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Peter, Cornelius, and Cultural Boundaries

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In the second half of the New Testament, the letters of Paul and the book of Acts are particularly and carefully focused on the issue of the church's early missionary efforts among Greek-speaking Gentile communities in Asia Minor, Macedonia, Rome, and Greece.[1] In fact, the interest in and focus on the Gentile mission might be considered a unifying theme in Paul's letters and in Acts. For example, discussions on important doctrinal topics such as grace and foreordination were necessary in light of the increasing numbers of Gentiles joining the church. Some important questions arose in the early church as a result of the Gentile mission: Would God accept Gentiles into heaven, and if he did so, would *they* need grace to enter unlike Jews, who were guaranteed a place in heaven through birthright? Were God's people forever chosen despite the fact that Jews were only infrequently accepting baptism and joining the fledgling Christian church? These questions shaped Paul's letters and forced him to address these topics on multiple occasions. They also direct us to some of the interesting points of discussion that arise out of the letters and histories from the first three decades of the church's existence (AD 30–60).[2]

One particularly perplexing and thematic issue is the resistance that some early Jewish members of the church felt toward teaching the gospel to Gentiles. Additionally, it is possible that some early church leaders may have been culturally conditioned to feel a need to place restraints on the teaching of the gospel to Gentiles. A study of this length cannot consider all of the attitudes that early church members expressed towards Gentiles or whether or not there were even different opinions expressed towards different ethnic groups within the church: Macedonians, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, or Samaritans. Some would have been more culturally different—Egyptians—while the Samaritans shared many of the same beliefs and practices as ethnic Jews. Despite the limitations of a study such as this, it will be possible to consider briefly how Peter treated Gentiles within the church and how his actions shaped early church policy and practice. Peter is at least emblematic of the wide spectrum of attitudes that existed in early Christianity, and his attitudes and actions are woven into the fabric of an ethnically diverse, multilingual, geographically distant, early Christian church. The modern reader will find in this discussion an important study of how cultural boundaries shaped the growth of the early church and how the Lord guided early church leaders to navigate an ethnically diverse organization.

Ultimately, this paper will seek to establish the thesis that Peter, the church's leader and most recognizable member, was both part of the hesitance in initially limiting the mission to the Gentiles and a significant part of the solution in initiating the mission to the Gentiles after his vision in Joppa. Moreover, this paper will attempt to establish the fact that Peter's actions were representative of the attitudes and opinions of Jewish Christians regarding the evangelization of Gentiles and regarding the early hesitance to permit Gentiles into full fellowship without first requiring them to be circumcised and live the kosher laws (i.e., the *kashrut*). This study will not consider the successes or the failures of the early Gentile mission, nor will it address the doctrinal question of whether a Gentile mission was even permissible. Instead, this paper will focus closely on whether Luke's portrayal of events, particularly those involving Peter, intentionally suggests that Peter had reservations in taking the gospel to the Gentiles.

A Brief Survey of Previous Studies

A number of careful and contemplative studies on the subject of Acts and the Gentile mission have been carried out by Latter-day Saint scholars, all of which appear to be genetically linked to Bruce R. McConkie's seminal series on the books of the New Testament.[3] Each of the subsequent major studies on Acts builds on the position advanced in Elder McConkie's work and argues with

minor alterations that Peter was hesitant to accept Gentiles into the church in full fellowship but that he eventually, through revelation, accepted them, thus paving the way for a full-blown Gentile mission.[4] There has been little discussion about the ramifications of Peter's act of hesitation, and almost no discussion of where Peter's attitudes came from and whether they represented those of other members of the early church or whether the Galilean Peter was predisposed to exclude Gentiles. These questions have major ramifications for the development of Christianity because they provide us with an awareness of the outlook of the early disciples and whether or not they had considered taking the gospel beyond Judea and Galilee.

Outside of Latter-day Saint circles of scholarship, the question of attitudes toward Gentiles within early Christianity has been closely considered with emphasis on the chronological development of the question and the social impact of those attitudes.[5] As a general rule, these studies typically assume that early Christian leaders held attitudes that were very similar to or even identical to other first-century Jews who did not convert to Christianity.[6] This is, of course, certainly possible, but upon careful scrutiny of the evidence it is not necessarily certain that early Christians felt the same way about Gentiles that their Jewish counterparts did. In addition to that concern is the question of whether the early disciples shared the common cultural bias that their Jewish counterparts exhibited.

Some of Jesus' teachings in the Gospels clearly point in the direction of an eventual Gentile mission. Following Luke's overall interest in the mission to the Gentiles, he was careful to narrate Simeon's blessing of the infant Jesus: "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2:32). Although the disciples would not have heard Simeon speak the prophecy, Luke's recording of the story shows that it was foundational for understanding Jesus and the purpose of his ministry. An additional saying in Matthew 12:21 records a saying of Jesus that points clearly in the direction of the Gentiles coming to accept the gospel: "And in his name shall the Gentiles trust." The quotation itself is derived from Isaiah 42:1–4, but Jesus changed the wording: "He shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law" (Isaiah 42:3–4). By changing Isaiah's "isles" to Gentiles, Jesus unequivocally changed the meaning and helped his disciples see that a Gentile mission was possible.

It is certainly time to relook at the issue of the Gentile mission and to reappraise the evidence. That evidence will help us determine whether Peter was caused to accept Gentiles through visionary prompting after expressing early reluctance to do so or whether Peter and other early Christians were simply

anti-Gentile in their attitudes because they had been culturally conditioned via Judaism to be that way.[7]

A Mission to the Gentiles? The Purpose of Acts

It is important for this study to note that writing and recording history in the first century was fundamentally different than writing history today. For the purposes of this study, it is worthwhile to consider what it might mean to us if Luke wrote with a particular agenda and how he treated his ancient eyewitness sources. Oral history was preferred over written history.[8] The oft-quoted saying of Papias is helpful here and is worth including in full:

> I shall not hesitate also to put into properly ordered form for you everything I learned carefully in the past from the elders and noted down well, for the truth of which I vouch. For unlike most people I did not enjoy those who have a great deal to say, but those who teach the truth. Nor did I enjoy those who recall someone else's commandments, but those who remember the commandments given by the Lord to the faith and proceeding from the truth itself. And if by chance anyone who had been in attendance on the elders should come my way, I inquired about the words of the elders—[that is,] what [according to the elders] Andrew or Peter said, or Philip, or Thomas or James, or John or Matthew or any other of the Lord's disciples, and whatever Aristion and the elder John, the Lord's disciples, were saying. *For I did not think that information from books would profit me as much as information from a living and surviving voice.* (Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.39.3–4)[9]

This cautionary type of attitude, if representative of the attitudes held by others towards book reading in the early church, should not cause us to question the accuracy of books per se, but to evaluate books that claim to present firsthand experiences differently than we might evaluate an ancient book that was not written by eyewitnesses. That is to say, books that advocate that their information was derived from eyewitnesses were superior, according to Papias, to books where the author has collected written sources and evaluated them. A modern scholarly book would not fare well in ancient Christianity. But additionally it should be pointed out that a book that promotes eyewitness accounts may also be taking advantage of the skepticism of writing history via reading

books and promoting its own account as superior to other books on the subject. Two canonical Gospels intentionally promote eyewitnesses as the source of their writing: Luke and John.[10]

Although we cannot take up the discussion of John as an eyewitness, we do have space to consider Luke's eyewitness sources.[11] He, more than any other New Testament writer, established his credentials in writing at the outset of his account: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, *Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses*,[12] and ministers of the word; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order" (Luke 1:1–3; emphasis added).[13] What is useful to this study are two features from this discussion: first, Luke may have intentionally wanted his readers to recognize his *written* gospel as more authoritative than the oral reports circulating in his day, and second, his confidence that his report was based on a "perfect understanding." For the present study, this evidence points in the direction of an author who had something definitive and authoritative to say and that there may also be undertones of a corrective interest. It would appear safe to say that Acts, also written by Luke, bears a similar interest in setting forth the story that was based on eyewitness accounts and was reliant upon a "perfect understanding."[14]

A parallel situation occurs in Joseph Smith's 1838 journal history, where he also records history with an overt purpose, "Owing to the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil-disposed and designing persons, in relation to the rise and progress of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, all of which have been designed by the authors thereof to militate against its character as a Church and its progress in the world—I have been induced to write this history, to disabuse the public mind, and put all inquirers after truth in possession of the facts, as they have transpired, in relation both to myself and the Church, so far as I have such facts in my possession" (Joseph Smith—History 1:1).

Discovering Luke's Agenda

Building upon the proposition that Luke wrote with a particular agenda in mind and that he intentionally wanted to advertise his account as one that was built upon better eyewitness sources, it should be possible to at least describe the contours of that agenda.[15] Several features of Luke's account reasonably represent at least a portion of his agenda.[16] First, Paul is formally introduced into the story in Acts 9:1 and takes over the narrative almost completely by Acts 13:1. Even though Luke began by retelling the history of Christianity and the early experiences of the Apostles, he no longer does so in a significant way after narrating Paul's first

mission. Second, the stories that are told after Paul's introduction are almost exclusively focused on the question of the Gentile mission: Cornelius, Peter's vision at Joppa, the church expanding into Antioch (a Gentile city), and the death of an old nemesis from the Herodian family.[17] Although Luke certainly had additional intentions in writing his Gospel and history, such as the role of women in the church and the plight of the poor, we can be fairly confident that one of the items of central importance was his interest in describing the Gentile mission.

The Gentile mission was arguably the foremost interest driving Luke's narrative: he was searching for causes and solutions.[18] And he may have taken his narrative structure in part from Paul's letter to the Romans, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; *to the Jew first, and also to the Greek*" (Romans 1:16; emphasis added, see also 2:10).[19] The taking of the gospel to the "Jew first, and also to the Greek" accurately describes Luke's account where he abbreviates the story of taking the gospel to the Jews (Acts 1–8) and then expands the discussion of the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9–21).[20] Luke also foreshadowed his greater interest in the Gentile mission when he reported a cautionary statement by a leading Jewish leader of the day that has prophetic hints at the success of the Gentile mission, "Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God" (Acts 5:38–39). Luke went on to demonstrate that the growth of Christianity among the Gentiles was something that could not be overthrown. Having discussed both Luke's agenda in writing as well as his interest in establishing his history as authoritative, we can now look at how Luke's portrayal of Peter fits into this developing narrative.

Peter's Role in the Gentile Mission

Returning directly to the original focus of this paper, it is necessary to consider Peter's part in the unfolding story of the Gentile mission. In the Gospel of Luke, Peter is mentioned by name in eighteen verses, with twelve of those references coming from two stories: the Mount of Transfiguration and Peter's denial (see Luke 5:8; 6:14; 8:51, 45; 9:20, 28, 32–33; 12:41; 18:28; 22:8, 34, 54–55, 58, 60–62). Peter is mentioned fifty-six times in Acts, with fifty-five of those references coming in Acts 1–12 (see also Acts 15:7). Of necessity, Peter is portrayed differently in the two sources: in the Gospel of Luke he is the impetuous disciple who faithfully seeks to testify and demonstrate his faith, whereas in the book of Acts he is the relentless leader of the church who is carefully guided through revelation (see Acts 10) to lead the church in a new age. The two viewpoints are congruous, and in the

Gospel of Luke, Peter can be described as learning to be a disciple, and in Acts he demonstrates that he has learned and is capable of leading.

Some of the features that are characteristic of Peter in the Gospel of Luke are that he is frequently portrayed as asking questions and giving answers (see Luke 8:45; 9:20). He is also the voice for the other disciples and frequently uses the first person plural when speaking, "Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee" (Luke 18:28). In Acts this portrayal of Peter subtly shifts when he asks the disciples, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). This question is characteristic of Peter as portrayed in the Gospel, but after Pentecost it appears that Peter only asks questions to which he already knows the answer. To be precise, after Acts 2:37 he asks questions on two different occasions: In Acts 5:3, 8, and 9, Peter asks questions of Ananias and Sapphira where he already knew through inspiration what they had done, and in Acts 10:21 he asks Cornelius, "Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?" Effectively, Peter has become the leading disciple in Acts that is on some level omniscient of the answers he will receive, a contrast that Luke highlights by making the final verse in his Gospel that specifically mentions Peter to say, "And Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62). In the Gospel he is also human and subtly weak, but the weakness also serves to heighten the contrast of the new Peter in Acts.

In a diachronic retelling of the history of Christianity and the story of Peter and the early Gentile mission, Luke was faced with several challenges of how to incorporate some of the difficulties that arose when ethnic Jews were faced with the possibility of dining with Gentiles in their Christian house-churches where non-kosher foods were offered and where the Gentile members were uncircumcised. The trauma of such an event is recognizable in Paul's description of one such encounter in Antioch, "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision" (Galatians 2:11–12).[21] In structuring the story, Paul may have supposed that Peter ceased eating with Gentiles because he was afraid of what ethnic Jews might think of him for eating with Gentiles.[22] Luke does not report the story in the way that Paul does and he omits the story of conflict, perhaps because he was more sensitive to Peter's actual motives. What Peter's concerns were is a subject to which we will return.

Part of Luke's narrative in Acts may initially appear to depict Peter as part of the obstacle in taking the gospel to the Gentiles, an important part of the discussion considered in this study. The key verses treating this theme read, "And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, *Not so,*

Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean" (Acts 10:13–14; emphasis added) and later in the chapter, "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28). Both of these passages convey the idea that Peter was in part an obstacle to a Gentile mission because he had never considered the unclean (the Gentiles) and because even after the vision of the sheet and the unclean animals, Peter still maintained that he was a "Jew" (and not a Christian) and that it was "unlawful" for him to come into the home of a Gentile. Both of these obstacles should naturally have been resolved in the Resurrection and the command to take the gospel to all nations, but Luke is here subtly reminding the reader that there were still cultural obstacles to overcome and Peter was pivotal in resolving those obstacles (see Matthew 28:19–20). Assuming that Luke was intentionally retelling this story to help demonstrate to the reader that he was aware of the implications of Peter calling himself a Jew after the Resurrection of Christ, then this story has great meaning in understanding some of the cultural boundaries that existed between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians.

Simplifying the story in this way, however, misses the opportunity to ask whether or not Luke may have shaped the story in a way to express to his audience the validity—the revelatory foundation—of the Gentile mission. In other words, when Peter expressed his hesitancy to the angel, "I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean," he may have revealed his deep-seated concerns about a mission to the unclean Gentiles, but Luke may have recorded that particular part of the story because it so adequately described the sentiments of Judean/Jewish Christians. In analyzing the story further, it becomes apparent that Peter may have been savvier to the meaning of the vision than we might have initially assumed. Luke reports, "Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: and he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat" (Acts 10:9–13). By drawing attention to Peter's concluding statement we overlook two important features: (1) there were clean beasts on the sheet and (2) Peter knew he was being asked to eat the unclean beasts, which is surprising given that observant Jews would certainly assume they were only to eat the clean animals.[23] For an observant

Jew, the command to eat from the sheet would typically be understood as a request to avoid the unclean and to eat only the clean: Peter saw it differently.

It can be stated with some confidence, that on a simple reading of Acts 10, Peter is part of the hesitance in expanding the mission to the Gentiles, but that upon closer inspection, Peter knew the way forward and saw how the Lord was directing him to take the gospel beyond Judea and Galilee. Luke spends more time on this part of the discussion between Peter and Cornelius than he does on any other aspect.[24] He reports Peter's words, "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34–35). Luke is careful to note that Peter's declaration caused some concern for ethnic Jews when they heard his report, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 10:44–45). By retelling the story in this way, Luke has helped the reader see that the common attitude that Gentiles could not receive the Holy Ghost had been unequivocally answered through Peter and through revelation.

Peter at the Jerusalem Conference (AD 49)

To fully appreciate the importance of Acts 15 and its account of the Jerusalem Conference that was convened to settle the matter concerning the Gentile needs to be circumcised and to maintain the kosher standards of Judaism, we must first take a closer look at Peter's vision of the sheet and its aftermath. This will be important to the discussion because it will help demonstrate how the early church resolved the issue of the cultural divide between its members.

The most important verse in this discussion will be "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Because the verse reads as a declaration of the early church's position on Gentile conversion and because of its pivotal nature in this discussion, it will be helpful to scrutinize the translation. In Greek, the passage reads, "ἀκούσαντες δὲ ταῦτα ἡσύχασαν καὶ ἐδόξασαν τὸν θεὸν λέγοντες, Ἄρα καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὁ θεὸς τὴν μετάνοιαν εἰς ζωὴν ἔδωκεν," which translated in a very literal way reads, "having heard this thing, they were silent and were glorifying God saying, 'Then God has given to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.'"

An important feature of this verse is the statement that they were "silent" and "glorifying," the latter of which is not a particularly silent gesture, which

indicates that they were probably silent in their resistance to the Gentile mission but vocal in their praise of God. The "thing" that caused them to rejoice openly was the unequivocal statement "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17). In other words, they could no longer withstand the will of God. But perhaps most important is the verb translated as "has given" (ἔδωκεν), which conveys a past tense action or an action that had occurred prior to the speech being reported. God "has given" the Gentiles an opportunity to enter the fold and who can "withstand God?"

In looking closer at Peter's experience, another interesting facet of the story catches our attention. By reporting Peter's declaration that being commanded to eat unclean foods helped Peter see that *people* should not be declared unclean (Acts 10:15, 28), Luke has subtly made the connection that people are equal to the unclean food in the vision. Through this connection, Luke is able to draw out the idea that the center of the divide between Gentiles and Jews in early Christianity was an issue of food.[25] At the very heart of the debate was the real-life concern that in giving up the kosher laws of the Old Testament, ethnic Jews were turning their back on their religious identity and uniqueness. And one of the fundamental reasons Gentiles were considered unclean is because they partook of unclean foods. Now Jewish Christians would be unclean in the eyes of their non-Christian countrymen.[26]

This brings us to what appears to be Luke's clearest expression of frustration that the issue continued to divide ethnic Gentiles like Luke and ethnic Jews like Peter. In reporting the Jerusalem Conference, Peter states with authority,

> And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.
>
> And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us;
>
> And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.
>
> Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?
>
> But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. (Acts 15:7–11)

Peter's redeclaration of God's will in Acts 15 was the second announcement of church policy, and the fact that God had already declared his will on the matter in Acts 11:18 as ἔδωκεν ("hath given") was already sufficiently clear.

Peter, following the direction God had given him, announced the decision on two separate occasions, which is why Acts 15:20 represents a step backwards in the narrative: "But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood." These strictures all relate to the *kashrut*, the kosher requirements of the law of Moses, and they were given despite Peter's clear declaration on the matter. Phrases such as "put no difference between us and them" are in open conflict with "But that we write unto them."

It is to be expected that Luke, Paul's traveling companion, would hold an opinion similar to Paul's regarding the Jerusalem conference (for Paul's view, see Galatians 2:12–13), i.e., that he saw the resolution of the conflict of cultural boundaries as foundational to the success of the Gentile mission. When Paul denounced Peter in Antioch, he perhaps failed to apprehend that though he was commissioned to take the gospel to the Gentiles, Peter was commissioned to take the same message to the Jews so that their hearts could be softened to accept the Gentiles that Paul would convert. Paul appears to have interpreted the situation through its effects on his mission in Antioch and not in light of the larger issue of harmony within the church between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Luke, however, shows some sensitivity in not taking either side in the conflict, but in focusing on the resolution.

Why Joppa?

Finally, it is helpful to see that there may be a larger symbolic undertone to why Peter was at Joppa when he received the revelation that Cornelius was awaiting him. According to the story in Acts, Cornelius was at Caesarea Maritima when he had the vision telling him to send for Peter, while Peter was a short distance away in the coastal city of Joppa (Acts 10:1).[27] Acts reports simply, "And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter" (Acts 10:5). The significance of Joppa is easily overlooked in the story, but it may have a connection to an earlier prophet who was similarly called to teach the gospel to Gentiles. In the book of the prophet Jonah, when the Lord commanded Jonah to go to Nineveh, Jonah fled in the opposite direction, "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord" (Jonah 1:3). Jonah's

starting point for taking the gospel to the Assyrians was the same city where Peter was later praying on his roof.

The symbolic significance is overt: Jonah fled the command to take the gospel to the Gentiles, while Peter in the same city accepted the call of the Lord to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Interestingly, Jonah was originally called upon to deliver a message of doom, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me" (Jonah 1:2). Peter was given the command to take a message of peace and of good news.[28] Although the actual occurrence of the vision in Joppa is probably little more than happenstance, given Luke's careful documentation of the Gentile mission, it is possible that he recorded the location with the intent that the reader would see the connection to the mission of Jonah and see the parallel that is mentioned here.

Conclusion

Looking carefully at the New Testament texts and their accounts of the early Gentile mission may raise concerns in the minds of some readers: concern that there was discord in the early church, concern that James and Paul may have handled the issue of kosher requirements very differently, and concern that Peter's revelation was only gradually adopted.[29] But those concerns are really only minor when we compare the issues in the early church with any other dispensation where the faithful have wrestled to accept all of God's words: We have seen that there is at times discord in the way we understand revelation; we have teachings that appear to offer differing opinions; and ultimately we have a prophet who reveals the mind of the Lord that we are obligated to accept. The history of the early church is the history of God's people. Luke's honesty is refreshing and insightful.

Reconstructing what Luke appears to intend, we can conjecture that Peter was initially resistant to accepting Gentiles into the church without the Gentiles previously having committed themselves to live the full law of Moses as he had done. With revelatory prompting, Peter came to see a way forward through grace wherein the Gentiles could enter the church in full fellowship. Some early missionaries, notably not referred to as Apostles in Acts, disagreed on how Peter's revelation should be implemented. And perhaps the most resounding message comes from Peter, who understood fully the impact of what the Lord had revealed to him. The Gentiles were and are the future of the church and Peter opened the door through which they entered. Elder Hales noted the pivotal nature of Jesus' words to Peter when he said, "Brothers and sisters, do we really understand the teachings of the Savior, 'When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren'?

(Luke 22:32). Feed my lambs. Feed my sheep. Feeding the lambs could well be missionary labors working with newly baptized members, who must be nurtured and given caring warmth and fellowship in the family of Saints. Feeding the sheep could well refer to the mature members of the church, some active and some less active, who need to be cared for and brought back to the flock."[30]

It is the conclusion of this paper that seeing Peter as the resistant disciple is perhaps too simplistic and that the development of the Gentile mission was in fact much more complicated. In the end, there simply is not enough evidence to distinguish Peter's personal views about Gentiles from those of his Judean peers, although I expect that they were different. Ultimately, the church was slow to take the gospel to the Gentiles. A multitude of reasons exists to explain this occurrence, but the most likely reason is that cultural attitudes were the root cause. Luke, a fellow traveling companion of Paul's, saw the need to document the Gentile mission and sought to help the reader see it as part of the larger historical portrait of Christianity.

Notes

1. The New Testament term denoting "Gentile" is ἔθνος (ethnos), which functionally indicates a group of people unified by family or culture. Typically the term is modified by a genitive description of the people, i.e., "the people of the Samaritans" or "the people of the Greeks." Often it is used in the sense of those who have another faith, regardless of their ethnicity (see Matthew 10:18).

2. For example, Paul's teaching that the law of Moses acted like a schoolmaster to bring Israel to Christ in Galatians 3–4 may be understood as a conversation arising out of the Gentile mission. See also Romans 1–3.

3. Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965–73). The series is now published by Deseret Book in both electronic and print editions.

4. See Robert J. Matthews, "Unto All Nations," in *Studies in Scripture*, vol. 6, *Acts to Revelation*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 34–36; Gaye Strathearn, "The Jewish and Gentile Missions: Paul's Role in the Transition," in *The Apostle Paul: His Life and His Testimony* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 194–96; Gaye Strathearn, "Law and Liberty in Galatians 5–6," in *Go Ye into All the World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 62–63; Jared W. Ludlow, "The Book of Acts: A Pattern for Modern Church Growth," in *Shedding Light on the New Testament: Acts–Revelation*, ed. Ray L. Huntington, Frank F. Judd Jr., and David M. Whitchurch (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2009), 1–29; Eric D. Huntsman, "The Impact of Gentile Conversions in the Greco-Roman World," in *The Life and Teachings of the New Testament Apostles: From the Day of Pentecost through the Apocalypse*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 80–96.

5. An excellent recent study on the question is a collection of essays edited by David C. Sim and James S. McLaren, *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2013). A particularly helpful article in the collection is Elizabeth V. Dowling, "'To the Ends of the Earth': Attitudes to Gentiles in Luke–Acts," 191–208. See also James Carleton-Paget, *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

6. D. C. Sim, "Gentiles, God-Fearers and Proselytes," in *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. David C. Sim and James S. McLaren (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 4–8.

7. I recognize that this is a somewhat simplistic dichotomy and is not likely to express all of the nuances in the excellent studies already in print. The dichotomy is admittedly a characterization of the two different sides of the discussion. What is not at issue is the simple fact that both sides accept a certain anti-Gentile attitude in earliest Christianity.

8. See Thomas A. Wayment, "From Jesus to the Written Gospels: The Oral Origins of the Gospel," in *The Life and Teachings of the New Testament Apostles: From the Day of Pentecost through the Apocalypse*, 11–34.

9. I have taken the translation of this passage from Richard Bauckham's excellent study on the topic, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 15–16: his translation of the passage is the most nuanced and careful of which I am aware.

10. Some will note that Matthew (9:9) was also an eyewitness to the events told in his account, but Matthew as a personal witness to events is not a developed theme in the first Gospel.

11. For John as an eyewitness, see John 1:35–40 and 19:26.

12. The phrase "Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses" could be read to imply that Luke was including himself as an eyewitness. In Greek, however, the phrase is not ambiguous and it unquestionably refers to the eyewitnesses, i.e., Luke was stating that the unnamed eyewitnesses passed on things to "us," a group that included Luke.

13. For a discussion of this passage, see Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, "Introduction: The World of the New Testament," in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, vol. 1: *From Bethlehem through the Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), xxii–xxix.

14. Acts 16:10 begins a series of first-person plural passages, the so-called "we" passages, that point to Luke being physically present for the events he is narrating.

15. This approach has often been viewed with skepticism because scholars who seek to determine Luke's method of writing history often use terms such as *myth*, which has been offensive to many Latter-day Saint scholars. In telling a story with an overt agenda, however, the author is not obligated to create a mythical account or an account built upon fabricated sources. Even the act of selecting which stories to tell is an act of writing with an agenda. For a recent discussion of Luke's agenda, see Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke: Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007).

16. Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature 9 (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 46, details the difficulties in identifying an author's agenda in writing. See also David L. Cowles, "Formalism," in *The Critical Experience: Literary*

Reading, Writing, and Criticism, ed. David L. Cowles, 2nd ed. (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing, 1994), 11–12.

17. Acts 10:45 preserves an allusion to what I will argue is Luke's agenda, "And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost."

18. Luke also expresses a clear interest in the Samaritan mission in the early part of Acts. See Elizabeth V. Dowling, "'To the Ends of the Earth': Attitudes to Gentiles in Luke–Acts," in *Attitudes to Gentiles in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, 191–208.

19. Somewhat surprisingly, two passages from Mark that emphasize Gentile involvement are not retold in Luke (Mark 7:24–30; 8:1–10).

20. This emphasis has been noted by numerous other scholars. See, for example, Jeffrey S. Siker, "'First to the Gentiles': A Literary Analysis of Luke 4:16–30," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 111 (1992): 73–90.

21. James D. G. Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch (Gal 2:11–18)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 18 (1983): 3–57; John G. Gager, "Jews, Gentiles, and Synagogues in the Book of Acts," in *Christians among Jews and Gentiles: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. George W. E. Nickelsburg and George W. MacRae (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 93. Gager thinks Gentiles were welcome in the synagogues. Most scholars today seem to refute Gager's findings, but it remains a possibility that in diaspora communities Gentiles were frequently in attendance.

22. The participle *foboumenos* (φοβούμενος) in Galatians 2:12 conceptually conveys genuine fear and apprehensiveness. See H. Balz, "φοβέω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. G. W. Bromily, 9 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 208–19.

23. It may be that the instruction to eat the unclean was implied in the injunction "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat." The inference was that Peter was to eat everything on the sheet, clean and unclean. Clinton Wahlen, "Peter's Vision and Conflicting Definitions of Purity," *New Testament Studies* 51 (2005): 515, notes that the impure (κοινόν) and unclean (ἀκάθαρτον) animals symbolized impure (κοινόν) and unclean (ἀκάθαρτον) people, a possible reference to two types of Gentiles: God-fearers and idolaters, respectively.

24. R. W. Wall, "Peter, 'Son' of Jonah: The Conversion of Cornelius in the Context of the Canon," in R. W. Wall and E. Lemcio, eds., *The New Testament as Canon: A Reader in Canonical Criticism*, JSNTSS 76 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 129–40, argues that the Cornelius episode has historical foundations in a conversion story of a Gentile household.

25. See Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch (Galatians 2:11–18)," 3–57, who comes to similar conclusions through looking at the incident in Galatians.

26. C. K. Barrett, *Acts: Volume I, I–XIV*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 494.

27. For an excellent discussion of how Luke wrote with intent, see Walter T. Wilson, "Urban Legends: Acts 10:1–11:18 and the Strategies of Greco-Roman Foundation Narratives," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 (2001): 77–99.

28. For a discussion of the mythology associated with Joppa, see Paul B. Harvey, "The Death of Mythology: The Case of Joppa," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 2 (1994): 1–14.

29. A similar idea is touched upon in Doctrine and Covenants 64:8: "My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened."

30. Robert D. Hales, "When Thou Art Converted, Strengthen Thy Brethren," *Ensign*, May 1997, 82–83.