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A table of contents for *Grace Journal* can be found here:

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# THE USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EN HŌI IN I PETER

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That en hōi is important exegetically to Peter's epistle is seen from the fact that it occurs five times: 1:6, en hōi agallia<sup>s</sup>the; 2:12, en hōi katalalousin humōn; 3:16, en hōi katalaleisthe; 3:19, en hōi kai. . . ekē<sup>r</sup>uxen; and 4:4, en hōi xenizontai. Moule notes that some would take the frequent occurrence of en hōi in I Peter as merely an idiosyncrasy of Peter's literary style and not of much exegetical import. He writes:

There are some turns of phrase which appear to have little significance for the sense, and are mere idiosyncrasies of the writer. . . . Possibly certain uses of the particle te in the later chapters of Acts ought to be so classified. . . and so (according to some) ought the en hōi of I Peter. . . .<sup>1</sup>

Reicke has made an extensive inquiry into the precise meaning of en hōi.<sup>2</sup> He demonstrates that in I Peter 3:19 it must be considered as a unit--a temporal conjunction. As such it should be translated "whereat," "on which occasion," "while," "at the same time as," "in doing which." He then shows that en hōi is used as a temporal conjunction in the New Testament (apart from I Peter) in Mark 2:19; Luke 19:13; John 5:7; and Romans 2:1 (in this last instance he notes that en hōi has a temporal purport with a conditional by-significance). He continues by showing that en hōi is used as a temporal conjunction in literature other than the New Testament, e. g., in Soph. Trach. 929, Xenoph. Oecon. xvii. 10, and an Oxyrhynchus Papyrus. He notes further that en hōi can also be used as a causal, instrumental or explicative conjunction (meaning "in that") or with a relative connection (meaning "and therefore"). As examples of these usages he gives Romans 8:3; Hebrews 2:18; and Hebrews 6:17.

In dealing with relative pronouns the antecedent is normally the nearest preceding noun or pronoun or at least a noun or pronoun in the preceding context. However, this general rule does not apply to Peter's usage of en hōi because he uses it as a conjunction and not strictly as a relative pronoun. This statement is borne out by a consideration of the instances in which Peter uses en hōi.

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Note: The material for this article was drawn from a paper submitted in connection with graduate studies in the Graduate School of Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas. The Greek words in both the text and quotations have been transliterated.

THE USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EN HŌI IN 2:12 AND 3:16

Reicke observes correctly when he observes that of the five occurrences of en hōi in I Peter, 2:12 and 3:16 are different from the others and rather similar to each other.<sup>4</sup> There are two ways in which they differ from the others but are like each other: (1) en hōi is not used as a relative connection, i.e., what follows does not grow out of what precedes, and (2) the content of both statements is virtually the same. Bigg, divorcing all temporal aspects from the construction, translates en hōi in 2:12 as "in that very matter in which they speak against you as evildoers"<sup>5</sup> and in 3:16, "the very thing wherein ye are spoken against."<sup>6</sup> If Bigg is correct in his understanding, Peter is not using en hōi as a conjunction in these two instances and en hōi would be equivalent to en toutōi. Reicke observes:

In that case the meaning would be that the heathen come to shame in the respect in which they reproach the Christians. . . . This interpretation, however, is impossible in I Pet. ii. 12 for the main sentence speaks of praising God, but it is nonsense to say that the Heathen will praise God "in that respect." Further a supposed en toutōi in ii. 12 must compete in a peculiar way with ek tōn kalōn ergōn as a modification of the verb doxasōsin. For the same reason en cannot here have a causal meaning. It is unnatural to consider a causal en toutōi explained by a following apposition ek tōn kalōn ergōn. No, even in I Pet. ii. 12 en hōi must certainly be a conjunction, probably of a pure temporal character so that the meaning is: "just as they slander you."<sup>7</sup>

Concerning 3:16 Reicke continues: "In all probability en hōi in iii. 16, a passage which so clearly agrees with ii. 12, must be interpreted in exactly the same way, as a temporal conjunction."<sup>8</sup>

The foregoing shows, then, that here are two instances where en hōi is used by Peter as a temporal conjunction. Thus no preceding noun is the antecedent of the pronoun hōi. The construction, rather, should be translated in a way to bring out its temporal character, e.g., "whenever," "while," "during which time," or, as Selwyn suggests, ". . . almost 'in the very act of.'"<sup>9</sup> The resultant idea in 2:12 is that whenever they should speak against you, or while they are in the very act of speaking against you as an evil-doer, they might glorify God as the result of your good works. A similar result is noted in 3:16 where the idea is that whenever you are spoken against, or during the time that you are spoken against, the ones who are persecuting your good manner of life in Christ might be put to shame. Peter's thought is that their shame will come in the process of and because of their abuse heaped upon you in the course of their persecution.

THE USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EN HŌI IN 4:4

It is very plain that the immediately preceding noun (athemitois eidōlōlatriais) cannot be the antecedent of en hōi in 4:4, for it is plural whereas the pronoun (hōi) is singular. In contrast to 2:12 and 3:16, en hōi of 4:4 is a relative connection in that the statement that follows is occasioned by that which has preceded. Thus en hōi does indeed function as a conjunction

for the two thoughts. The question is: What kind of a conjunction? Of the alternatives suggested by Reicke earlier, only the causal conjunction will fit the context which plainly demands that en hōi here be rendered "therefore"<sup>10</sup> or some similar translation.<sup>11</sup> The context indicates that the readers had participated for some time in the sins previously mentioned but recently had become converted and had forsaken these sins. Because of this (en hōi) their former fellows are astounded and think it strange that they no longer engage in such practices.

#### THE USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EN HŌI IN 1:6

A usage similar to 4:4 is observed of en hōi in 1:6. There are three views as to the antecedent of the pronoun. Bigg<sup>12</sup> takes the nearest noun (kairōi eschatōi) as being the antecedent. This is not likely because agallias the is present tense. It would have to be future tense if it were to be understood with kairōi eschatōi. The rejoicing, then, is a present rejoicing and en hōi must have something else as its antecedent. Robertson<sup>13</sup> notes that it is possible to have either theou (1:5) or Iēsou Christou (1:3) as the antecedent and the rejoicing as being in Him. This would necessitate taking the relative pronoun hōi as masculine and is a possible translation which makes good sense. Selwyn<sup>14</sup> gives a third possibility suggesting that en hōi be translated as "in which circumstance," "wherefore," or "in which assurance" and that its antecedent is the whole situation of 1:3-5--rebirth, hope inheritance, faith, imminence of the End.

The first view is not acceptable on grammatical grounds. Only if the verb were future tense would it be possible. Further, as Selwyn observes: ". . . the words kairōi eschatōi are scarcely a large enough element in the previous sentence to carry the weight of this rich and significant relative clause."<sup>15</sup>

The second view is grammatically possible in that it ties verses six to nine in with the main clause. It is theologically sound in that it expresses the readers' response to the divine work proclaimed in verses three to five.

The third view is best, for its antecedent is more inclusive than the antecedent of the second. Further, Peter's usage of en hōi fits it better. In 1:6 en hōi is a relative connection in that what follows is occasioned by that which has preceded. Again, the question is: What kind of a conjunction? As in 4:4 it must be causal for the context, because of the relative connection en hōi sustains, is most suitably translated by "therefore," "because of that," or by one of the above translations suggested by Selwyn. Peter's thought is that they have been begotten unto a living hope, an inheritance, and a salvation (1:3-5); therefore (en hōi) they can rejoice because their present sufferings (1:6-9) can do nothing to hurt or imperil that unto which God has begotten them. The whole idea of 1:3-5, then, is the antecedent of the en hōi of 1:6.

#### THE USE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EN HŌI IN 3:19

From the foregoing consideration it is seen that en hōi has the character of a causal

conjunction in both 1:6 and 4:4 while in 2:12 and 3:16 it is a temporal conjunction. This accounts for four of Peter's usages. What of the fifth? It is found in 3:19.

The closest preceding noun to en hōi in 3:19 is pneumati of 3:18. Pneumati, however, cannot be the antecedent of en hōi, as Selwyn has well pointed out: "The antecedent cannot be pneumati, for there is no example in N. T. of this dative of reference, or adverbial dative as I should prefer to call it, serving as antecedent to a relative pronoun."<sup>16</sup> Reicke agrees as he observes:

If we consider verse 18 as a whole we find further that the appositions thanatōtheis men sarki, zōopoiētheis de pneumati appear in parenthesis in the sentence, inserted as a clearer explanation of the main action, but on the other hand based on well-known christological formulae of an elementary character. It is not probable that en hōi is connected to this pneumati, here accompanying rather cursorily. Nor would it be natural if one of the two antithetical ideas, sarki and pneumati, was suddenly taken out of the context and formed a basis for the whole of the following sentence. But above all it is unnatural to make a dative of reference serve as antecedent to a relative pronoun.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that Peter definitely uses en hōi in the sense of a conjunction four times in his epistle (together with the fact that it is used this way in many other instances in the New Testament) makes it probable that en hōi in 3:19 is used as a conjunction. A careful consideration of the passage confirms the truth of this probability. That which follows en hōi in 3:19 is occasioned by the main statement in 3:18. Thus the use of en hōi is identical with the use in 1:6 and 4:4 (all being relative connections) but different from those in 2:12 and 3:16 (which are not relative connections). Reicke states the next phase of the inquiry in the following words:

Then the next question will be: What kind of conjunction? Looking at the context and also considering what categories of en hōi as a conjunction we have otherwise in the N. T., there are really only two possibilities: Either en hōi in this passage is a purely temporal conjunction, in this case meaning "whereat," or "thereat," "on which occasion" &c.: or also it is a causal conjunction meaning "wherefore" or "therefore," "for this reason" &c.<sup>18</sup>

After pointing out that the causal conception is supported by a patristic tradition based upon the theory that Christ went and preached to win sinners to God, Reicke rejects the possibility that en hōi can be taken as a causal conjunction in this context. He writes:

Against this theory however it can be pleaded that there is a certain obscurity as to the extent in which a purely causal relation can really be discovered here. It is not possible to bring out such a causal relation that the conclusion as to the preaching to the spirits appears as a clearly logical consequence of the given premises. An allusion to hina &c. should, further, preferably have been expressed by eis ho, in which case the reasoning would be final. The causal interpretation does not, on the whole, give any clearly logical connection.

Reicke supports taking en hōi as a temporal conjunction as follows:

By a temporal interpretation on the other hand of en hōi we can obtain the following natural meaning: "on which occasion" or "on that occasion," namely when he died (preferably not: "when He was made alive" because of the parenthetical character of those appositions) Christ went and preached also to the spirits. This gives a highly logical and natural purport to our passage, the translation is simple and intelligible, and a good formal analogy can be shown in the immediately preceding verse 16, apart from other analogies which we have already touched upon -- it may also be observed that the *Oxyrhynchus papyrus* referred to above is good evidence that en hōi can allude to the previous situation, and continue the reasoning after a short pause. If then we are to choose between a conception of en hōi as a causal and as a temporal conjunction we must prefer the latter. In the temporal interpretation there is the very best possibility to understand this en hōi, which otherwise causes so many misgivings.

The kai which in 1 Pet. iii. 19 follows directly upon en hōi will by this temporal interpretation best connect hapax apethanen . . . hina humas . . . with tois . . . ekēru xen. This too gives a good and natural meaning.<sup>20</sup>

Selwyn suggests a similar but different translation that still gives en hōi its temporal significance.

en hōi] in which state or circumstance, i.e., of spirit quickened after physical death, or better and more broadly, "in which process," in the course of which, referring to Christ's passion and resurrection generally.<sup>21</sup>

Taking en hōi as a temporal conjunction in accordance with the foregoing discussion, its antecedent, then, is the main clause of 3:18--the general reference to Christ's death (or suffering, if epathen is the correct text). This, of course, would help to place the time during which the event of Christ's preaching to the spirits in prison took place because it aids in establishing an order of events, viz., his death (3:18), his going to preach (3:19), and his exaltation to the right hand of God (3:22). Thus in the general process of his death and prior to the time of his resurrection, he went to preach (kērussō = "to proclaim" i.e., to proclaim His victory over Satan at the cross) to the spirits who were in prison.

It is in order to suggest, for the consideration of others, a refinement on this view. Realizing the temporal character of en hōi and that its antecedent is the general process of Christ's death, it may be that the time period referred to is not the interim between Christ's physical death and His resurrection (though that certainly fits the chronology of the passage), but rather to the three hours during which He hanged upon the cross and darkness was upon the face of the earth (cf. Matt. 27:45; Lu. 23:44; Mk. 15:33) at the close of which the Lord cried, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthanei?" Both Matthew and Mark translate that question as "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken (egkatelipes) me?" While the grammar of Matthew and Mark does not establish this possibility it certainly permits it. If the view is correct, it would be better to render the aorist egkatelipes by the simple English past tense (i.e., "My God, my

God why did you forsake me?") than by the English perfect tense. Thus during the three hours the Lord was enduring spiritual death (i.e., separation of His spirit from God) He went to the only place where ones separated from God can go (viz., to Hades, the temporary abode of those who are likewise separated from God) and there preached. It is significant that during the period of time that He who is the Light of the World (John 8:12) was absent from the world, darkness was over the face of all the world. It was during this time that the heart of the atonement was accomplished, i.e., the remedying of spiritual and eternal death, and it was hidden from the view of man who was not able to see this spiritual event transpire. Further, when the physical aspect of the atonement (i.e., the remedy for physical death) was realized by the Lord's physical death, He cried: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lu. 23:46). It does not seem likely that His spirit thus commended into the hands of the Father would be permitted to visit the abode of those separated from God. It seems better to understand that during the three days His body was in the tomb His spirit was in the presence of God. It is interesting to note, in addition, that while all of the Synoptic Gospels record the fact of the darkness upon the face of the earth, none of them records anything that transpired during that three hour period. Peter, then, gives a commentary on what transpired during those three hours. The thought of the passage (3:17-22), then, is that it is better to suffer for having done good than for having done evil (3:17). Christ is the Supreme Example of one who thus suffered (3:18, cf. 2:22-24). 3:18, then, gives the statement concerning the sufferings of Christ (specifically defined by the parenthetical participial clauses following). 3:19 tells of His activity during the time of His suffering and 3:22 tells of His glorification after the time of His suffering.

### CONCLUSION

By way of summary, the foregoing discussion has shown that Peter's literary style involves two usages of en hōi. First, as a relative connection in 1:6, 3:19, and 4:4 (being used as a causal conjunction in 1:6 and 4:4 but as a temporal conjunction in 3:19). When it is so used, the antecedent is the general concept preceding, not the immediately preceding noun or pronoun. Second, as a non-relative connection in 2:12 and 3:16. When it is so used there is no antecedent to en hōi and the construction is best translated in such a way as to bring out its temporal character as a temporal conjunction.

### DOCUMENTATION

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6. Ibid., p. 159.
7. Reicke, p. 110.
8. Ibid., p. 111.
9. Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (2d. ed. London: Macmillan & Co., 1947), p. 170.
10. Reicke, p. 111.
11. Selwyn, p. 212, suggests either in which circumstance or wherefore.
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13. Archibald Thomas Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. VI: The General Epistles and the Revelation of John (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1933), p. 83.
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17. Reicke, pp. 107-08.
18. Ibid., p. 112.
19. Ibid., pp. 112-13.
20. Ibid., p. 113.
21. Selwyn, p. 126.