

Elegxis Reconsidered: Balaam’s Exposure, not Rebuke

(Placeholder Edition)

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Word Studies in the New Testament by Marvin R. Vincent

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament by Joseph Thayer

A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament by James Strong

Douay-Rheims Bible

King James Bible

Mace’s New Testament

Worsley’s New Testament

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Haweis New Testament
Webster's Bible Translation
Anderson's New Testament
Smith's Literal Translation
English Revised Version
Young's Literal Translation
American Standard Version
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Preface

This version of the article is temporary and includes definitions from Merriam-Webster's online *Collegiate Dictionary*. The final edition will incorporate definitions from *Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* and older editions of *Webster's* dictionaries. Permission to do so in the *Unabridged* and older cases is pending.

Links to the current *Unabridged* and older editions are available in the Appendix.

Access to some resources at Archive.org that are cited herein requires an account with the website.

Summary

Exposure is a superior rendering of *elegxis* in 2 Pe 2:16, according to study of that verse’s Greek text, of relevant English definitions, and of the account in Nu 22 of Balaam’s encounter with the donkey and the angel of the LORD. ***This word translates not only Peter’s description of what happened to Balaam but also the effect of that event on the prophet’s thinking.***

- ***Exposure is what Balaam had in his mind after the donkey uncovered and refuted his grasp of the incident.***
- ***Conviction is what he had in his mind after the angel of the LORD proved him guilty of sin.***

Of nine lexicographers (or groups thereof) examined here, only those at Abarim Publications choose *exposure* to convert *elegxis* into English. One other, Strong, selects *refutation*, an accurate rendering in his era.

Of 41 biblical translations surveyed here, none employs *exposure* (or a synonym), and none correctly identifies what Peter is addressing—both the prophet’s interaction with his donkey and his state of mind resulting from it. All but one interpret the apostle’s text as describing only Balaam’s experience. The single exception does also define Balaam’s mental condition, but only as it developed after the angel of the LORD had confronted him, not immediately after the donkey had spoken to him.

The lexicons and translations assessed here by far most commonly render *elegxis* as a rebuke (or a synonym), whether as a noun or a verb. ***The donkey, however, did not merely express disapproval of Balaam’s behavior***, as a review of the report in Nu 22 shows. ***She reasoned with him to expose his faulty understanding***, an effort inconsistent with *rebuke’s* definition.

Findings

The Greek noun *elegxis* (ἔλεγξις) occurs once in Scripture, in 2 Pe 2:16.² Its meaning is reconsidered below by assessing the following information in this order:

- Definitions of the word in nine lexicons.
- Forty-one translations of the verse.
- The verse’s Greek text and pertinent English definitions.
- Nu 22:22-34 as rendered in the English Standard Version.

English definitions appearing in this edition of this study come from *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (MWCD).

Initial Evaluation of Nine Definitions of *Elegxis* in 2 Pe 2:16

The variety of views presented in the nine lexicons examined here indicates no consensus among them, although a slim majority favors rebuke or reproof as the best translation of *elegxis* in 2 Pe 2:16. These resources describe the word primarily in four ways:

1. The act of disapproval—a rebuke, reproof, or reproach—by five of the nine.
2. The act of conviction, by two of the nine.
3. The act of refutation, by one.
4. The act of exposure, by another.

² “1649. *elegxis*.” Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1649.htm>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

Some of the lexicographers offer more than one translation, usually indicating one to be primary and others as secondary. Of the primary interpretations:

- Seven are nominal in form, in which the Greek noun is converted into an English one.
- Two are verbal in form, in which the Greek noun and its attending verb are converted into an English verb.

All of the secondary interpretations take the nominal form.

Marvin Vincent, in *Word Studies in the New Testament*, published in 1887, provides the following comments on *elegxis* in 2 Pe 2:16:

Was rebuked (ἔλεγξιν ἔσχεν). Lit., *had a rebuke*. The word for *rebuke* only here in New Testament [bold text and italics in the original].³

This description clearly indicates his preferred translation of the word in the verse (shown below in bold text, using as a basis the English Standard Version, Text Edition: 2025⁴):

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but **was rebuked⁵** for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

Joseph Thayer's entry on *elegxis* in his book, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, published in 1886 and again in 1889,⁶ begins as follows:

ἔλεγξις, -εως, ἡ (ἔλέγχω, γ. ν.), refutation, rebuke; (Vulg. correptio; Augustine, convictio):
ἔλεγξιν ἔσχεν ἰδίας παρανομίας, he was rebuked for his own transgression, 2 Pet. ii. 16
[bold text and italics in the original].⁷

Thayer indicates his book to be his English translation of a Greek-Latin lexicon of the New Testament produced in 1862 by Professor C. L. Wilibald Grimm on the basis of previous work by C. G. Wilke.⁸ Thus, according to Thayer, in English, *refutation* and *rebuke* are *elegxis'* primary significations, and *was rebuked* properly translates it in 2 Pe 2:16.

³ Vincent, Marvin Richardson. "Was rebuked (ἔλεγξιν ἔσχεν)." *Word Studies in the New Testament*. Vol. 1, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1900, p. 700 (729 of 859). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/cu31924092322522/page/700/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026. See p. ii (7 of 859) for date of copyright.

⁴ All quotations of Scripture herein come from this edition of the ESV, unless noted otherwise.

⁵ I.e., the same as the ESV's text.

⁶ Thayer, Joseph H. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti, Translated Revised and Enlarged*. Corrected ed., New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, American Book Company, Harper & Brothers, 1889, p. iv (7 of 761). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/thayersgreekengl0000thay/page/n7/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

⁷ Ibid. "ἔλεγξις," p. 202 (225 of 761). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/thayersgreekengl0000thay/page/202/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026. (Cf. "1649. elegxis." *Thayer's Greek Lexicon*, STRONGS NT 1649: ἔλεγξις. *Bible Hub*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1649.htm>.)

⁸ Ibid. Preface, p. v (8 of 761). Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but **was rebuked** for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

James Strong's lexicon, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament*, published in 1890 as one of two dictionaries appended to his main work, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, contains this concise entry on *elegxis*:

1649. ἔλεγξις **ělēgxis**, *el'-eng-xis*; from 1651; *refutation*, i.e. *reproof*:—rebuke [bold text and italics in the original].⁹

Strong explains his system of reporting definitions in his "Plan of the Book," which appears after the preface of each dictionary.¹⁰ According to this information, his entry indicates that *refutation* is *elegxis*' "radical meaning," *reproof* is its "applied signification," and *rebuke* is its translation in the "Authorized English Version" of the Bible. His use of *i.e.* indicates his understanding of *refutation* and *reproof* as synonyms in this context. To him, *refutation* fundamentally defines *elegxis*, and *reproof* conveys *elegxis*' meaning in practical terms.

Although this synonymity is not evident in *Webster's* dictionaries published in 1864 and 1898, *Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary's* current definition of *reproof* suggests the solution (cf. Table 1). [One sentence withheld, pending Merriam-Webster's permission to quote definitions. See Preface.] This understanding would explain the close relationship Strong sees between that noun and *refutation*.

If so, then this would be his interpretation of *elegxis* in 2 Pe 2:16:

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but **[had a refutation]** for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

Reproof is omitted above because Strong apparently understands it to mean *refutation* in this context.

- [One sentence withheld, pending Merriam-Webster's permission to quote definitions.]

Refutation in Strong's era, according to *Webster's* editions of 1864 and 1898, could be understood as either an action or its result, a state of mind: [Two phrases withheld, pending Merriam-Webster's permission to quote definitions] (cf. Table 1). However, analysis indicates that, for certain nouns, the action involved necessarily produces the mental result called by the same name—that, for example, a conviction of someone yields a conviction in that person's mind. Otherwise, the action is something else

⁹ Strong, James. *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament; With Their Renderings in the Authorized English Version*. New York: Eaton & Maines; Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1890, p. 27 (1768 of 1829). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/exhaustiveconcor1890stro/page/26/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026. Prepared for separate publication but contained within: Strong, James. *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, And Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order; Together with a Comparative Concordance of the Authorized and Revised Versions, Including the American Variations; Also Brief Dictionaries of the Hebrew and Greek Words of the Original, With References to English Words*. New York: Eaton & Maines; Cincinnati: Jennings & Graham, 1890.

¹⁰ Ibid. "Plan of the Book," p. 5 (1746 of 1829). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/exhaustiveconcor1890stro/page/n1745/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

(cf. Appendix A). Such plainly was the case for *refutation* in the 19th century. Moreover, Strong’s evident mental caliber and vocabulary more likely than not led him to understand it in this full and proper way.

- [One sentence withheld, pending Merriam-Webster’s permission to quote definitions.]

Table 1: A Sampling of Webster’s Definitions of *Refutation*, *Reproof*, and *Rebuke*¹¹

Term	Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (2026)	Webster’s International Dictionary of the English Language (1898)	Dr. Webster’s Complete Dictionary of the English Language (1864)
Refutation	: the act or process of refuting ¹²	[Withheld, pending Merriam-Webster’s permission to quote.]	[Withheld, pending Merriam-Webster’s permission to quote.]
Reproof	: criticism for a fault : rebuke ¹³	[Withheld, pending Merriam-Webster’s permission to quote.]	[Withheld, pending Merriam-Webster’s permission to quote.]
Rebuke, noun	: an expression of strong disapproval : reprimand ¹⁴	[Withheld, pending Merriam-Webster’s permission to quote.]	[Withheld, pending Merriam-Webster’s permission to quote.]

Friedrich Büchsel states the following in the second volume of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, published in German in 1935¹⁵ and in English in 1964:

ἔλεγξις [*elegxis*] is rare and means “persuasion” and “refutation.”¹⁶

The footnote attached to this sentence indicates that Büchsel’s comment regards the word’s use by Pape—presumably Johann Georg Wilhelm Pape, the “German classical philologist and lexicographer” of the 19th century.¹⁷ Then Büchsel writes:

ἐλεγμός (v.l.: ἔλεγχος) in 2 Tm. 3:16 and ἔλεγξις in 2 Pt. 2:16 mean the rebuking of the sinner.¹⁸

This seems straightforward. The rebuking of the sinner is the act of rebuking the sinner, which is a rebuke, and thus suggests the following rendering of *elegxis*:

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but [had a rebuke] for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

¹¹ Cf. Appendix A for citations.

¹² “Refutation.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/refutation>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026.

¹³ “Reproof.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reproof>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026.

¹⁴ “Rebuke.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rebuke>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026.

¹⁵ “Preface.” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964, p. iii (6 of 975). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/theologicaldicti0002unse/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

¹⁶ Büchsel, Friedrich. “ἐλέγχω, ἔλεξις, ἔλεγχος, ἐλεγμός.” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, p. 476 (487 of 975). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/theologicaldicti0002unse/page/476/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

¹⁷ “Wilhelm Pape.” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Pape. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

¹⁸ Büchsel. As cited above.

In *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, published in German in 1967, 1969, and 1971, and after that in English, **Hans-Georg Link**, in a definition of the related verb, provides first this summary of *elegxis*' meaning:

ἔλεγξις (*elexis*), conviction, rebuke, reproof.¹⁹

He later defines *elexis* (*elegxis*) and the related verb *elenchō* (*elegchō*) as follows:

2. *elenchō* is found particularly frequently in hortatory passages (e.g. Eph. 5:13). The Pastoral Epistles assign to the leader of the community the task of rebuking church members (1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Tit. 2:15) and of convicting opponents of their error (Tit. 1:9, 13). The corresponding activity is called *elegmos* in 2 Tim. 3:16, and *elexis* in 2 Pet. 2:16.²⁰

This description indicates that “the task . . . of convicting opponents of their error (Tit. 1:9, 13)” corresponds to “*elexis* in 2 Pet. 2:16.” It further indicates that Link sees *elegxis* as an action—one of delivering a conviction. This suggests the following as his interpretation in 2 Pe 2:16:

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but **[had a conviction]** for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

William Mounce, in *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, published in 1993, states in relevant part the following about *elegxis*:

ἔλεγξις, εως, ἡ . . . *reproof, rebuke*, 2 Peter 2:16*²¹

Since *reproof* and *rebuke* are synonyms, either one in his view could render *elegxis* in the verse:

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but **[had a reproof or had a rebuke]** for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

The online *Dictionary of Biblical New Testament Greek* by Abarim Publications, published initially in 2021, contains the following data on *elegxis* in its entry on *elegchō*:

¹⁹ Link, Hans-Georg. “ἔλέγγω.” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Colin Brown, General Editor. Translated, with additions and revisions, from the German *Theologisches Begrifflexikon zum Neuen Testament*. Edited by Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard. English Language edition, vol. 2, The Zondervan Corporation/The Paternoster Press Ltd., 1976, p. 140 (143 of 1031). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/dictionaryofnewt0002unse/page/140/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026. Originally published by Theologischer Verlag Rolf Brockhaus, Wuppertal, 1967, 1969, 1971.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142 (144-145 of 1031). Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

²¹ Mounce, William D. *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan Publishing House, 1993, p. 178 (195 of 567). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/analyticallexico0000moun/page/178/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026. The asterisk indicates that “all biblical references have been cited.” *Ibid.*, p. x (13 of 567). Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

The noun *ελεγξις* (*elegxis*), which describes an [*sic*] momentary instant of the action of the verb: an exposure, a conviction of being wrong, a wrong-proving ([2 Peter 2:16](#) only).²²

This description indicates that the translators consider *elegxis* to be an action. It also indicates that they regard the three phrases offered as equally valid. However, the website's interlinear presentation of the verse uses *exposure*,²³ which thus seems to be the translators' preferred rendering *elegxis* there:

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing,¹⁶ but [**had an exposure**] for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

HELPS Word-studies, published in 2021, is the online version of **HELPS Lexicon** contained in *The Discovery Bible*²⁴ and offers this definition of *elegxis*: "the brand of *conviction* that *rebukes* the sin of double-mindedness" (italics in the original).²⁵ This description indicates that HELPS' editors consider *elegxis* to be an action. The idea of a conviction rebuking someone mixes up the vocabulary in current English, judging by MWCD's definitions.²⁶ Nevertheless, HELPS' description indicates the following interpretation of *elegxis* in 2 Pe 2:16:

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing,¹⁶ but [**had a conviction**] for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William Frederick Arndt, and Felix Wilbur Gingrich (BDAG)—in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, describe *elegxis*' meaning in 2 Pe 2:16 in part as follows:

ἐλεγξις, εως, η [élenxis] . . . = ἔλεγμός **expression of strong disapproval, reproach, rebuke, reproof** ἔ. ἔσχεν ἰδίας παρανομίας *he received a rebuke for his transgression* **2 Pt 2:16** [brackets, bold text, and italics in original].²⁷

This information clearly indicates BDAG's recommended translation of the word:

²² "ελεγξω." *Dictionary of Biblical New Testament Greek*. "First published on 2021-05-19; last updated on 2025-10-27." *Abarim Publications*, <https://www.abarim-publications.com/DictionaryG/e/e-l-e-g-ch-om.html>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

²³ "2 Peter 2." Free, online interlinear (Greek/English), word by word translation and Greek grammar parsing codes. *Abarim Publications*, <https://www.abarim-publications.com/Interlinear-New-Testament/2-Peter/2-Peter-2-parsed.html#AVerse-16>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

²⁴ Cf. Hill, Gary. *The Discovery Bible*, <https://discoverybible.com/>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

²⁵ "1649. *elegxis*." HELPS Word-studies, Cognate: 1649 *élegksis*. *Bible Hub*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1649.htm>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

²⁶ Cf. Appendix A for definition of *conviction*.

²⁷ Bauer, Walter; Danker, Frederick William; Arndt, William Frederick; and Gingrich, Felix Wilbur. "ἐλεγξις." *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 4th ed., The University of Chicago Press, 2021, p. 278 (368 of 1079). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/a-greek-english-lexicon-of-the-new-testament-and-other-early-christian-literatur/page/n367/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but **[received a rebuke]** for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

BDAG’s description indicates that they see *received* as equivalent in meaning to *had*, the literal English rendering of the Greek verb involved (discussed below). It further indicates *received a rebuke*, *received a reproach*, and *received a reproof* as equally valid conversions of *elegxis* here to them.

Table 2: Summary of Data from the Nine Lexicons

Source	Source’s primary interpretation	Source’s other interpretations
Vincent, <i>Word Studies in the New Testament</i>	<i>was rebuked</i>	<i>had a rebuke</i>
Thayer, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>	<i>was rebuked</i>	
Strong, <i>A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament</i>	<i>had a refutation</i>	
Büchsel, <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , Kittel, Bromiley, eds.	<i>had a rebuke</i>	
Link, <i>The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , Brown, ed., vol. 2	<i>had a conviction</i>	
Mounce, <i>The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament</i>	<i>had a reproof or had a rebuke</i>	
Abarim Publications, <i>Dictionary of Biblical New Testament Greek</i>	<i>had an exposure</i>	<i>had a conviction of being wrong; had a wrong-proving</i>
HELPS Word-studies, <i>Bible Hub</i> , Hill et al., eds.	<i>had a conviction</i>	
BDAG, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> , 4 th ed.	<i>received a rebuke</i>	Implied: <i>received a reproach; received a reproof</i>

Initial Evaluation of 41 Translations of *Elegxis* in 2 Pe 2:16

Forty translators (or teams thereof) of the 41 renderings listed in a sample by Bible Hub consider *elegxis* in 2 Pe 2:16 to be an action done to Balaam by his donkey, and only an action—namely, a rebuke (or synonym thereof), according to analysis. The remaining translator also deems it to be the donkey’s action, but with a mental result for Balaam by the same name—a conviction.²⁸

- Sixteen of the 41 renderings are in the nominal form (cf. Table 3).
- Twenty-five are in the verbal form.

The phrase *received a rebuke* is grouped in Table 3 with *had a rebuke* (and the other three nominal renderings involving *had*) because, logically, a completed act of reception results in having the thing received—so that *received* can equal *had*.²⁹

The renderings by John Worsley, *was reproved*, and Thomas Haweis, *received a reproof*, given their publications in 1770 and 1795 respectively, could be understood in two ways:

- The donkey chided Balaam for his transgression; she expressed her disapproval of it.

²⁸ “2 Peter 2:16.” Parallel Translations, Cross References, Commentary, Lexicon. *Bible Hub*, https://biblehub.com/2_peter/2-16.htm. Accessed 15 May 2026. The total number presented is 44, but only 41 are counted here because the Weymouth New Testament and Berean Literal Bible appear twice each and the Berean Annotated Bible is simply the annotated version of the Berean Standard Bible.

²⁹ “Receive.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/receive>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026. Cf. senses 1, 5c, and 5d.

Table 3: 41 Translations of *Elegxis* in 2 Pe 2:16

Translated text	Name of Translation	Year published or most recently released (per <i>Bible Hub's</i> webpage for named translation, unless noted)
Renderings in nominal form		
Balaam “had a check”	Douay-Rheims Bible	1582, NT; 1609, OT (biblegateway.com/versions/Douay-Rheims-1899-American-Edition-DRA-Bible/)
Balaam “received a reproof”	“Haweis New Testament”	1795
“he had reprehension”	“Smith’s Literal Translation”	1876; completed in 1855 (textusreceptusbibles.com/JuliaSmith)
Balaam “had a rebuke”	Young’s Literal Translation	1898 version (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young%27s_Literal_Translation)
Balaam “had a rebuke”	Worrell New Testament	1904
“he received a rebuke”	New American Standard Bible	1977
“he received a rebuke”	New American Standard Bible	1995
“he had a correction”	Catholic Public Domain Version	2009 (https://www.sacredbible.org/catholic/)
Balaam “received a rebuke”	Holman Christian Standard Bible	2009
***	New American Bible, Revised Edition	2010
***	“Aramaic Bible in Plain English”	2013
Balaam “received a rebuke”	The Christian Standard Bible	2017
“he received a rebuke”	New American Standard Bible	2020
“he had reproof”	Berean Literal Bible	2021 (https://literalbible.com/)
“he received a rebuke”	Legacy Standard Bible	2021
Balaam “had a rebuke”	Literal Standard Version	2022
Renderings in verbal form		
Balaam “was rebuked”	King James Bible	1611 (kingjamesbibleonline.org/King-James-Version/)
“he was rebuked”	“Mace New Testament”	1729
Balaam “was reproved”	“Worsley New Testament”	1770
Balaam “was rebuked”	“Webster’s Bible Translation”	1833 (bible-researcher.com/webster.html)
“he was rebuked”	“Anderson New Testament”	1865
“he was rebuked”	English Revised Version	1885
“he was rebuked”	American Standard Version	1901
“workbeast . . . rebuked” Balaam	“Godbey New Testament”	1902
“he was rebuked”	“Weymouth New Testament”	1902, 1903, 1904, 1909, 1913, 1924, 1929 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weymouth_New_Testament)
Balaam “was rebuked”	“Lamsa Bible”	1933
“he was rebuked”	New King James Version	1982
Balaam “was rebuked”	Good News Translation	1992
Balaam “was rebuked”	New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition	1993
“he was convicted”	GOD’S WORD® Translation	1995
“he was rebuked”	The World English Bible	1997
“a donkey corrected him”	Contemporary English Version	2006
Balaam “was rebuked”	NET Bible	2006
See note under Permissions.	New International Version	2011
“he was rebuked”	International Standard Version	2012 (Release 2.1)
“his donkey rebuked him”	New Living Translation	2015
“he was rebuked”	Amplified Bible	2015
Balaam “was rebuked”	English Standard Version	2016 (ESV Text Edition®)
“he was rebuked”	Majority Standard Bible	2022 (https://majoritybible.com/)
“he was rebuked”	New Heart English Bible	2025 (https://nheb.net/)
“he was rebuked”	Berean Standard Bible	2025

*** Permission to quote could not be obtained in time for publication.

- The donkey refuted Balaam for his transgression; she disproved something about it.

These interpretations accord with corresponding senses of *reprove* in Samuel Johnson's fourth edition of *A Dictionary of the English Language*, which also was published in 1770:

1. To blame; to censure.
2. To charge to the face with a fault; to check; to chide; to reprehend. . . .
3. To refute; to disprove. . . .
4. To blame for.³⁰

Without more information, Worsley and Haweis' intended interpretations are unclear. However, because their translations fit the verbal and nominal patterns respectively, each is so grouped in Table 3.

GOD'S WORD® Translation renders *elegxis* as *he was convicted*,³¹ which, assessment indicates, has a dual meaning. It uses the verb *convict*'s passive voice to translate *echó* and *elegxis*. Stated more fully, Balaam was convicted by his donkey, or, in the active voice, his donkey convicted him. She delivered a conviction to him; hers was the act of conviction. Logically (as discussed above), this implies that, as a result, he had conviction, the mental state of being convicted. Indeed, in English, *having conviction* and *being convicted* are both acceptable ways of expressing the mental result of having experienced the act of conviction. Thus, the passive voice of *convict* can signify both the act of conviction and the result of it. Hence, *he was convicted*. As discussed in Appendix A, this translation fits the norm and logic: conviction begets conviction; the act produces the result.

Final Analysis

Examination of the verse's Greek grammar, relevant definitions by Merriam-Webster, and Peter's message in the context of Nu 22's report on Balaam strongly indicates that seven of the primary lexical definitions and all 41 of the translations reviewed above fail to define *elegxis*' meaning in 2 Pe 2:16.

- ***The authors of 45 of them see the beginning of the verse as Peter's description of simply what happened to Balaam, a rebuke by the donkey.***
- ***The authors of the other three define the incident as a conviction of the prophet.***

Instead, this study strongly indicates that Peter is characterizing an experience that produced in the prophet a new state of mind, an event in which the donkey showed him his misunderstanding of what had just happened.

- ***Translators at Abarim Publications choose exposure to express this experience.***

³⁰ "TO REPROVE." *A Dictionary of the English Language: In Which the Words Are Deduced from Their Originals, Explained in Their Different Meanings, and Authorized by the Names of the Writers in Whose Works They Are Found*. Abstracted from the Folio Edition, by the Author Samuel Johnson, A.M. To Which is Prefixed, A Grammar of the English Language. In Two Volumes. Vol. II. 4th ed., corrected, printed for W. Strahan; J. and F. Rivington; J. Hinton; T. Davies; Hawes, Clarke, and Collins; R. Horsfield; W. Johnston; W. Owen; T. Lowndes; T. Caslon; S. Crowder; T. Longman; B. Law; Beckett and De Hondt; E. and C. Dilly; J. Dodsley; W. and J. Richardson; G. Kearsley; W. Nicoll; W. Griffin; Robinson and Roberts; T. Cadell; S. Bladon; Richardson and Urquhart; J. Almon; and R. Baldwin, 1770, p. – (253 of 554). *Internet Archive*, https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_dictionary-of-the-engli_johnson-samuel_1770_2/page/n253/mode/2up?view=theater. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

³¹ "2 Peter 2." GOD'S WORD® Translation. *Bible Hub*, https://biblehub.com/gwt/2_peter/2.htm. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

- **Strong selects refutation, an appropriate expression in the 19th century.**³²

The renderings conviction by Link and HELPS Word-studies and was convicted by GOD’S WORD® describe both Balaam’s experience with the angel of the LORD and his resulting mental condition, but not *elegxis*’ meaning in the verse, which relates only to his dealings with the donkey.

The Greek phrase that begins the verse is ἔλεγξιν δὲ ἔσχεν ἰδίας παρανομίας, translated in Bible Hub as *reproof [elegxis] however he had for his own transgression*.³³ Balaam, as stated in verse 15, is the antecedent of *he* here.³⁴ The Greek verb involved, ἔσχεν (transliterated in Bible Hub as *eschen*), is the aorist, indicative, active, third-person, singular form of ἔχω (*echó*), which means “**To have, to hold, to possess**” (bold text in the original).³⁵ So, the question for this assessment is simply: What did Balaam have for his transgression?

Study of *Merriam-Webster’s* definitions related to *have*³⁶ and of Nu 22 indicates that Balaam could have had in this instance either just an experience with his donkey or an experience that induced in him a new mental state that goes by the same name as the experience. Peter is communicating one or the other.

All nine lexicographers and 41 translators (or teams thereof) examined above choose words that mean Balaam *had* an experience—at the least. They render this idea in two basic ways, as discussed above:

1. **Nominally**, by converting the Greek noun into an English one.
 - The pattern followed by 16 translators.
 - The primary translation of seven lexicographers.
 - A secondary one of three lexicographers.
2. **Verbally**, by converting the Greek noun and attending verb into an English verb.
 - The mode chosen by 25 translators.
 - The primary rendering of two lexicographers.
 - A secondary one clearly implied by no lexicographer.

The nominal form is obviously the more literal translation because it maintains *elegxis* as a noun. The verbal form, however, equally describes the experience. All of the experts surveyed, in other words, agree that the prophet had an encounter with the donkey entailing *elegxis* for him. They translate this word into English in the nominal form as *rebuke, reproof, check, correction, reprehension, refutation, conviction, or exposure*. They mean that Balaam *had* this experience—again, at the least.

³² So does Thayer (Grimm and Wilke) in principle, but he passes over it without comment.

³³ “2 Peter 2:16.” *Biblos Interlinear Bible*. *Bible Hub*, https://biblehub.com/interlinear/2_peter/2-16.htm. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

³⁴ Apparently, the inclusion of *he* is an interpreter’s choice to state what is implicit, given verse 15.

³⁵ “2192. *echó*.” *Lexical Summary*. *Bible Hub*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2192.htm>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

³⁶ “Have.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/have>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026. Cf. senses 1b, 4a, 6a(1), and 6a(2). “Have.” *Merriam-Webster.com Thesaurus*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/have>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026. Cf. senses 1, 5, and 8.

However, four lexicographers and one translator use terms that go beyond this meaning. They offer English words that convey both an experience that Balaam *had* with the donkey and a mental state that he *gained* as a result: *refutation*, *conviction*, or *exposure*.

- She refuted him, so he had refutation as a state of mind (Strong).
- She convicted him, so he had conviction (Link and HELPS word-studies³⁷) or was convicted (GOD’S WORD® Translation).
- She exposed him, so his mental condition was one of exposure (Abarim Publications).
- She delivered an experience to him, so he had the mental result that goes by the same name.

The dual function of these three nouns obviously exceeds that of the others listed above. The former sort represents both an action and the mental result of it, such as a conviction that produces a conviction, whereas the others do not. A rebuke, for example, is only an action. While it may prompt regret, anger, confusion, indifference, or the like in the mind of the person rebuked, it cannot produce there a rebuke *per se*, the *act* of rebuking. That is not a possible mental condition. The same is true for a check, correction, reproof, and reprehension. Having an action as a mental outcome, possessing an actual act *in* the mind after experiencing that act—as opposed to simply thinking about it—is not an idiom in English.

There are similar English idioms, but they do not apply here. According to MWCD, *have it in mind* means “: to plan or want (to do something) : to intend,”³⁸ and *have (someone or something) in mind* means “**1** : to be thinking of (someone or something): such as **2** : to be thinking of choosing (someone) for a job, position, etc. [or] **3** : to be thinking of doing (something).”³⁹

But what about Koine Greek? Does it have such an idiom?

Experts in that language can say for sure, but, judging by Thayer’s very detailed handling of *echó*, the answer is *no*.⁴⁰ None of the senses he describes carries the meaning of an ability to possess in the mind an action, an external event, experienced by oneself—to have the cognitive condition of an action produced by that action. Senses 1c, 1d, and 1e seem to come closest, but none states that meaning, and none of the verses cited there by Thayer conveys it. So, unless Thayer missed or chose to omit such an idiom—both of which seem unlikely, given his attention to detail—there appears to be no grammatical reason to think that Balaam, for his sin, by way of his donkey, could have *had* in his mind an *act* of rebuke, reproof, check, correction, or reprehension.

³⁷ Again, Abarim Publications offers this word as an alternative.

³⁸ “Have it in mind.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/have%20it%20in%20mind>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026.

³⁹ “Have (someone or something) in mind.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/have%20%28someone%20or%20something%29%20in%20mind>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026.

⁴⁰ “2192 *echó*.” Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, STRONGS NT 2192: ἔχω. *Bible Hub*, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2192.htm>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026. Under the second primary sense, the letter *j* is missing. Thayer, Joseph H. “ἔχω.” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Being Grimm’s Wilke’s Clavis Novi Testamenti, Translated Revised and Enlarged*. Corrected ed., Harper & Brothers, 1889, pp. 265-268 (288-291 of 761). *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/thayersgreekengl0000thay/page/264/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

Thayer’s entry, according to him, is not exhaustive. As can be seen in his book, he does not conclude the entry with an asterisk (cf. the top of p. 268). This means that he has not touched on every instance of the verb in the New Testament. See his explanation of asterisks on p. xviii.

- This assessment will proceed on the assumption that Koine Greek has no such idiom.

In sum, then, Balaam either had the experience of receiving a rebuke (or its equivalent) from the donkey or had the new mental state of refutation, conviction, or exposure by experiencing the same through her. Which message is Peter conveying?

Study of the incident as described in Nu 22 strongly indicates the latter outcome to be the case.

If the former were true, then the donkey merely expressed disapproval of her master, frowning upon his behavior and asking him in effect:

What is *wrong* with you? Do you think I like the beatings? Need a clue? I hate them!

In other words, she simply disagreed with his conduct and censured him for it. She made no effort to explain his offense to him, let alone to prove its impropriety, to convince him of it, or to compel his admission to it.

But that is not what happened, study of Nu 22 indicates. Instead, in verses 28 and 30, the donkey asked Balaam three questions that helped him to diagnose and understand her actions, and thus his own:

1. "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?"
2. "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day?"
3. "Is it my habit to treat you this way?"

Or restated:

1. How has my behavior justified yours?
2. Do you not know me well?
3. Do I normally disobey you?

These requests for information did not explicitly convey disapproval, even if they implied it. Rather, *they invited thought*. The passage, in other words, indicates that she reasoned with him; she questioned his assumptions.

Balaam's answer in verse 29 to her first question exposed two things:

1. His total misperception of the effect of her actions—that she had made a fool of him, when actually she had saved his life.
2. His complete confidence in his perception of what had just transpired, evident by his readiness to kill her, when in fact he had misread everything.

His reaction revealed his suppositions at that point:

- He had understood the situation that he had just faced and had acted correctly.
- He had properly judged her behavior as wrongful disobedience.
- He had rightly discerned the effect of her behavior on him.

In sum, Balaam presumed to know what had occurred, to have correctly observed and comprehended the events he had just experienced.

Her questions, however, implied the opposite—that he was mistaken, having misconstrued everything—and they worked: he stopped and thought. He admitted, in verse 30, after hearing her second and third queries, that her demeanor was not normal. At that point, she had refuted his premise of right understanding—although, apparently, he had yet to recognize in full that disproof and the problem it

presented. Such realization plainly followed when God opened Balaam’s eyes and, by way of His angel, proved the truth that the donkey had implied.

- The angel of the LORD, in verses 32-33, repeated the essence of her first question—indicating His agreement with her—and explained why He had come to oppose Balaam, why she had disobeyed him, and what his consequence would have been had she not done so.
- In this way, by His authority, infallibility, and omniscience, each immanent, He proved her disobedience to be justified and Balaam’s “way” to be sinful—to which he confessed in verse 34.
- Thus, He too reasoned with the prophet but delivered to him a conviction—not a mere rebuke.

This narrative depicts the donkey getting Balaam’s attention and causing him to reconsider, at which point the angel of the LORD drives home how right was her way and how wrong was his—“perverse before” the angel (ESV, 2025), “reckless *and* contrary to” Him (NASB, 2020). Although the donkey’s ability to speak is striking, its overall effect in the passage seems feeble in comparison to the angel’s appearance and lecture, which overwhelm the prophet and “steal the scene” (as well they should).

In 2 Pt 2:16, however, the apostle testifies to the strength of her action, saying that she “restrained the prophet’s madness.” This restraint indicates at least his partial recognition of her refutation and at least implicit agreement with it—both of which result from the more basic nature of her act, that of **exposure**, and its upshot, his **mental condition of exposure**. She divulged his misunderstanding and presumption of righteousness; he then stood with his thinking laid bare, beginning to realize his mistakes and misjudgments. Thus, according to this analysis, exposure is what Balaam *had* for his transgression by way of his donkey and is *elegxis*’ meaning in the verse.

¹⁵ Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, ¹⁶ but **[had exposure]** for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness.

In sum, *exposure* describes both his experience and new mental state. The act produced the result.

Of course, God did not stop there, as Nu 22:31-34 shows. The angel of the LORD completed the delivery of proof and clinched the outcome. What began with Balaam’s exposure ended with his conviction: *proof* of guilt, which God used to produce *knowledge* of the wrong and then *belief* in the known guilt.

- In the end, Balaam was convicted—*having* conviction for his transgression through the angel of the LORD’s intervention.
- Thus, moreover, the Holy Spirit clarifies through Peter what He implies through Moses.

Last Thoughts

The translators at Abarim Publications do not explicitly acknowledge *exposure* as the mental state logically entailed by the donkey’s act of exposure. Nor does Link or HELPS’ editors do so in regard to *conviction*. Nonetheless, all may recognize it as such.

Translators of *GOD’S WORD*® may well see *was convicted* as an expression of both the prophet’s experience and his new state of mind.

Thayer does not explain how *refutation* functions as a translation of *elegxis* in general and whether it does so specifically in 2 Pt 2:16. Given the difference in meaning between *refutation* and *rebuke* both in his era and now, it is hard to see how he would consider them to be equally good translations in the verse.

Appendix A

Refutation, Conviction, and Exposure

These terms used by four lexicographers and one translator in the assessment above have a wider range of meaning than the various expressions of disapprobation used by the others. Each one describes both an action—that of refuting, convicting, or exposing—and the mental state that comes from the action—that of having been refuted, convicted, or exposed. Both the action and the mental state are described by the noun: refutation, conviction, or exposure.

- This dual function applies to *refutation* in the second half of the 1800s, although not today, according to *Webster's* definitions in Table 1 above.

MWCD's definition of *conviction* can be rearranged into two categories.

Action:

- 1** : the act or process of finding a person guilty of a crime especially in a court of law
also : the final judgment entered against a defendant after a finding of guilt
- 3a** : the act of convincing a person of error or of [compelling](#) the admission of a truth

Result:

- 2a** : a strong persuasion or belief
- 2b** : the state of being [convinced](#)
- 3b** : the state of being convinced of error or compelled to admit the truth⁴¹

MWCD's definition of *exposure* can be similarly rearranged. Here are the portions relevant to this study:

Action:

- 2** : the act or an instance of [exposing](#): such as
- 2a** : disclosure of something secret

Result:

- 1** : the fact or condition of being [exposed](#): such as
- 1a** : the condition of being presented to view or made known
- 1c** : the condition of being subject to some effect or influence⁴²

Logically speaking, the act of exposure brings something to light, makes it evident—plain to the sight or mind—and thereby produces evidence that, in the right hands, can be used to prove a point.

Normally, the act of refuting, convicting, or exposing produces the result of refutation, conviction, or exposure in the mind of the person undergoing the act. Although that person may deny the action's reality, out of his sinful capacity to suppress the truth (Ro 1:18), such denial does not actually invalidate the act delivered. Only two conditions can prevent an attempt to refute, convict, or expose someone:

- An incapacity to understand the action because of mental immaturity or disfunction.
- An inability to feel the impact of that action because of mental illness or spiritual corruption.

⁴¹ "Conviction." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conviction>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026.

⁴² "Exposure." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exposure>. Accessed 6 Jun. 2026.

Any refutation, conviction, or exposure by God succeeds, by definition, and He would execute such an action only on someone He knew was able to receive it.

So, refutation begets refutation; conviction begets conviction; exposure begets exposure. The act causes its effect.

[One paragraph withheld, pending Merriam-Webster's permission to quote definitions.]

Citations for Table 1

"Refutation." *Merriam-Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/unabridged/refutation>. Accessed 14 Apr. 2026.

"Refutation." *Webster's International Dictionary of the English Language; Being the Authentic Edition of Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, Comprising the Issues of 1864, 1879, and 1884; Now Thoroughly Revised and Enlarged under the Supervision of Noah Porter, D. D. LL. D., of Yale University, with a Voluminous Appendix and an Australasian Supplement*. Australasia Ed., Springfield, MA, G. & C. Merriam Company, 1898, p. 1209 (1326 of 2207). <https://archive.org/details/webstersinternat00port/page/1208/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.

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"Rebuke." *Dr. Webster's Complete Dictionary of the English Language*. 1864, p. 1094 (1171 of 1847). <https://archive.org/details/drwebsterscomple00unse/page/1094/mode/2up?view=theater>. Accessed 7 Jun. 2026.