the past and he continues on in that state.” For Porter, Peter is simply summarizing the reality from his vantage point. The question then is why the rare perfect tense with this verb. It would seem that Peter is viewing such a death, in either case, as a state without any regard for its progress. Surely one could see how death and its subsequent ceasing from sin would be viewed in such a manner!<sup>68</sup>

In verse 3 Peter uses three perfects to make the point that as the people of God, they are no longer to live like they did as pagans. He writes,

For the time already past is sufficient *for you* to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

The first of these three perfect tense form is the participle ὁ παρεληλυθώς contained in the expression “the time already past” (ὁ παρεληλυθώς χρόνος). This is an unusual expression in

<sup>65</sup> Davids lists five views for how the phrase has been interpreted; *The First Epistle of Peter*, 148-149.

<sup>66</sup> I have not found any commentators to date who make such an observation.

<sup>67</sup> cf. Kelly, 168-169 for summary of various views on the meaning of the phrase.

<sup>68</sup> While it could be argued from a traditional perspective of the perfect that Paul himself used the perfect in Romans 6:7 to teach a similar truth (ὁ γὰρ ἀποθανὼν δεδικαίωται ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας), the same point can be argued that death is being summed up as a whole by Paul. However the fact that two such similar passages use a perfect tense is significant.

the New Testament.<sup>69</sup> Peter states that for his readers, “sufficient is the time already past,” with emphasis being placed on the adjective ἄρκετός. This adjective demonstrates a kind of irony in the only three uses of the New Testament.<sup>70</sup> Peter’s point is in a sense, “more than enough- too much in fact.”<sup>71</sup> What is in fact enough is the time already past. The use of the perfect tense participle with ἄρκετός makes good tense if in fact Peter is viewing such a time as sufficient. The adjective looks at the whole of time and not a process. He is saying in a sense, you had more than enough time in the past to do the things characteristic of pagans. Peter sums up their old life, with its corresponding time frame, with the perfect. By doing so he is emphasizing that their days of living like this are over in that their time for sin is completed. This ties very well with the truth of verse 1 that he who has died is freed from sin. Their wasted years of profligate living are over. One could see how it could be argued that the perfect is stressing that their time for sin is past and continues to be so. However, the overall context of the passage indicates this. Peter said in verse 2 that they are “no longer” (μηκέτι) to live like pagans, but they need to live for the will of God. This new living implies both the present and future.

The second perfect in verse 3 is found in the expression, “to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles” (τὸ βούλημα τῶν ἐθνῶν κατειργάσθαι). The perfect middle infinitive makes logical sense given that it is dependent upon on the perfect tense participle παρεληλυθώς. What is sufficient in the past time is their propensity to live after the desire or will of the Gentiles. Since Peter is summing up the completeness of the time with a perfect participle, his choice of a perfect infinitive seems to be for the purpose of consistency. What needs to be determined in this

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<sup>69</sup> The noun χρόνος and the verb παρέρχομαι are found together only here and in Acts 27:9 where it is in a narrative passage with the aorist tense.

<sup>70</sup> cf. Matthew 6:34; 10:25; Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter*. Thornapple Commentaries, 2d ed., ([London]: Macmillan, 1947; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 210.

second perfect and the perfect participle to follow is the identity of the subject. It seems clear that it is an unexpressed ὑμᾶς (“you”), being so implied from the second person infinitive ὀπλίσασθε in verse 1.

The third and final perfect of verse 3 is a very interesting use in regard to verbal aspect. As noted above, the implied subject is the “you” of verse 1. In discussing the kind of life that was sufficient for them to have carried out in the past, Peter writes then gives a long list of sins which they had pursued as pagans in their former lives. He introduces this list with the perfect participle πεπορευμένους. Peter says that they had in fact “pursued” (from πορεύομαι) such a life. It does not seem likely to this writer that one would want to argue here that the perfect tense form is a past act whose effects remain! On the contrary, it is a state whose reality is being viewed as a whole, when they were in fact, pagans. The fact that Peter is underscoring their past life out of which God saved them seems to gain support when it is observed how Peter uses this verb elsewhere. In 2 Peter 2:10 and 3:3 Peter employs the verb in similar contexts yet with the present tense:

10 and especially those who **indulge** the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties,

<sup>10</sup> μάλιστα δὲ τοὺς ὀπίσω σαρκὸς ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ μiasμοῦ πορευομένους καὶ κυριότητος καταφρονούντας. τολμηταὶ αὐθάδεις, δόξας οὐ τρέμουσιν βλασφημοῦντες,

3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, **following** after their own lusts,

<sup>3</sup> τοῦτο πρῶτον γινώσκοντες ὅτι ἐλεύσονται ἐπ’ ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν [ἐν] ἐμπαιγμονῇ ἐμπαίικται κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας ἐπιθυμίας αὐτῶν πορευόμενοι

It is very interesting how Peter uses a perfect tense form in 1 Peter 4:3 to speak of believers who have passed out of this sinful life, yet he uses present tense forms in 2 Peter in speaking of those

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<sup>71</sup> Michaels, *1 Peter*, 230.

who are yet pagans. It would seem that Peter's choice of the highly marked perfect was for the sole purpose of being consistent<sup>72</sup> in the verse and to emphasize the life of darkness out of which God called them to live holy lives. This contrast of their old and new life is noted in the similar but opposite phrases, the "will of God" (θελήματι θεοῦ) in verse 2 and the "desire of the Gentiles" (βούλημα τῶν ἔθνῶν) in verse 3.

In 4:7 the last of five perfect tense forms in this section is used by Peter. In writing that "The end of all things is at hand," he uses the perfect tense verb ἤγγικεν. The verb ἐγγίζω is used some 40 times in the New Testament and a disproportionate amount of the uses are in the perfect tense.<sup>73</sup> It would seem that the verb has a propensity to be used as a perfect, especially when in conjunction with certain deictic indicators.<sup>74</sup> This is an excellent use of how temporal relationships are denoted in a particular passage as it relates to the perfect tense form. The verb ἐγγίζω has an inherent temporal thrust to it lexically. It has the meaning "is near" and when coupled with other words, it often has possible spatial meaning as well.<sup>75</sup> In this particular passage, this spatial element is seen in the term τέλος. A traditional understanding of the Greek perfect would argue that Peter is declaring that the end of all things is near and remains so. However this truth is contained in the context of the passage itself, not necessarily from the choice of Greek tense form used by Peter. Peter is saying that the end of all things is near as a result of the lexical significance of the verb (ἐγγίζω). That this state remains is true because it

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<sup>72</sup> cf. Charles Bigg argues that Peter is using the perfect participle here in order to be consistent with the perfect infinitive κατειργάσθαι; *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*. The International Critical Commentary. 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 168.

<sup>73</sup> 15 are perfect or about 37% of total uses.

<sup>74</sup> It is often used for instance in the New Testament for the imminent coming of the kingdom (Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:15; Luke 10:9) as well as for the coming fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Acts 7:17); the end of the age (Rom. 13:12; Heb. 10:25); and the coming of the Lord (James 5:8).

awaits its consummation (Πάντων ... τέλος). As a matter of fact, he goes on to say in verse 7 that because the end is near (but not here), they ought to be committed to the discipline of prayer. Peter uses the perfect since it portrays from his viewpoint how the whole of the end times is near, without commenting on its inception, progress, or end.<sup>76</sup>

#### *The Believer's relationship to one another and suffering 5:1-11*

In this final section under suffering, Peter uses a single perfect tense to appeal to his reader's personal knowledge of the suffering being endured by other believers. The perfect tense εἶδότες is identical to Peter's use in 1:18. As noted there, this verb almost always carries a present reference.<sup>77</sup> Here it seems to take on something of an imperatival nature by virtue of the exhortation, "Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert."<sup>78</sup>

#### **Conclusion 5:12-14**

In his concluding remarks, Peter does not use a perfect tense. In verse 12 he writes that through Silvanus he "had written briefly" (ὀλίγων ἔγραψα). The aorist verb γράφω is found in at least one significant passage in the New Testament where there are various tense forms at work. In John 19:19-22 there are six uses of the verb in all three aspectual variations: one *imperfective* (present: v. 21), one *perfective* (aorist: v. 19), and four stative uses (perfect: vv. 19, 20, 22(2x)). It seems to be a classic case of the ways that the various tense forms operate in different "planes."

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<sup>75</sup> Herbert Preisker, "ἐγγίζω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:330-332.

<sup>76</sup> One might think that because the verb ἐγγίζω is coupled with the noun τέλος that the perfect has a future referent. However Peter is simply looking at the whole moment as he writes without regard to even its fulfillment. The future element is a result of deixis. For instance, Mark 1:15 is a very similar construction (perfect) and idea (imminent kingdom), yet Decker notes that in Mark "there are no perfect forms in Mark that refer to a future state" (*Temporal Deixis*, 110).

<sup>77</sup> Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, 16.



19 And Pilate <b>wrote</b> (ἔγραψεν) an inscription also, and put it on the cross.	<b>aoist</b> (perfective)	<b>background</b>
And it was <b>written</b> (γεγραμμένον), "JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS."	<b>perfect</b> (stative)	<b>foreground</b>
20 Therefore this inscription many of the Jews read, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was <b>written</b> (γεγραμμένον) in Hebrew, Latin, and in Greek.	<b>perfect</b> (stative)	<b>foreground</b>
21 And so the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, "Do not <b>write</b> (γράφε), 'The King of the Jews'; but that He said, 'I am King of the Jews.'"	<b>present</b> (imperfective)	<b>foreground</b>
22 Pilate answered, "What I have <b>written</b> (γέγραφα) I have <b>written</b> (γέγραφα)."	<b>perfect/perfect</b> (stative)	<b>foreground</b>

In both the aorist and the present use of the verb γράφω there seems to be a simple statement of fact and injunction respectively ("he wrote...do not write"). What follows after both the aorist and the present are two uses of the perfect which seem to be the way by which both John and Pilate emphasize what was written. The apostle John uses two perfects (v. 19b; 20) to emphasize what was written by Pilate, and then Pilate himself uses two perfects to reiterate what he had written in response to the imperative of the chief priests. The point is that the tense forms seem to be interchangeable. Nothing is apparently lost in the use of a perfect after an aorist. Perhaps it might be said that the use of the aorist in 1 Peter 5:12 is for the purpose of signifying a foreground, but not quite a foreground aspect.

#### SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT OF FIRST PETER

Peter argues his point in three major sections, concentrating his fifteen uses of the perfect tense form in two major areas: Salvation and Suffering. As we have seen, Peter's choice of the

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perfect was for the point of emphasizing the main thrust of his argument in a given setting. The lack of a perfect in the second major section dealing with Submission likely is due to the subject matter.

### ASSESSMENT

This has been a brief attempt to study the function of the perfect tense in First Peter in reference to the debate over verbal aspect. As noted, Porter and Fanning are very close in their understanding of the nature of verbal aspect. They believe that the choice of tense by the writer is the way he chose to portray a given situation. What they differ over is whether or not the choice of tense grammaticalizes time. Porter says no while Fanning believes that to some degree it does. Fanning's argument finds its greatest weakness, I believe, in the nature of the most marked of all the tense forms, the perfect. This study of the perfect tense challenges Fanning's claim that the perfect tense conveys a dual time reference. This is seen along several lines. First, the argument that the perfect conveys such a dual time reference is difficult to support contextually. Most of the occurrences of the perfect are used to refer either to a past or present time action, but rarely both. In passages where it could be argued that both past and present time is possible, it was shown that this was simply because of deictic indicators, not because of the weight that the tense was carrying. The temporal tension that exists in many passages in regard to the use of the perfect is difficult to remedy, while under Porter's thesis no such tension exists. Secondly, if time is inherent in the tense, it is difficult to justify one use of a verb in one tense while another use of that verb in a perfect in describing the same event. Such a decision by the author argues that his choice of the perfect was for emphasis and not to denote time.

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<sup>78</sup> cf. Michaels, *1 Peter*, 301.

While this study of one general epistle has called into question the dual time element of the perfect, it is not proof positive that the traditional understanding of the tense is faulty. More examinations of how the perfect tense form is used in the New Testament must be undertaken before the traditional view can be laid aside. As noted earlier, Porter's viewpoint that the tense of the Greek verb in no way grammaticalizes time is a system that allows for no exceptions. If some can be found, then his system is as tenuous as what he seeks to set aside. The jury is still out, but his thesis is intriguing and from the perspective of this writer, airtight in First Peter.

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